Reflecting on the Possibilities of Religious Education Research

Edited by
Kathy Winings

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Editor

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Contents

About the Editor

Kathy Winings has served in numerous administrative positions, such as Vice President for Academic Affairs, Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, and founding Director of campuses in New York and Maryland, for a graduate seminary.

She is the Vice President of the Board of Directors for the International Relief Friendship Foundation, Inc., an international disaster and sustainable development agency, after having served as its executive director. She has traveled throughout the world conducting vital projects and guiding the work of the organization. Keys programs provide education, literacy, healthcare, vocational training and microfinance.

She is President and Founder of Educare, an educational consulting firm with expertise in curriculum design and programming, educational leadership and service learning. Dr. Winings is the author of numerous articles in academic as well as popular journals on neuroeducation, service learning, social justice and brain-based teaching and diversity and equality. She is the editor of the book American Christian Traditions and the author of Building Character through Service Learning.

Dr. Winings is a past President of her professional academic association, the Religious Education Association, and has served a member of the International Executive Council for the World Association of NGOs. She is the recipient of the Harriet Tubman Award, the Outstanding Women's Scholar award from Teacher's College, the Founders Award for Leadership (IRFF) and Community Building Service Award. She a member of the Kappa Delta Pi National Honor Society for Education as well as Theta Alpha Kappa Honor Society for Biblical Studies and Theology..

Dr. Winings received her Undergraduate degree in Media Studies with a professional diploma in Elementary Education from Fordham University, her Masters of Religious Education and Master of Divinity from the Unification Theological Seminary, and her EdD from Teachers College, Columbia University. She was given Emeritus standing in 2021.

Editorial

Introduction

Kathy Winings

Unification Theological Seminary, Barrytown, NY 12507, USA; k.winings@uts.edu

Education is a very diverse field. This is because it is important to learn all that we can if we are to live productively and appropriately. Religious education is one aspect of this diverse field. While many of us may not be aware of what religious education incorporates and may assume that it does not touch our daily lives, this assumption and understanding would be incorrect. For those who attend any kind of faith-based service, program or worship experience, whether or not there is a sermon, homily or speaker, we are, nonetheless, experiencing religious education in some form. A Friends' circle is a form of religious education as is a Hindu service, or *puja*, and a *jumah* prayer session on Fridays for Muslims. If you attended Sunday School or a confirmation lesson or any kind of instruction as a child or adolescent, you experienced religious education.

While these are more obvious expressions of religious education, there are many other forms that may not be as readily viewed as such. For example, a general course in a public school or college about religion can be considered a form of religious education, as such a course seeks to inform and acquaint the student with a better understanding of religion. One might attend a seminar about climate change or the need to be environmentally responsible. Depending on the context of the seminar, the perspective of the presenter or the content presented, there could easily be a dimension of religious education involved. The same is true for any of the social justice, human rights, diversity/equity and human relationship issues that we face today. Religious education can address most issues that we may face in life, beyond those very specific issues of faith and doctrine.

Just as on-going research in secular education expands our knowledge of the world and our understanding of how to live and thrive in it, so too does on-going research into the field of religious education. As we develop and deepen our knowledge of life and the larger issues we face as human beings, we develop new questions about who we are, what our purpose in life might be, and how can we properly take care of this world in ways that further expand our knowledge and wisdom.

Over time, research in religious education has focused on numerous themes and issues. Taking into consideration the geographical context, the faith community's theological perspective, the needs of the community and the passion of the educators involved, research areas have included doctrinal and liturgical themes, effective pedagogical tools, personal faith development, what constitutes spiritual maturity, the nature of interreligious relationships, how to understand and respond to social justice issues, ecology, and developing a world of peace and harmony. That is why we see the articles in this Special Issue address contemporary concerns for religious education research.

One example in Christian religious education of a vital concern that became the focus of religious educational research concerned the key changes that took place between the late 1700s and mid-1800s in western Europe, particularly within Great Britain, and in the urban areas of the eastern United States. These changes arose because of the rise of the industrial revolution. The key concerns that would eventually motivate early research within Christian religious education included the growing gap between the wealthy and the poor, child labor laws, the increase in crime and tenement housing, and challenges to personal faith and piety. With time, additional topics became the focus of research, including the concept of the Christian Sunday school, the moral and Biblical imperative to "love thy neighbor" and the need to understand other faith communities (Elias 2002).

Religious education research has also been conducted by Islamic, Hindu, Judaic and religious educators from other faith communities as well as religious studies scholars. A review of journal articles and book themes outline topics addressed by religious educators have sought to confront pressing issues faced by contemporary Islamic communities. As will be addressed by an article in this issue, the need for curricula, programs and materials that work toward the deradicalization of young Muslims is an important concern for Islamic religious educators. The need to research gender equality has also been a critical issue for research. Within the European context, the nature and quality of religious education in public schools has also been a research topic of critical concern. Judaic research has often focused on an issue that has plagued Judaism for centuries. This is the issue of anti-semitism. In recent years this has expanded to include research about discrimination and hatred. Research has also looked at an issue in Judaism that is common to most religious communities—the impact of secularization on Jewish families and faith together with the related issue of looking at the nature of faith in a commercialized society.

Within the south Asian context, research in Hindu religious education has been focused on the quality of religious education for Hindus both in the schools and in the home out of concern for the faith formation of the next generation. Hindu religious educators in the United Kingdom have also researched the question of what constitutes effective faith formation in today's world so that Hindus learn how to be true to their faith on a daily basis. These specific themes for the diverse faith communities are in addition to the wider social justice issues that all religious educators face in their teaching. Each of these communities also, of course, conduct research on the traditional themes emphasizing theological orthodoxy, pedagogical effectiveness, liturgical practices and worship needs.

As we can see, there are many topics and issues that can become the focus of religious education research. This is why this *Journal* issue is timely and a good resource as each contribution provides a window into the possibilities of greater insight and understanding of both ourselves, religious education and our world. As we begin to consider life after the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, religious education research may very well assume more importance in terms of supporting the global healing and reconciling process. At the same time, there are emerging issues, questions and challenges of living in a diverse world that need to also be addressed constructively. Religious education research can help respond to that need as we move forward.

This special edition of the "Religions" *Journal*, "Reflecting on the Possibilities of Religious Education Research," offers readers an insight into a selection of different yet relevant themes in which religious education research is opening doors so that we can examine and discuss ways in which religious education can play a role in addressing or resolving these important issues. "'&I/&you' An Innovative Research Instrument for Youngsters to Explore Their Life Orientation" by Ina ter Avest, provides findings from an "innovative and explorative" research instrument created by ter Avest that allows for student self-reflection and analysis as they seek to define their worldview, whether positioning themselves religiously or non-religiously. Ter Avest focuses in particular on gaining insight into Muslim youth as to how they form their faith and life orientation, highlighting those youths who are at risk for radicalization.

Using Fowler's view of faith development in adolescents as a baseline, ter Avest then presents insights on faith development in youth based on findings obtained from multiple studies conducted previously in England, Estonia, Ghana and Malawi. Using either special questionnaires or student assignments, the data obtained from these resources addressed youth perceptions of faith in the modern world, faith practices, beliefs and other relevant points. The second source of data comes from the '&1/&you' instrument created by ter Avest, that was combined together with the PIREd module based on specific lessons that involved dialogue which challenged the youth to explore their own thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding faith and religious pluralism. The instrument gave students the opportunity to explore their own views, experiences and feelings regarding religious plurality with fellow students as they sought to understand their position in relationship to

the faiths and worldviews in the classroom. As noted by ter Avest, the focus on self-analysis and dialogue are important elements for youth during this formative time in their lives.

As ter Avest further notes, the increasing focus within religious education is how to help future generations develop the tools that support the adolescents as they encounter the "other" and open themselves to engage in both dialogue and self-analysis about their beliefs and how to formulate a worldview that will guide them in life. As the article is keen to develop insights into reaching out to Muslim youth who are at risk for radicalization, this is timely and important research in religious education.

Because of the importance of effective teaching and learning of religious content and spirituality with adolescents, another article also focuses on religious education with this age group. "Adolescents' Perception of Religious Education According to Religion and Gender in Spain," offered by Maria del Carmen Olmos-Gomez, presents a quantitative study of how adolescents view religion in Spain utilizing analytical-empirical and social research methods. The difference for this article is the added question concerning the impact of gender in such classrooms.

In looking at religious education in Spanish classrooms, Olmos-Gomez had two goals for the study. First the study was an opportunity to develop an instrument that can assess how religion impacts the school as it relates to both the cultural background and the sex of the participants. The second goal was to understand if a relationship existed between one's perception of religion in school and the variable of gender and religion. At the end of the study, the more notable results certainly have implications for future research in religious education. One of the findings was that Christian women and Muslim men had more positive experiences with religion in school. A second finding was that knowledge of religion supported adolescents' ongoing development. Third, Christian and Muslim men and Jewish women expected greater autonomy. A final finding was no surprise. The adolescents believed that the religious curriculum in the schools should be studied and reviewed and improved pedagogically as it is important for them.

Norshariani Abd Rahman takes the reader in a different area of research in religious education. This study provides a creative look at how the *tauhidic* elements in Islamic religious education can contribute to understanding our environmental challenge, looking at how it can encourage one to take appropriate action to resolve our ecological problems. "Integration of Tauhidic Elements for Environmental Education from the Teachers' Perspective" discusses the process and conclusions of a qualitative study conducted within two Islamic boarding schools in Malaysia. By interviewing two science teachers, two Islamic religious educators and an environmental education coordinator, the author sought to see if and how this Islamic concept of *tauhidic* might guide Muslim students to become more active in responding to environmental education.

Acknowledging the small sample size and the need for further assessment, Rahman certainly stimulates the reader to look at the possible contributions of Islamic teachings to further nurture an ethical and moral perspective toward ecology and the environment. As Norshariani concluded, the integration of *tauhidic* elements is only effective when two things take place. First the teachers need to share the values that inform their advice to the students on the environment while also serving as role models. Second, classroom activities help students connect to the genuine meaning of the relevant verses from the Quran or the Hadith. Overall, the author concluded that environmental education requires the cooperation of science teachers and the Islamic religious educators in order to be more effective in environmental education. Although the study was small and revolved around Islamic boarding schools, it does provide us with food for thought as to the possible role of religious education in providing insight into such global issues as environmental education.

The pandemic has certainly affected every corner of the world and all areas of life and work. As we begin to emerge from it and from the almost total shutdown of life as we knew it, we are faced with many questions as they relate to religious education. Monique van Dijk-Groenboer presents in her article, "Religious Education in (post-) Pandemic Times; Becoming a Resilient Professional in a Teacher Academy," what some of these key questions

are including: Who are we? How do we find our roots again? What direction is right for us now? In essence, van Dijk-Groenboer is looking at resilience in the midst of rapid change, both personally and professionally. The challenge for religious education, as noted in the article, is to articulate these questions with our students so that they are not afraid to face them so they may develop resilience and move into the future. More importantly, religious education teachers also need to develop resilience before they introduce it to their students.

There is a valuable discussion of values and the challenges around such a topic as a foundation for understanding resilience. However, as noted by van Dijk-Groenboer, in order for youth to be resilient, they need to have a greater awareness of their talents and the set of values upon which they base their decisions. It is van Dijk-Groenboer's view that religious education then is well-situated in a school to develop such a discussion of values and how students can make sense of which values are right for them within the range of competing values. The discussion of values is central to the article in that the focus of religious education is at the heart of resilience and decision-making. As noted by van Dijk-Groenboer, in order to be resilient in the new post-pandemic world, students need to make their important decisions based on strong values, values that reflect who they are as human beings. It is also these values that shape one's moral compass which orient one's actions. The author also offers a basic discussion of methodologies that can support such content effectively. These methods include co-creating in inspirational sessions, the use of stories, learning together, agentive-transformative approaches and deep listening. Of course, at the end of the day, the reader is reminded that one's moral compass will be reshaped throughout one's life and that our students need the tools to continue to reflect and reshape their compass.

A second article is also focused specifically on the pandemic. The experience of trauma is certainly an experience that many religious educators working in either theological schools or secular institutions have had to face with their students during the pandemic. As thousands of families and individuals have experienced first-hand the pain of loss and the pain of long-term illness, understanding trauma-informed pedagogies can be extremely valuable. Additionally, understanding the value of trauma-informed pedagogy can certainly aid educators in making a contribution to their students who have experienced trauma caused by violence and racial discrimination as well. This is Darryl Stephens' perspective in his article, "Trauma-Informed Pedagogy for the Religious and Theological Higher Education Classroom." Stephens reminds us that trauma is not just an individual experience but can be experienced in different forms from collective, epigenetic and social-cultural forms of trauma to a vicarious form.

The article draws on religious education literature, psychology, neuroscience and public health in order to provide a rich discussion of trauma-informed pedagogy that can be used in the classroom. What is particularly helpful is the discussion of the definition of trauma and the types of trauma that one may experience as well as trauma's impact on survivors. Noting how young this area of study is, the article more importantly discusses the bibliographic contributions of the field. In doing so, it offers the religious educator insight into what might be possible at this stage, looking to a time in which further studies can be developed.

Finally, there is Charles Chesnavage's examination of "Digital Stories as a Creative Assignment to Study World Religions." At a time in which global interreligious understanding is still being challenged by our limited knowledge of faiths and religious communities other than our own and with a lack of sufficient interfaith dialogue, Chesnavage's article presents a helpful methodology for educators. Stories have always been viewed as an effective teaching resource, regardless of the content of the course or the age of the students. Stories help one to learn, to celebrate key experiences, to remember and to heal. While story telling is not a new pedagogical tool, digital story telling using one's cell phone is a new dimension that fits well with today's generation of Millennials and Generation Zs and their almost total reliance on their phones. The students' stories can include music, photos,

images, videos and voiceovers. As noted in the article, students are engaged cognitively, emotionally and spiritually through these digital stories.

The article notes the process used by Chesnavage that involves the distribution of a theme sheet. The types of themes used, as noted in the article, can include religious beliefs, holidays, birth, death, rituals and other central points in the life of a religious community. Chesnavage draws on the work of key religious educators to highlight the valuable contribution that story telling can make to the study of the world's religions and to our own religious sensibilities. While the context for this article is that of a world religions course, digital story telling has broad application in religious education and can certainly play an important role in other essential themes such as spiritual formation, theology, philosophy and faith formation.

Each of the articles in this *Journal* offer insight into the importance of religious education research. They also speak to the hope of continued growth and development of the field of religious education. Although a century ago it was thought that religious education was primarily about transmitting the faith and doctrine, we have begun to see how vast the application of religious education can be because of new and ever-expanding research. It can apply to ecology and the environment, social justice, human relationships, human trauma, and to everyday life. Each issue or theme presented in these articles can certainly be studied further, as noted by some of the authors. That is our challenge as religious educators—to be daring enough to step into the future and look for the ways that religious education might contribute or provide insight, and then to boldly begin the valuable research in that area. This is what will reveal religious education's dynamism and depth.

The articles published in this issue reflect a range of perspectives and research interests in the field of religious education. I look forward to future research that will continue to highlight important and relevant research in the field. Thank you to all of the contributors.

Reference

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Article

'&I/&you' An Innovative Research Instrument for Youngsters to Explore Their Life Orientation

Ina ter Avest [1,2]

1 Faculty of Religion and Theology, VU University, De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands; khteravest@gmail.com
2 Independent Researcher, 6711 PK Ede, The Netherlands

Abstract: In this contribution, we explore youngsters' positionality regarding religion and present an example to facilitate them to 'research' their own beliefs and their affective commitments to their faith. We start with a short general introduction in Fowler's theory of faith development. This is followed by findings from research in England, Estonia, Ghana, the Netherlands, and Malawi. From these findings, we conclude that youngsters need to be guided in their exploration of religious and secular worldview traditions. For this, we developed an instrument in particular for Muslim youngsters 'at risk' for radicalization: '&I/&you'. It is along the lines of religious tradition(s), citizenship, discrimination, and environmental concerns that students explore their convictions, broaden their horizons, and further develop their own (religious or secular) life orientation. Our innovative and explorative instrument ('&I/&you')—part of the PIREd (PIREd: Playful Islamic Religious Education) module of seven lessons—is described in detail. Preliminary results of pilot studies are promising. Students see this instrument as a 'space' for dialogue and love to share their ideas and sharpen their mind 'in the presence of the other'.

Keywords: faith development; radicalization; religious positioning; international research; self-analysis; dialogical self theory (DST); self confrontation method (SCM)

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that in an age of secularization faith development is a changeling. The disappearance of a context of 'normality' regarding religion(s) in different parts of the world has resulted in, on the one hand, an increase of religious and spiritual movements, among which mindfulness is but one of the stars in heaven's sky (see for example Ergas 2013). On the other hand, a decrease of visits to churches sheltering under the sacred canopy, as Peter Berger described it in his much-read book *The Sacred Canopy* published in (Berger 1967), is signalled.

Young people these days have to position themselves amidst a diversity of religious and secular worldview traditions and life orientations. They develop their own life orientation in dialogue with others: believers and so called 'nones'—people who do not have faith in God. Fowler's theory on faith development (Section 2) offers a view on possible lines of religious development of this age group. Students in different countries (the UK, Estonia, Ghana, and Malawi; Section 3) inform the reader about their actual positioning, their struggle, their doubts, their vulnerability, and their arguments concerning the preliminary outcome of their search for an authentic positioning amidst their peers' and significant others' diverse secular, religious, and spiritual positions.

To guide students in this positioning process, we, a group of researchers and practitioners in theology and education, developed a learning module of seven lessons (PIREd) including a game ('MirrorMind') rooted in the theoretical framework of the valuation theory and the multivoiced theory (Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 1995). This framework was further developed in the dialogical self theory (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010). Included in this module is an instrument for students' self-analysis, based on the self confrontation

method that initially was developed as an instrument to research students' motive-based actions. These tasks are described in detail in Section 4, as well as the preliminary impressions of its implementation and its possible contribution to students' faith development and their positioning in a post-secular world. Section 5 is dedicated to conclusions and discussion. At the end, in Section 6, we present some recommendations.

2. Faith Development

Despite critics of Fowler's stages of faith development, its broad contours are still applicable as a frame of reference studying religious identity development (Parker 2010). In 'Stages of Faith', James Fowler (1981) makes a clear distinction between faith, religion and belief. Fowler, following Wilfred Cantwell Smith, understands religions as 'cumulative traditions' that are constituted of 'various expressions of the faith of people of the past'. Living cumulative traditions 'awakens present faith'. Following that line of thought, faith is 'the person's or group's way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition' (Fowler 1981, p. 9). Faith and religion mutually need each other. Beliefs, according to Fowler, 'try to bring to expression what faith sees as it images an ultimate environment' (ibid., p. 27). Imagination is a *conditio sine qua non* in the development of a person's faith. To describe faith development in detail Fowler builds on the interaction of lines of thought of Erikson (psycho-social development), Piaget (cognitive development) and Kohlberg (moral development). Fowler distinguishes five stages of faith. This framework of stages should be interpreted as a spiralling process: each stage building on each other, at the same time each stage being more or less prominently active in following stages. In DST terminology, 'voices' of the past are more or less prominent active in the present.

Fowler distinguishes five stages: infancy with its undifferentiated faith, early childhood with its intuitive-projective faith; childhood with its mythic-literal faith, puberty and adolescence with its reflective and synthetic-conventional faith, adulthood with its individuative-conjunctive faith, and old age with its universalizing faith. Within the scope of this article, we focus on puberty and adolescence.

In puberty and adolescence, youngsters reflect on their position in life and in society with the help of 'the other'. Peers are important 'mirrors' through which they observe themselves—their external positions in society as well as their internal positions in their inner life, their 'society of mind' (Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 1995). Increasing reflective competences enable youngsters to entangle different stories that are told about them and that they tell about themselves and construct a personal connecting thread. This connecting thread not only connects stories from the past but extends into narratives about the future (Fowler 1981, p. 152). People of this age long for recognition, no longer exclusively found in their parents, but even more so in peers and in teachers and different adults that coach them, for example, in sports and other leisure activities. Fowler speaks of a 'hunger' for 'a God who knows, accepts and confirms the self deeply' (ibid., p. 153). The 'hunger' for recognition of their peers shows in a need to belong and subsequently the strong tendency to rely on peers' behaviour-known as 'the tyranny of the they'. At the same time youngsters become more and more aware of and committed to their own tacit system of values and will vehemently defend its resulting norms. At this stage, symbol and symbolized coincide or are at the verge of being separated—a process that, according to Fowler, signals the transition to the stage of adulthood (ibid., p. 163). Fowler points to the risk of 'trivialization' of symbols with the result that the 'sacred itself is emptied' (ibid., p. 163).

In puberty and young adolescence, youngsters' faith is 'conventional' in the sense of being the faith system of others, of the community young people wish to belong to; it is synthetic in the sense of perceived in its global wholeness, not yet reflected upon values and stories that are brought together in their biographical narrative (ibid., p. 167).

In the dialogical self theory (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010), the metaphor of the polyphonic novel is central, allowing for 'a multiplicity of positions [in the self] among which dialogical relationships may emerge'. In Hermans' view, the self is a 'dynamic

multiplicity of *I*-positions' (Hermans 2001). The psychologist of religion, Hetty Zock (2013) states that in this theoretical framework religion is seen as one of the 'voices' positioned in the dialogical self. Dialogues–internal and external–stimulate a person to 'allow new voices from outside to come in and open up hitherto marginalized and hidden positions in the self' (ibid., p. 21). Fowler's faith development theory and the theory of the dialogical self open our mind to understand young people's positionality in a plural world.

In the next paragraph we present an overview of research amongst youngsters, not pretending that this is a comprehensive overview of students' faith development in societies characterized by plurality and secularization.

3. Youngsters' Religious Positionality

Below we do not put together a general and complete survey of research on youngsters' religious positioning, but present a bird's-eye-view based on what students wrote and told about their view on religion(s). In the United Kingdom, the focus is on the actual worldview positioning of students as they expressed it in personal and group interviews (3.1). In Estonia, students' expectations of religion in the future is described, based on students' essays (3.2). In sub-Saharan Africa, students' experiences with inclusion/misclusion of worldview diversity, voiced in group interviews, are at stake (3.3).

3.1. Youngsters' Religious Positioning in the UK

In a reflection on three qualitative research projects (in-depth interviews between 2006–2016) with students 13–17 years of age, coming of age in a Christian country through the ages, Julia Ipgrave reports about what youngsters had to say about the role of religion in their lives, now and in the future. Ipgrave investigates the seemingly paradoxical situation of the decline in church attendance, the increase of secularity and the revival of religiosity in the public debate (Ipgrave 2020, p. 75). The purpose of her research[1] is "to hear the young people's views on what of traditional religion has been lost, what retained, what regained over time" (ibid., p. 79). The religious background of the students was diverse, as was the school context of the group interviews with participating youngsters regarding location, as well as school ethos and funding. Hundreds of young people participated in Ipgrave's research projects. In her presentation of the findings, Ipgrave follows David Foas who 'draws attention to "age", "period" and "cohort" effects which may be at work' (ibid., p. 77).

The students all were born in the first decade of the 21st century, the cohort named the Z-generation (e.g., Seemiller and Grace 2017) (cohort effect). A pattern of 'generation-to-generation' (non-)transmission is observed in the students' sayings (ibid., p. 80):

People are losing—it's not like they're losing their faith in God, it's just maybe as generations pass they're—I don't know—just losing interest.

and

There's all the 60s, cos like when they were younger they did everything religious based . . . like everyone's not so fussed about religion anymore.

Regarding this generation-effect, young people's grand-parents are viewed as the link in the 'chain of religion'; grandparents 'being the holders of religious knowledge and memory within families' (ibid., p. 81), as we read in the following statement:

I used to go to church with my granddad but then he died so I just learn about [religion] in school, that's it.

The reason that young people rely on their grand-parents for religious knowledge is attributed to a lack of knowledge of their parents, as is stated below (ibid., p. 82):

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[1] Ipgrave's research is based on various projects she was involved in over the decade 2006–2016. The participants are seen as members of the collective, UK Youth at a particular period of history. Each quotation is illustrative of a position held by a number of young people.

Like our parents don't necessarily know—or my parents don't necessarily know ... the reason for which we're doing it, but we just do it because we've been taught to do it. Like anyway how you pray and what you say.

Also, youngsters refer to the generation of their parents as the rebellious generation, for whom religion was no option anyway. For their parents, religion was 'not done', students are of the opinion that they need educators in the chain of tradition to develop a life orientation, as the student below states (ibid., p. 83):

I think we need more guidance like from parents and stuff because you don't really know. I think it's just the parents becoming more relaxed with things and then we get brought up like that and we bring our children up and it goes on like it.

A disturbing event for the students was the wide spread news of examples of sexual abuse and the covering-up thereof by the churches (period-effect). Also for the students in the UK, 'Dawkinsmania' played a role in their sayings about the role of religion(s). Period-effect and age-effect come together in the following saying (ibid., p. 90):

We're at the stage when as teenagers we're wanting to question everything, and Dawkins is providing a foundation for us to be able to do that.

Modern times, in the sense of a loss of credibility of religion and the distractions of living in the 21st century are prominent in two students' reflections, as we read below (ibid., p. 86):

The stories in the Bible, it's just got no proof, no proof–things coming up on the news and it's like proven theories with science and you realise that it's got more to reinforce the science than the religion.

I think because it's modern times now. Our generation have computers and they're interested in the different stuff and they would—like the older generation didn't have computers and they didn't have that many equipment that they could play with.

Another student refers to the language of religion that is not understood by young people living in the 21st century. This student adds to the 'modern times' argument (ibid., p. 88):

But I think the only thing with following like rules, what's right and what's wrong, and with a religion, is that was thousands of years ago—and, like, time's gone and things get more and more modern and with innovations it's not realistic to stick by [an] old set [of] rules.

Interesting are the students' responses about the relation between a loss of religion and a decline in moral behaviour. Students are of the opinion that unstable family life and plurality of religions and value systems contribute to relativisation of morality. Other students think that age-old religious traditions do not respond to the complexity of modern life (ibid., p. 88).

For young people, it seems clear that the position of religion in their life will change over years (age effect). Religion is seen as childish as this student says (ibid., p. 89):

Becoming older I sort of think that miracles and stuff, that just sounds like rubbish, I just completely don't believe in that now.

Becoming a 'none', a non-believer, for young people seems not a matter of choice but of 'just' happening. According to one of the students (ibid., p. 90):

I just kind of stopped going [to church]. I don't know, I think I started tennis lessons which were on at the same time and then after I finished that I never really went back.

Students, however, presume that their disbelief might change over the years. The way to become a believer is open, and related to knowledge construction, as the two students below state (ibid., pp. 91, 94):

I really don't know, what it is, I'm just losing interest quite quickly . . . I know I'll go back to it later but right now I'm not that [bothered].

I'm more interested [in religion] because over the years we've learnt about the religion and everything and now I've got time to put it into practice—to put my views into practice—on my own now without my parents' help.

Young people have their own solutions to their lack of interest for religion(s). For example, they think churches and RE teachers should adjust their style of worship and other activities to the needs of young people and should give them responsibility in innovative offers. Religious communities, like churches, mosques and temples, are seen by the students as a kind of religious 'market place' which they like to explore on their own. In a way, Ipgrave concludes the young people 'seek to advance their own religious education' in 'conversation with ancient wisdom, past tradition and community memory' (ibid., p. 98).

3.2. Youngsters' Religious Positioning in Estonia

In the Spring Term of 2017, Olga Schihalejev asked her students (ages 16–18) to write an essay on the future of religion in Estonia, as a classroom exercise. The aim of her study was to 'examine how young people in a secular country structure their thoughts and what they use in thinking about the future of religion' (Schihalejev 2020, p. 101). These young people were growing up in a country that to start with was imbued with Christianity since the ages, however was forced to abandon its beliefs due to 'the ideological state-driven anti-religious policies and practices of the Soviet era', then regained its trust in religion and after all faces a 'steady decline in organised religion' (ibid., p. 102). By consequence, the participating students in this research were educated by parents who lived under the Soviet regime and lacked any form religious education themselves. These youngsters learn about religion in municipal schools, either in mandatory or elective classes RE.

In sum, 113 students participated on a voluntary basis in Schihalejev's research; all students from an upper secondary school. The background of the students regarding religious affiliation is diverse. Students were asked to write an essay on the future of religion in Estonia in 50 years' time. Forty-five minutes were allocated for this assignment– more than enough for most of the students. The essays' length varied between 82 and 521 words. They were analysed following Farclough's critical discourse analysis.

From Schihalejev's research, we learn in general that students who were religiously educated are more positive about the future of religion than students whose parents did not adhere to a religious worldview or did not attend RE classes. Students with a religious background write about changes they expect in the role of religion, notwithstanding the effect of processes of secularization.

Schihalejev's analysis shows four different argumentation strategies students practice in their essays: discourse of religion as 'rigid conservatism', as a 'gap in knowledge', of 'Estonians as being naturally non-religious' and of 'religion in the midst of growing tolerance'. Some of the students see religion as 'inflexible, in contradiction to quickly changing societies'. Schihalejev speaks of a discourse of 'Rigid Conservatism' as exemplified in the statements of two students, as illustrated below (ibid., p. 106):

I am pretty sure that religion will be immutable. If we take for example Christianity, then Christian customs have not changed at all since the Reformation and most customs have remained to this day.

In 50 years we may have flying cars and relatives living on Mars, but I do not think that religion will have changed a lot.

One group of students are of the opinion that religion(s) filled the gap between what was known and what was unknown. They expect that the moment science can fill the

gap, religion will disappear. This line of thought is closely related to the level of education of people: more education goes together with less religion. This metaphor points to the phenomenon of communicating vessels—a phenomenon from natural science! Schihalejev speaks of a discourse of 'Religion as a Gap in Knowledge'. These ideas are presented below the statement of one student (ibid., p. 107):

> People will not understand how anybody could create the world from nothing, if one lacks scientific explanation. Probably there will be new information about the provenance of our world. I think that society will understand religious people less and less and the share of atheists will grow.

That non-religiosity is part and parcel of Estonian identity Schihalejev concludes from statements like the one below (ibid., p. 108):

> The majority of Estonians are not believers and I think that this will not change in 50 years. Estonians have never been very religious people, this is why I doubt that in the near future we will see any major changes.

The discourse of young people that reason along this line is named 'Discourse of Estonians as being Naturally Non-Religious'.

The last line of reasoning that emerges from Estonia's young people's essays is named the 'Discourse of Religion in the Midst of Growing Tolerance' (ibid., p. 109). These students, rather than speaking of a decline of religion, mention the diversification of Estonia's religious landscape. A belief in diversity as enriching, paired with a belief in open-mindedness and tolerance, dominates in the respective essays. The statement below is an illustration of this discourse (ibid., p. 109):

> The world will be a better place–both for religious and nonreligious people. Better education results in a world with wider horizons. The consciousness about other people, their cultures and religions becomes more important. We will see more religious people who dare to be themselves and nonreligious people who respect them.

It is interesting that this position of youngsters is not related to their religious commitment or lack thereof. The development of new technologies is supposed to facilitate more openness, since by way of new media, people can be reached that otherwise never would participate in religious meetings. One of the statements (ibid., p. 110) underlines this line of thought, and is worth mentioning, in particular in these pandemic days:

> Religious behaviour will change as technology develops. I think that several religious rites will be held via the internet. For example prayers will be podcast and people can take part from their homes. Certainly there will be people who go to church as well. But sick and very old believers could take part by video broadcast.

For some of the youngsters, religion is meaningful in a unique way for individual persons, detached from religious institutions. This group by Schihalejev is named 'Religion as Individual Enterprise'. More than being detached from institutions, religious institutions are seen as 'obstacles' or at least 'superfluous', as illustrated by the quote from one of the students (ibid., p. 111):

> I think that in 50 years there will be no belief where everyone believes exactly what he wishes without belonging to any group that prescribes how to behave.
> . . . What will be important are people's own convictions. They are not influenced by Holy Scriptures and revelations but by their own religious experiences.

In this group, however, a different note is made, like the statement below (ibid., p 111):

> I hope that in spite of the fact that religions in society are in decline there will still be some faith in people's hearts. Life is too difficult without faith. But it should remain self-oriented. One should not impose one's faith on others, proclaim it or take lives by conflict.

Most of the students argue along the lines of secularization. Discourses including pluralisation mostly were present in writings of young people who in some way or another

were religiously educated. The student's remark above for Schihalejev is the reason to name this group alternatively as the 'Discourse of Hope' (ibid., p. 112). This hope gets a practical touch in Schihalejev's recommendation to balance through education the problematisation of religious life orientations with an equally critical stance to secular and atheist worldviews.

3.3. Youngsters' Religious Positioning in Sub-Saharan Africa

In a comparative research study on (mis)representation of religion in RE in Ghana and Malawi, it showed that Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religions (AIR) are included in the formal curricula, excluding any other religious or secular tradition. In Ghana and Malawi, the responsibility for the way these religious traditions are represented in RE classes is left to each individual school. According to its school ethos, individual schools decide which forms of representation of religion(s) they do or do not allow in their RE classes. In their comparative research on RE in Ghana and Malawi, Matemba and Addai-Mununkum interviewed both teachers (individually) and students (focus group discussion) to gain insight in the (mis)interpretation of religion(s) and the (mis)inclusion thereof in RE classes, and the effect on students' views on religion(s) (Matemba and Addai-Mununkum 2021).

In this article, we focus on this study's findings of students and their views on the representation of religion(s) in RE classes and to what extent this was a fair representation. Criteria for a fair representation of religion(s) were 'factual accuracy and non-bias'. Teachers who made 'factually accurate statement about another religion devoid of bias, we considered them to have represented that religion fairly', according to the researchers (Matemba and Addai-Mununkum 2021, p. 64). For a 'fair' representation, knowledge about religion(s) seems to be a precondition—a precondition that is not always met, as is illustrated by the following statements of students:

> Islam and Rastafarianism are just good but having bad principles. How can one be punished for a cloth covering her head for the whole life in our hottest continent?

> . . . When God came to this earth, he brought only one religion [Christianity] . . . Muhammed brought Islam and for AIR, somebody just worships an object until it is engulfed with some spirits. God created the human being and all the objects so why should they worship it?

Talking about the Islamic head scarf and the Rastafarian headdress as mere head covering, not aware of the religious meaning of it, shows that both Islam and Rastafarianism are misinterpreted and misrepresented in classes. These students lack information about Islam. Although the head covering for women in different religious traditions and cultures was an issue in RE classes—whether this is seen as 'punishment' or not—from the responses of the Ghanaian and Malawi students, we learn that they have a 'simplistic understanding of such a polarising issue' (ibid., p. 66). According to the criteria of 'fair representation', these statements point to a misrepresentation by the teacher or misunderstanding by the students. The information given by the student about AIR is not 'fair' in the sense that it points to a non-existent characteristic: AIR's faithful believers do worship God, since 'all African peoples believe in God' (ibid., p. 66).

Students' lack of information in some cases is the result of the school's rationale behind teaching RE. One head of school in Malawi states (ibid., p. 70),

> RE should help a child in his spiritual journey knowing God and His goodness.
> . . . Teaching different religious traditions in our schools cannot be supported because we cannot teach religions that oppose what we teach.

> For this principal, religious plurality is not seen as enriching, but as a great challenge.

Regarding the role of parents in religious education, teachers report that Muslim parents kept their children at home. These parents were afraid their children would not get the right religious education (instruction) to become a good Muslim. As one Malawi teacher states (ibid, p. 67),

... After school, many parents hire sheikhs to teach their children the truth about Islam because the state system has failed to do that. We are happy that the Muslim association is providing such services and encouraging parents to send their children to the Madrasah.

Church leaders' attitudes in Malawi are in line with these parents' anxiety; they support RE in the sense of 'evangelism' to safeguard young people's commitment to Christianity.

One of the findings of the analysis of students' group interviews is, that Christian and Muslim students demonstrate a respectful attitude towards each other. According to them Christianity and Islam are 'like children of the same mother'. Students adhering to these two traditions seem to distance themselves from AIR's, which they see as 'an expired religion' and 'it belongs to the bush'. Notwithstanding these statements, the young people are convinced of the need to include AIR in the official curriculum, demonstrating simultaneously to be 'attracted to and repulsed' by AIR (ibid., p. 72).

A look at classroom conversations gives insight in youngsters' positioning of religion in the diverse contexts of Ghana and Malawi. The classroom mirrors societal processes of power and of inclusion and exclusion. Teachers are aware of the power of language and they do their utmost to avoid polarization in the classroom. Despite teachers' attempt to concretize inclusive RE—for example, by using objective scientific language (teaching about) or inclusive language ('we all believe that ... ') to create a feeling of belonging—everyday practices show that only Christianity, Islam, and AIR are included, at the expense of Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Baha'ism, Rastafarianism, Judaism, Eckankar, Hare Krishna, etc. Students support this exclusion, as we learn from the words of two students from Ghana (ibid., p. 92):

I don't think so [that we have to learn about other religions]. What we are learning is about the religions we have. The ones you mentioned, we don't have them here so why should we study about them?

Those [other] religions, even if people attend, they are shy to say it, I don't think we need to learn about them because their own people are not proud of the religions.

In classes where the 'other' religions are included, this may lead to wrong and stereotyped images, due to the teacher's lack of information or to the teacher's lack of experiences with meeting 'the other'. One Malawi student says (ibid., p. 92),

What Rastafarians do is smoke chamba [marijuana/Indian Hemp]. It will be chaos if government allowed each and every one to practice their faith in such bizarre way.

Exclusion or misinformation is not only about 'other' religions but also affects different denominations within one worldview tradition. Here again, the teacher's own knowledge and experiences are of pivotal importance, as shows this teacher from Ghana (ibid., p. 93):

Let me tell you, even for us Muslims sometimes it is difficult to identify who is Shia. One of my good friends was a Shia but I didn't know for a long time. We were attending radio programs and teaching Islam and there was no problem. It was later that that someone told me he was one of them. From that time, I ceased walking with him.

This statement, according to the researchers, 'speaks volumes of how he will treat a Muslim student who identifies as such'.

Regarding the diversity in Christianity, students make the observation that RE about Christianity deep down is RE about Catholic Christianity, as the student from Ghana below observes (ibid., p. 94):

We are not offended by that because those do not turn argumentative. It is only when we get to Sabbath part that we debate. The teacher brushes over it and we bring it back and engage in debates. Sometimes other teachers walking by would stop and join in the debate.

However tolerant this student's statement is, other students might be confused in case a teacher offers different, conflicting or paradoxical passages from Holy Scriptures. This shows clearly the different layers that are at stake in teachers' RE practices: the school's formal positioning regarding worldviews concretised in the school's curriculum, the school's hidden curriculum, the teacher's personal religious identity concretised in her/his interpretation and subsequently implementation of the curriculum, and last but not least the diversity in the student population—this in the wider context of the society.

Responding to the confusion of plurality—intrareligious as well as interreligious—is the subject of the next session, in which we first describe the power of 'disturbing' moments in religious identity development followed by a self-analysis instrument for students to explore the vitality of the confrontation with disruptive moments.

4. Plurality and Disruptive Moments

From the statements of students in three different contexts, as described above, we learn that in each situation students are confronted with 'the other'—be it their uninformed parents, the faithful classmate occupying a different religious position or the teacher's exclusion/misclusion. Presuming that 'the other' can or should not be neglected, educators' (parents and teachers) challenge is to invite students to leave their comfort zone, open their mind, and start a dialogue with 'the other'. To facilitate dialogues a module of seven lessons is developed, including the game 'MirrorMind'. To become informed about the change brought about in the affective relation with religion(s) and/in society, a research instrument is developed. The findings of pilot studies with this instrument in six groups are promising. Students show a strong positive relation with their faith and its practicalities, and with living in the Netherlands; as Turkish-Dutch Muslims, they hardly experience negative feelings in relation to their position in Dutch society (Ter Avest et al. 2020, in press). Below, we describe this self-analysis instrument creating 'disruptive moments' together with guidelines to turn conflicting differences into new and enriching positions regarding religion(s).

'&I/&you'—Self-Analysis

The theoretical framework of the module of seven lessons, including a game, and the self-analysis instrument for young people in secondary education consists of the valuation theory (VT) and its research instrument the self confrontation method (SCM; Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 1995), further developed in the dialogical self theory (DST; Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010). The lessons subsequently are dedicated to 'Diversity—in Dutch society and in Islam', the concept of 'Jihad' in Islam, Islamofobia, 'Identity—a given', Sustainability and Responsibility, the game 'MirrorMind', and a concluding lesson on 'Identity–work in progress'. Each lesson includes sections on exploration (what do students know about the issue at stake), information (contextual readings from Qur'an and Hadith), examples in literature and film, dialogue, and integration. One lesson is dedicated to playing the game 'MirrorMind', a playful way for students to dialogically explore further the meaning of concepts dealt with in the lessons.

The very heart of the theoretical framework of the module and the game is self (S) and other (O), positive (P) or negative (N) directed motivation, in relation to the (implicit) affective relation to (expressed) key situations or persons in a person's biographical narrative. In the title *'&I/&you'* the context in which religious identity development takes place is represented by *'&'*, the other as mirror is represented by *'&you'*. Referring to the positivity and negativity related to persons and/or situation, in *'&I/&you'* we make use of a list of validated positive and negative affects (Centrum voor Religieuze Communicatie 1999).

The aim of *'&I/&you'* is to facilitate students to explore their own thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding the plurality of religion(s) in their classroom and in society. With this instrument students clarify and nuance their own religious positionality amidst cultural and worldview diversity. This self-analysis instrument contributes to the religious

and moral identity development of students, it stimulates the mutual exchange of religious positions and widens their horizon.

The procedure in the method '*&I/&you*' is as follows:

Step 1:

The teacher presents to the students one or a variety of religious statements that represent correct characteristics and/or societal interpretations/prejudices of a religion or religious denomination. For example: 'Jihad justifies violence against other believers', 'Christians must give away half of their possessions to poor and needy people', or with the core sentence of a presented case about bullying, like 'Mirjam hit Omer in his face'.

Step 2:

The teacher invites the students to connect the presented statement(s) with a list of validated feelings: 'When you read this sentence, what kind of feeling do you experience? Note behind each feeling on the list to what degree this feeling is experienced. Score the respective feeling between 0 (zero, in case that feeling is not experienced at all) and 5 (five, if you experience that feeling very strong)'.

The validated list of positive and negative feelings consists of ten emotions, like joy, angry, inspired, disappointed, powerless. Filling in the list alone already stimulates awareness of one's own positionality and the diversity in her/his group of peers.

Below we present in Table 1 ('When I read the sentence, I feel ... ') an example of statements and imaginary scoring of one student, and questions a teacher can ask to stimulate the internal dialogue.

Table 1. 'When I read the sentence, I feel ... ' (between 0 and 5).

	Jihad Justifies Violence Against Other Believers	Christians Must Give Away Half of Their Possessions to Poor and Needy People	From the Presented Case: 'Mirjam Hit Omer in His Face'.
joy	4	1	4
afraid	1	3	2
angry	1	4	4
inspired	4	1	3
disappointed	2	3	0
confident	3	0	4
happy	3	0	3
anxious	2	4	1
powerless	0	4	0
strong	5	1	5

Step 3:

After the students fill in the list, the teacher explains to them that the affect list consists of positive and negative feelings—joy being a positive feeling and powerless a negative feeling—and shows the full list of affects and their positive and negative direction, respectively (see Table 2 List of Affects P/N):

Table 2. List of Affects P/N.

Affects	P/N	
joy	P	
afraid	N	
angry	N	
inspired	P	
disappointed	N	
confident	P	
happy	P	
anxious	N	
powerless	N	
strong	P	
sum scores	P=	N=

As a next step in this self-analysis instrument '*&I/&you*', the teacher asks the students to reflect upon their own scores, to respond for example to the following questions for themselves:

'What is it that makes me feel anxious so strongly?' or 'How come that I do not feel any joy?' or 'How do I interpret the dominance of negative/positive scores?' These questions invite students to tentatively look around in their own 'society of mind'.

Step 4:

The next step in '*&I/&you*' is that the teacher invites the students to compare their affect list with the list of one of their classmates.

Comparison of the scores with a classmate widens students' horizon. The teachers ask the pairs of students questions like, 'Clarify to each other the underlying motivation for scores you have in common, and for scores that differ considerably'. In addition, the teacher brings the students to mind the structure of this mutual conversation: listen to the other, summarize what the other said (to check if you understood correctly her/his saying) and continue asking questions until you both agree that what is said is understood correctly. Such given directions for a constructive dialogue encourage the exchange of experienced feelings, in pairs and in plenary classroom conversations, and stimulates students' religious identity development and religious literacy.

Step 5:

The very last step of '*&I/&you*' is a plenary inventory about discovered new insights. New insights that widen students' horizon, including new perspectives in their 'society of mind'.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

What can we conclude from the findings in the three different contexts–different from the point of view of context (secularization, post-communism and plurality), and focus (state of the art, future expectations, (mis)representation and (mis)inclusion). What these researches have in common is 'the voice of the student'. The following comes to the fore from their statements.

First of all, they speak of a lack of knowledge from their educators–parents (in the UK) and educators (in sub-Saharan Africa). This lack of knowledge might result in the extinction of religion, as the Estonian students suppose, but also to the innovative ways to respond to the need of being connected to the other, a religious community or God. Preconditional for a (re)new(ed) interest in religion, according to the UK students, is that students should be approached according to their interests and needs.

What then are the needs of students age 13–16? Fowler's ideas regarding this age group revolve around the following key concepts 'reflection', 'peers as mirrors', and 'hunger for recognition'; they are about to construct a connecting thread in their biographical narrative. To help this latter process along, they need the loving guidance of a well-informed teacher.

Loving because the teacher is well aware of the vulnerability of these young people that are on their way to leave home—literally and metaphorically—and in this specific period in their life, in no-man's-land-in search for their own life orientation. Well informed–to pass on to them the information they need as a stepping-stone on their way to a flexible balanced religious identity.

A flexible balance is what is aimed at in the method '*&I/&you*'. The self-analysis instrument of '*&I/&you*', with its focus on (internal and external) dialogue, responds to what Hans Joas points to as the enormous potential for innovation (in RE) that lies in the sphere of dialogue. In opposing Peter Berger's claim on secularization, and the subsequently anxiety regarding other than religious movements, Joas turns anxiety into a challenge to learn from and with each other. He speaks of processes of 'learning and controlled change' resulting in a flexible internalization of others' values and norms that ends in 'a heightened sensitivity towards others and "the Other" within and thus leads to a dynamic (instead of static) stability' (Joas 2006, p. 58)—what is called a flexible balance in the students' 'society of mind' in DST terminology. Following his line of thought, and based on the interviews in the three research projects, we formulate three recommendations below.

6. Recommendations

Students make a plea for an approach on the part of religious institutions, and that goes for educators (parents and teachers alike) as well, to be addressed in a way that suits their life world and their expectations of future life. Combining this with students' need for recognition that means that in RE, teachers should start with 'translating' 'old set rules' and recognize the value orientation(s) that are (re)presented in actual narratives, movies, theatre plays and songs and confront this with what is transmitted in religious traditions–high appreciated values as well as the ways these cultural expressions signal ways to cope with contingency in life. However, beware of confusing tradition and culture with entertainment; beware of trivialization (Arendt [1954] 1968, p. 202).

Students are in need of knowledge about religion(s). Without knowledge transmission, it is impossible to learn from the accumulated knowledge that is stored in Holy Scriptures, rituals, and narratives. This knowledge, according to Matemba and Addai-Mununkum (2021), is open for doubt concerning a just representation of religion(s) and the inclusion of all what is experienced as a life structuring (life) orientation—be it religious or not. Matemba and Addai-Mununkum warn about ignorance due to teachers' lack of information-for which they coin the concept of 'misrepresentation'-and/or their biased position regarding other religions than their own—referred to as 'misclusion'. This warning is more than justified in each of the research contexts, taking into account the comments of students.

The lessons of the PIREd module are attuned to the needs of the students to know more about religion(s). Their parents, as we have read above, either are not interested (anymore) in religion, or are literate in 'living tradition' but not in transmitting knowledge about religion. Second, young people enjoy sharing their ideas and sharpen their mind 'in the presence of the other'. The playfulness of the lessons, the game 'MirrorMind' being the high point, creates a challenging climate in a safe classroom to broaden their religious horizon. We recommend to monitor the possible change that is brought about by PIREd and 'MirrorMind' with the help of the research instrument '*&I/&You*'. More research is needed to explore the suitability of the PIREd module, the game 'MirrorMind' and the self-analysis instrument '*&I/&you*' in other contexts than the Dutch context.

'Each new generation grows into an old world', Hannah Arendt states in her essay 'The crisis in education' and she continues, 'so that to prepare a new generation for a new world can only mean that one wishes to strike from the newcomers' hands their own chance at the new' (Arendt [1954] 1968, p. 174). Educators must introduce newcomers into the world, transmit existing knowledge about culture(s) and religion(s), as a stepping stone for the creation of a new world–work-in-progress for '*&I/&you*'.

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Adolescents' Perception of Religious Education According to Religion and Gender in Spain

María del Carmen Olmos-Gómez [1,*], **Rafael López-Cordero** [2,*], **Sonia García-Segura** [3] **and Francisca Ruiz-Garzón** [1,*]

[1]   Department of Research Methods and Diagnosis in Education, Faculty of Education and Sport Science, University of Granada, 52071 Melilla, Spain

[2]   Department of Didactics of Social Science, Faculty of Education and Sport Science, University of Granada, 52071 Melilla, Spain

[3]   Department of Education, Faculty of Education Science, University of Córdoba, 14014 Córdoba, Spain; sgsegura@uco.es

*   Correspondence: mcolmos@ugr.es (M.d.C.O.-G.); raloco@ugr.es (R.L.-C.); fruizg@ugr.es (F.R.-G.)

Abstract: The aim of our study is to verify the influence of Religious Education on Spanish adolescents by applying a quantitative study based on descriptive and social research methods which reflect the religious and social plurality of Spain, with a total of 679 secondary education students. By means of the Delphi technique, an exploratory and semi-confirmatory factor analysis, and a confirmatory analysis using structural equations, the psychometric properties of the questionnaire designed are guaranteed. Using a multivariate analysis of variance, after the Levene test, multiple comparisons are made in order to assess the difference between religions and gender with respect to school Religious Education. Significant differences and large effect sizes are found. The results show first that experiences with regard to religion in school are more positive for the group of Christian women and that of Muslim men; second, that the knowledge of religion helps in the daily development of adolescents; third, that men from the two major religious groups and Jewish women demand more autonomy; and lastly, that students consider that the curricular development of religion in school should be reviewed, although it is confirmed that Religious Education is regarded as important for their life and future development.

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1. Introduction

When the issue of Intercultural Education is being addressed, the religious dimension in education must necessarily be considered (Keast 2007). The subject where sociocultural differences are most noticeable and where the challenges of diversity are most often put to the test may be Religious Education. This poses a number of challenges to curriculum designers and teachers in the classroom (Johannessen and Skeie 2019). It is insufficient to consider religious teaching solely as an academic matter. In fact, Religious Education may help us move towards a pluralistic approach to the teaching of religion (Navarrete et al. 2019).

In societies where there is a single dominant religious tradition and where that dominance is reflected in their institutional structure it is often difficult to convince policymakers and teachers of the relevance of plurality and secularity in the management of public schools. In such societies, prevailing religious traditions are considered unproblematic, as long as there are no tensions and divisions within those traditions (Bash 2019). People from every sect in Pakistan prefer to learn only about their own beliefs, despite or because of the fact that the division of Muslims into Sunni and Shia, and the further

division of the former group into different sects, has led to widespread sectarian violence in the country. Ashraf (2019) found that most teachers participating in his study of religious literacy in Pakistan rejected the idea of teaching about other religions in schools since it would mean having to teach about something that they do not believe, or that cannot be applied to their religion, as it is a western concept. Moreover, they agreed that the Islamic way of life guarantees success. Therefore, it is considered unacceptable to learn about the beliefs of other religions or even other sects in Islam. In contrast, Tas (2019), in his study conducted in Turkey, examined the perceptions of primary school students regarding the lesson and teachers of religious culture and moral knowledge, and determined that these were mostly positive.

In countries such as Ireland, with a publicly funded school system characterized by a strong presence of Roman Catholic Church (Department of Education and Skills 2017), Religious Education has achieved a new status over the last two decades. This is largely due to the fact that it has become examinable, just as any other subject (Carmody 2019). The religious dimension was always Catholic in nature. With few exceptions, school personnel hardly questioned the role of religion in the life of the school (McCormack et al. 2019). In Israeli schools, there is a complex and changing situation: state-funded Jewish schools ('secular' and 'religious'); state-funded Arab (Muslim) schools; independently funded Christian (Arab) schools; independently funded 'ultra-orthodox' Jewish schools; etc. However, Jewish hegemony is taken for granted there. Despite its cultural—and religious—diversity, there is a clear lack of intercultural engagement in Israel (Bash 2019).

EU governments and religious organizations are joining efforts in the field of education in order to nurture spirituality while seeking to establish the limits of the influence of Religious Education on the general educational process at state-funded institutions. Europe is characterized by providing Religious Education within a multi-denominational education system. Therefore, it is necessary to develop Religious Education in each country based on its national culture and the traditions of its society (Dudin et al. 2019). Franken and Vermeer (2019) pay special attention to the cases of Belgium and the Netherlands when reflecting on the role of Religious Education in the school context, considering, on the one hand, the religious diversity and plurality among students and, on the other hand, the freedom of religion and education of religious schools. In this regard, Jackson and O'Grady (2019) describe the work of the Council of Europe on teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews, which is considered a major contributor to intercultural education, and introduce the concept of 'dialogical liberalism' in order to facilitate dialogue and discussion instead of imposing equality.

High school-age students seem to be influenced by the idea that modern science has refuted religious truth-claims (Walker 2019). Matemba and Addai-Mununkum (2019), in their study of schools in Malawi and Ghana, claim that Religious Education could even turn out to be counter-productive, resulting in the misrepresentation, rather than the promotion, of religions; particularly in those areas where a religion, such as Islam, has been hijacked by extremist groups with tragic consequences. This is the case of the recent terrorism activities perpetrated by ISIS in Europe, Al-Shabbab in in Kenya and Somalia, or Boko Haram in Nigeria. Experiences of religion-related dialogue in Sweden involving immigrant students from the Middle East with strong religious convictions reveal that historical and political conflicts in the Middle East influence, at least partially, students' willingness to have an open discussion (Vikdahl 2019). Meanwhile, da Gama et al. (2020) study how the impression of an ecumenical and multiculturalist bias in religious education in public educational institutions can be an effective means to deconstruct racist and prejudicial practices in relation to religions historically marginalized within school life. In search of this bias, Kimanen (2019) examines and juxtaposes discourses on religion and religious commitment of young Muslims and Protestants in the capital region of Finland. Her analysis shows that the Muslim background youth position consider themselves, being Muslims, to be in a privileged situation, while the majority of Protestant background youth tend to keep a certain distance from religion.

Freathy and John (2019), within the project 'Principles and Big Ideas of Science Education', carried out at the University of Exeter (UK), advocate for an increased focus on multi-disciplinary,

multi-methodological, inquiry-based, reflective learning, which questions the way in which our 'knowledge' of religions and worldviews is built. In this regard, four 'Big Ideas about the study of religions and worldviews' are postulated with the aim of highlighting the symbiotic relationship that exists between knowledge and knower, and of overcoming the false dichotomy that is often drawn between the object of study and the method of study (Freathy and John 2019). In the same vein, the research study on the integration of religious and non-religious worldviews in the school curriculum conducted in Norway and England by Braten and Everington (2019) discusses four issues: practical challenges; different understandings of the concept of worldviews; the inclusion of non-religious worldviews as a political issue and influences on the selection of worldviews.

Based on the previous analysis, the objectives of the present study were, first, to develop and validate an instrument to assess the impact of religion on schools in relation to the cultural background and gender of participants according to their culture and context; and second, to determine the possible relationship between the perception of religion in school and the variables gender and religion.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Method

For this research, which is descriptive in nature, a quantitative study was conducted. This quantitative strategy aimed to detect regularity from a positivist approach in order to identify the underlying causes of behavior combined with the social explanation of the relationship of the subject with their perception of reality. Thus, this study adopted a mixed-method approach, using analytical-empirical and social research methods (Howell 2008). This is a cross-sectional study based on a quasi-experimental methodology. Since the researchers cannot apply control techniques, they must be aware and take into account the possible consequences of the threat of differential selection in the planning of the study, as well as in its result and conclusions. A general approximation of reality is provided, but not in absolute values (Howell 2008).

2.2. Participants

The questionnaire was administered in secondary schools located in two different Spanish regions: Southeast of the Iberian Peninsula and Spanish North Africa. The selection of these regions was justified by the need to diversify the sample internally, and the aspects defined as the basis for comparison were urban vs. rural (immigrant population) and a strong tradition of limited religious plurality vs. multicultural religious diversity. Out of the total population, we chose seven schools located in the peninsula, in Southeastern Spain; and another seven schools located in Melilla, a Spanish North African city. The sample was comprised of students in their 2nd and 3rd year of secondary education, ranging from 14 to 16 years of age.

The religious education models followed by the schools under study are different, as are their levels of ethnic-religious diversity. They also have a different number of male and female students. This study involved 679 participants in total who were selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling. Opinions were collected from 381 female (56.1%) and 298 male students (43.9%) in the 14- to 16-year-old age group (Mean = 14.94 years). Regarding the variable 'religion', of the students who declared having a 'certain religion or worldview', 52% indicated that it was Catholicism, while 38% of them indicated it was Muslim. About 3% stated that they were Jewish, and another 3% affirmed that they practiced other religions. It is also worth noting that 1% of students chose another alternative and 3% did not respond.

2.3. Instrument

Each participant received in person and on paper format the questionnaire developed for the present study. As an initial focus, in order to select the items to be included in the questionnaire, the questionnaire was administered to a group of students ($n = 265$) with similar characteristics to the

sample used in the present study. After gathering the necessary information on the understanding of the questions and following the content validity process, the questionnaire was analyzed using the Delphi method (Escobar and Cuervo 2008). To do this, 11 experts were asked to evaluate the questionnaire and point out any element that could be regarded as unclear or poorly written in addition to suggesting recommendations on its relevance, appropriateness, coherence, and adequacy. All members of the group of experts held important positions in the religious and educational fields. The experts who participated as judges in the content validation process were professors at public and private universities, with PhDs in different areas of research (three male professors from a Catholic university and one female atheist professor), evolutionary psychology (a female Muslim professor and a female Jewish professor from a public university), social sciences (two priests who teach Catholic religion courses), and experimental sciences (a female Jewish professor and two male agnostic professors from a public university) which guaranteed their experience regarding this process. The final version of the adapted instrument was decided after three rounds of discussion. The percentage of agreement with respect to the relevance, appropriateness, coherence, and adequacy of the items ranged from 68% to 73% in the first round, from 74% to 81% in the second round, and from 82% to 91% in the third and last round.

Items with a percentage of agreement with respect to relevance, appropriateness, coherence, and adequacy lower than 70% were discarded or rewritten. Most elements remained unmodified, although four of them were completely removed and some others were regrouped. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 38 questions divided into five dimensions.

The instrument (Appendix A) (Weisse 2009; European Commission 2011; Dietz et al. 2011) was divided into two parts. In the first part, participants were requested to provide personal details such as gender, age, and religion (How many years have you studied religion in school? Are you attending religion classes this school year?). The second part included questions about the frequency with which participants' opinions were expressed with respect to the item in question, and it was in turn divided into four sections): Experiences with religion in school; Autonomy of religion in school; Knowledge of religion contributes to life development, and; Teaching Models in Religious Education. A five-point scale was used that ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 equals strongly agree and 5 equals strongly disagree. An exploratory and semi-confirmatory factor analysis was performed to examine the construct validity of the instruments. The value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index was 0.972 and the result of Bartlett's test of sphericity was 0.000, which made it possible to proceed to the semi-confirmatory factor analysis to validate the instrument. Finally, the analysis of the variance table revealed the existence of five factors that, when combined, explained 71.31% of the variance. We estimated the reliability of the scores obtained from the scale using Cronbach's Alpha, which was 0.918 (Elosua and Zumbo 2008).

Next, the multivariate regression coefficients based on structural equations were examined in order to confirm the factorial structure of the scale (González and Backhoff 2010). Regarding the application of the goodness-of-fit indices between the matrix derived from the data and the matrix reproduced by the model, it was observed that the two matrices were close, since the difference between them was not statistically significant, which indicates a good fit between the measurement model and the observed data.

Based on these parameters, and in order to ensure the convergence of the model, one more item was eliminated. A model was established with 90 degrees of freedom (df) and a $\chi2$ of 123.93. The *p*-value was below 0.05, meaning that the difference between the compared covariance matrices (the derivative and the reproduced) was statistically significant (Bentler and Bonett 1980). The parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) was 0.841, the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.890, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.906, the norm fit index (NFI) was 0.937, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.048 (Bentler and Bonett 1980; Hu and Bentler 1999; Bentler 2007). All these results were excellent (Table 1).

Table 1. Adjustment index of the model of the Adolescent Perception of Religious Education (APREQ) questionnaire.

Model	CMIN	P	Absolute Adjustment Index				Increased Adjustment Index			
			LO 90	HI 90	RMSEA	PNFI	NFI	CFI	TLI	
4 Facts 36 items	822.7	0.000	0.043	0.071	0.048	0.841	0.937	0.890	0.906	

2.4. Procedure

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered during the months of January and February 2020 with the permission of the families of the respondents and the approval of the directors of the participating secondary schools. The department of social responsibility and cooperation of the University of Granada also approved the study. The ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki were followed at all times. The students were given a paper-based questionnaire including a brief presentation, and then it was read as a group in order to allow for clarification questions. Each questionnaire took approximately 30 min to complete. Participants were given the guarantee of anonymity at all times and were informed that the data collected would be used only for research purposes.

2.5. Data Analysis

For the examination of the data, we performed a content analysis through the Delphi technique (Escobar and Cuervo 2008). Quantitative data were analyzed through an exploratory and semi-confirmatory factor analysis using the statistical program SPSS 24.0 (IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0, Chicago, IL, USA, 2016), (Martínez et al. 2019). Finally, through structural equation modeling, and by means of the statistical program LISREL v9.1, a confirmatory analysis was conducted (Scientific Software International, Princeton, NJ, USA, 2010).

Building on the psychometric reliability and construct validity of the questionnaire, the test for homogeneity of variance (Levene) was performed, which enabled the use of the parametric test (López-Roldán and Fachelli 2015). Besides, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to study the relationships between the variables, perform multiple comparisons and assess the relationship between different religions and gender with respect to religious education in school.

3. Results

Table 2 shows the MANOVA and the effect size analyzed through the eta-squared values. The results indicate the existence of significant differences and large effect sizes between the different religions and gender with respect to religious education in school.

A multivariate test was carried out to identify the effects of the covariance, since it facilitates the statistical study of the influence of gender (with two categories: Male and female) and religion (with four categories (Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu) in the coding of measurement at individual level. The results indicate significant differences and large effect sizes in relation to gender, religion, and the interaction between gender and religion. The sample size and proportion of variance explained (in ANOVA) (Andréu 2011; Cohen 1988) in relation to the factor 'Experiences with religion in school' with respect to the interactions gender and religion, yielded a result of ($\eta2 = 0.17$). It suggests that the proportion of differences can be attributed to the effect of Religious Education in school and to how it influences their life experiences, given that an effect above 0.14 is considered to be large (Badenes et al. 2018; Coe and Merino 2013; Lakens 2013). Likewise, the significant differences found, $p = 0.000$, explain that this aforementioned factor is more positive for the group of Christian women and Muslim men. Significant differences are also shown in the factor 'Autonomy of religion in school', with students demanding more practical applications and autonomous development of religious knowledge

than specified by the standard curriculum guide. This is supported by the results of $p = 0.000$ and a sample effect of ($\eta 2 = 0.32$). The men included in the two major religious groups and Jewish women are those who demand more autonomy. In relation to the factor 'Knowledge of religion contributes to life development', the results show that there are also significant differences in the interaction, and large effects of the sample ($\eta 2 = 0.21$). The group of Jewish and Christian women are those who express that it helps in their development. Moreover, there are no differences between the Muslim groups according to sex, as both consider that such help is a consequence of their knowledge of religion. With regard to the fourth factor, where opinions about the 'Teaching models in Religion Education' are examined, the values obtained show the lowest mean, which indicates that students consider that the models should be reviewed. This idea is confirmed by the results of the second factor, autonomy, which is related to the curricular development of religion in school as well. The results point to significant differences in the interaction between gender and religion, with the groups of Christian men and Muslim women being those who showed a more critical view in relation to this factor.

Table 2. Sums of aggregated scales (ANOVA and effect size ($\eta 2$)) for Religion in school by gender and religions.

Factors		M	SD	CI (95%)		F	*p*	η^2
				Lower Limit	Higher Limit			
Experiences with religion in school	Gender	4.36	0.791	3.83	4.66	0.483	0.003	0.26
	Religion	3.96	0.853	3.53	4.12	1.251	0.001	0.19
	Gender × Religions	4.02	0.866	3.85	4.22	2.244	0.000	0.17
Autonomy of religion in school	Gender	3.91	1.298	3.66	4.11	0.885	0.001	0.09
	Religion	4.11	1.933	3.99	4.56	2.246	0.000	0.07
	Gender × Religions	4.03	1.872	3.85	4.45	2.215	0.000	0.32
Knowledge of religion contributes to life development	Gender	4.05	1.331	3.98	4.57	0.998	0.012	0.33
	Religion	4.02	0.989	3.72	4.23	3.112	0.000	0.31
	Gender × Religions	3.98	1.232	3.65	4.34	2.631	0.000	0.21
Teaching Models in Religious Education	Gender	3.23	0.875	2.86	3.51	0.989	0.001	0.23
	Religion	3.19	0.816	3.03	3.24	2.842	0.000	0.21
	Gender × Religions	3.04	0.979	2.83	3.31	1.487	0.000	0.16

Note: The critical alpha level was adjusted for multiple testing to reduce the type I error (α). Thus, the α-value was divided by the number of pair comparisons for each ANOVA.

4. Discussion

In the present study, we try to understand the role of Religion within the Spanish educational system through the perceptions and opinions of secondary school students regarding Religious Teaching throughout their educational process. The 'educational confrontation' with otherness should empower students with the capacity to be critical of their own religion and that of others (Vermeer 2010). This otherness can also be addressed with the knowledge of the typologies in the theoretical understanding of the field in terms of paradigms (da Cruz 2019). However, in order to teach it, we must first listen, attentively and patiently, to the same students we are trying to educate.

Experiences with religion in school are claimed by 86% of students questioned. Being able to develop knowledge about religion, promoting concepts such as respect and coexistence, discussing religious differences, understanding current affairs, getting to know yourself and the developing of values, among other perceptions, have been positively valued by all respondents. Christian women (96%) and Muslim men (89%) are those who have expressed the greatest satisfaction with respect to the experiences developed with religion in school. This enables us to affirm that religion in school is not only positive from the point of view of theoretical understanding, in terms of knowledge paradigms (da Cruz 2019), but also from the experiential perspective of the participating adolescents.

The autonomy of religion in school is one of the key issues raised by the participants, since students demand more practical applications and autonomous development of religious knowledge, with Muslim and Christian men as well as Jewish women advocating for greater autonomy. Religion should be dealt with in school under criteria developed in line with interdenominational dialogue, based on discussions and the exchange of ideas as innovative learning methodologies, with the development of forums separated by groups (large group and small groups) (Segura et al. 2020), to later interrelate positions. That could be a good meeting point for the development of the second factor of our study: Autonomy of religion in school.

91% of respondents consider that the knowledge of religion contributes to life development. The process of justifying knowledge claims with evidence and reasons is often called 'argumentation' (Guilfoyle et al. 2020). The misuse or ignorance of the scientific and religious language is a drawback that hinders the development of interpersonal communication and, therefore, prevents the adoption of a possible pluralistic approach to the teaching of religions (Navarrete et al. 2019). Guilfoyle et al. (2020), in their research on the views of science and Religious Education teachers with respect to the nature of argumentation, referred to the increasing importance of the ability to coordinate knowledge and values in order to reach justified conclusions. Citizens face dilemmas where decisions are to be made in relation to science and religion. So, genetic cloning, nuclear power or climate change may not only potentially appeal to moral and religious values but also to scientific knowledge. In the present study, we observed that concepts such as 'worldview' were foreign to most students. We consider that Religious Education needs to pay attention to epistemic literacy if we aim to avoid epistemological misconceptions and enable students to develop their knowledge about the specific forms of knowledge manifested in religions (Pearce et al. 2019).

Teaching models regarding religious education should be reviewed in the development of the curriculum plan. Results suggest the idea that, although theoretical training is essential, the need for autonomy (second factor of our research) is equally important and can be fostered with greater religious dialogue and teaching innovations, which are critical in the teaching-learning process. That is why, in this cyber-communication world we live in, we should use tools that are adapted to the most popular communication systems among adolescents, such as social networks, in a cyber-intercultural and plural interreligious and international context, providing the necessary conditions for their correct use. However, face to face interactions should not be underestimated, as they may lead to the improvement of traditional models. Examples of these interactions would include the promotion of practical seminars conducted by experts through master classes, training experiences from a lecturing pedagogical approach, taught via practical applications in a school environment by a prestigious expert (Olmos-Gómez et al. 2019), and exchanges of experiences and knowledge of real situations.

In Finland, current and future teachers show different degrees of inter-religious sensitivity but the equal visibility of diverse traditions is primarily supported, without favoring strongly inclusive or exclusive practices (Niemi et al. 2020). Minorities are often perceived by the majority as deviant, especially when they stem from earlier religious schisms frequently regarded as apostates (Bash 2019). Sometimes, trying to integrate religious and non-religious worldviews, with the intention of protecting the beliefs of these minorities, creates tremendous difficulty for policy makers, teacher trainers, and schools (Braten and Everington 2019).

Another alleged ironist way of solving the conflict, with a westernized orientalism typical of the New Age, leads us to the current debate on Yoga and 'Mindfulness' in public schools. Candy (Brown 2019) proposes the implementation of religion in public schools through Yoga and Mindfulness. She describes the Buddhist origins and underlying nature of Mindfulness, presenting the idea that religion can just be subtracted from Yoga and Mindfulness and thus become secular (Brown 2019), which has initiated a controversial debate on the subject (Porterfield 2019; Neumann 2020; Mitchell 2020; VanTol 2020; Miller 2020). A different and less extreme view of secularity is taken, though, by many historians of religion, who consider that it emerges from

the Christian and especially Protestant investment in individuality of the early modern era (Porterfield 2019).

It is worth highlighting that almost all the adolescents participating in this research study ascribed to a certain religion, and considered themselves believers, regardless of their religious practice.

5. Conclusions

In an attempt to reflect the religious and social plurality of Spain, this study has been carried out in three autonomous communities of the country: Southeast Spain and a Spanish city in North Africa. In total, 679 secondary education students, with an average age of 15 years, participated, which made it possible to statistically analyze the influence of gender (with two categories: Male and female) and religion (with four categories: Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu), finding significant differences and large effect sizes.

According to our data, the study concludes that there are significant differences in the interaction between gender and religion, with the groups of Christian men and Muslim women being those who showed more critical view regarding to consider that the fact this helps is thanks to their knowledge of religion.

The importance of Religious Education which is reflected in the results can be attributed to the great effect of Religious Education in school and the way in which it influences the life experiences of students. Experiences regarding religion in school are more positive for the groups of Christian women and Muslim men. This is supported by literature on experiences such as that reported by Goren et al. (2019), who examined teachers' perceptions of Citizenship Education (CE) with a focus on the three main education sectors in Israel (secular-Jewish, religious-Jewish and Palestinian Arab) and found great differences in the interpretation of the term by teachers from each sector. For marginalized groups (Palestinian Arab), CE is regarded as a way of ensuring a sense of belonging to a global society. For social groups that are already well-resourced (secular Jews), CE is considered a way promoting the global future. Meanwhile, the Jewish religious minority in Israel see CE as a threat to national identity and religious values. The results of their study call into question the unifying potential of CE.

Knowledge of religion helps in the daily life of adolescents, with Jewish and Christian women being those who express this view more often. There are no differences in the Muslim group according to gender, as both consider that this help is thanks to their knowledge of religion. Men from the two major religious groups and Jewish women demand more autonomy.

Students consider that the curricular development of religion in school should be reviewed and demand more practical applications and autonomous development in religious knowledge than the specified in the standard curriculum guide. However, it has been found that they consider that Religious Education is important in their development, which is a key idea to highlight considering the age of respondents, since they have a short-term perception of life. This contrasts with the idea of the Council of Europe's 2008 'Recommendation', which encourages the study of 'non-religious convictions' in schools, in addition to religions, yet few European countries have incorporated non-religious worldviews within Religious Education (Braten and Everington 2019).

To conclude, it is important to emphasize the need to analyze the management of religious education in countries where the relationship between State and religion remains firmly rooted (as is the case of Spain), and the role of schools where confessional religion has a presence in schools (Garreta-Bochaca et al. 2019). However, for this analysis to be more accurate, it is necessary to contemplate not only the vision of parents, teachers (Olson et al. 2020), legislators (Malizia and Pieroni 2019; Markoviti 2019) and religious confessions (Silhol 2019); but also that of students, who can offer a perception of Religious Education based on their experience as insiders (Khalid et al. 2020).

Appendix A. Adolescent Perception of Religious Education (APREQ) Questionnaire

Sex: ___ Female/___ Male

1. How many years have you studied religion in school?
2. Do you attend religion classes this school year?

| Catholicism |
| Muslim |
| Jewish |
| Hindú |
| Agnostic |
| Atheist |
| Others |

What Is Your Experience with Religion in School? To What Extent Do You Agree That:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
At school I get knowledge about different religions.					
At school I learn to respect everyone, regardless of their religion.					
At school I have the opportunity to speak about religious matters from different perspectives.					
Topics dealing with religion in school are interesting.					
I consider religions to be an important topic at school.					
Learning about different religions helps us to live together.					
Learning about religion in general helps me decide between good and bad.					
Learning about religion in general helps me understand the current events.					
Learning about religion in general helps me learn about myself.					
Learning about religions leads to conflicts in the classroom.					

What Is Your Experience with Religion in School? To What Extent Do You Agree That:		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Religion can appear in school in many different ways. Imagine that you are someone who has the authority to decide about school affairs. To what extent do you agree with the following positions?						
Religious dietary demands must be taken into consideration at the school canteen.						
Students should be able to wear religious symbols in school.	. . . discreet (e.g., small crosses, etc. hanging around the neck)					
	. . . more visible (e.g., veils etc.)					
It is acceptable for students not to attend class due to religious holidays.						
Students should be excused from attending certain classes for religious reasons.						
The school should provide spaces for students to pray.						
Voluntary religious acts (e.g., prayers) could be part of the daily life of the school.						
To what extent do you agree that learning about religions helps to:						
Understand others and live with them peacefully.						
Understand the history of my country and Europe.						
Get a better understanding of current events.						
Develop my own point of view.						
Develop moral values.						
Learn about my own religion.						
What is your position regarding the different models of teaching religion in school?						
Religion should be optional.						
Students should study Religion separated into groups according to their religion.						
There should be no place for religion in school.						
Religion should be taught to all students together, regardless of students' religious or confessional differences.						
The subject of Religion is not necessary. All necessary topics are covered by other subjects in the school (e.g., Literature, History, etc.).						
Religion should be taught partly together and partly in groups, according to the religion of students.						
Get an objective knowledge of the religions of the world.						

What Is Your Experience with Religion in School? To What Extent Do You Agree That:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Learn to understand what religions teach.					
Be able to speak and converse on religious matters.					
Learn about the importance of religion to solve problems in society.					
Be oriented towards religious belief.					

Note: Questionnaire based on the instrument used in the European project Religion in Education. A contribution to dialogue or a factor of conflict in transforming societies of European Countries (Weisse 2009; European Commission 2011; Dietz et al. 2011).

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Integration of Tauhidic Elements for Environmental Education from the Teachers' Perspectives

Norshariani Abd Rahman [1,*], Fatin Nur Marhamah Zabidi [2] and Lilia Halim [1,2]

[1] Institute of Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Malaysia; lilia@ukm.edu.my
[2] Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Malaysia; P95891@siswa.ukm.edu.my
[*] Correspondence: norshariani@ukm.edu.my

Abstract: Serious environmental damage calls for the need of complementary approaches in applying tauhidic elements for environmental education. Hence, this study examined how the practices of integrating tauhidic elements for environmental education are carried out in two Islamic science boarding schools. A qualitative study was conducted by interviewing two science teachers and two Islamic education teachers from each school and an environmental education coordinator for data triangulation. The participants of this study were sampled using purposive sampling. The interview data transcribed were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings show that the integration of tauhidic elements in the school curriculum takes place with the support of the teachers and school administrators. However, the integration of tauhidic elements for environmental education only takes place through two approaches, namely through the inculcation of values from the teachers' advice and actions as role models, as well as through the activities of seeking the meaning of the verses in the al-Quran or the Hadith that are related to environmental concepts. The findings also demonstrate that the students already have good environmental knowledge, awareness, and interest in nature, but require enhancements concerning their practices of environmental conservation. In sum, integrating tauhidic elements for environmental education requires the cooperation of science teachers and Islamic education teachers as well as strong support from other subject teachers and environmental clubs in schools.

Keywords: environmental education; environmental values; integration; Islamic values; tauhidic elements

1. Introduction

The destruction of the environment as a result of development is alarming in the wake of natural disasters such as global warming, landslides, flash floods, air pollution, water pollution, land pollution, as well as the extinction of flora and fauna species. Environmental damage occurring in many Muslim countries, including Malaysia, calls upon the attention to emphasize ethical behavior toward the environment (Yaacob et al. 2017). The initiative in changing toward a more ethical behavior is necessary to transform the perspective of others toward Muslims, as Islam also has concerns about environmental care similar to other religions. Islam forms a framework for many aspects of a Muslim's life (Al-Hadabi 2016). As mentioned by Einstein, science without religion is lame, while religion without science is blind (Othman 2016). However, modern science has been rather silent about Allah (Abdullah 2015). The abandonment of Islamic values and the rapid adoption of western science and technologies have led to social and educational conflicts as well as environmental problems in many Islamic countries (Othman 2016; Faruqi 2007). Examples of values related to environmental education advocated by Islam are: (a) *qana'ah*, which means being moderate, thrift and thankful to Allah; (b) *mahabbah*, which means love and appreciation of the environment; (c) *ihsan*, which means wise choices, refraining from harmful acts toward the environment, being accountable for one's actions; (d) *ta'awun*, which means teaching

one's family to conserve the environment, reducing the use of natural resources, reducing waste and participating in campaigns on environmental conservation (Yaacob et al. 2017).

Recent studies have found that environmental management based on Islam is increasingly gaining attention at national and international levels (Rahman 2016; McKay et al. 2013). Osman Bakar, in his book entitled *Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: The Islamic Heritage,* also noted that environmental issues that are increasingly becoming serious in Islamic countries, including Malaysia, require an Islamic approach for environmental conservation (Aung 2016). The need for this Islamic approach is indispensable based on the results of a previous study by Emari et al. (2017), which found that Islamic environmental awareness contributes 39% to general environmental awareness, while Islamic environmental awareness and general environmental awareness contribute 47.8% to environmental conservation. This finding suggests a need for the integration of tauhidic elements in environmental education as a complement for enhancing public awareness of the environment and subsequently changing the public behavior toward environmental conservation.

In this regard, the integration of tauhidic elements for environmental education can be defined as an education where moral values toward environmental care behavior are infused based on the al-Quran, the Hadith and the teachings of Islamic values to create awareness of the environment by maintaining the relationship with Allah, fellow human beings and the environment, as well as demonstrating responsible behavior toward the environment (Djainudin and Sirait 2016; Othman 2016; Othman 2014). Based on this definition, it is understood that in integrating tauhidic elements for environmental education, the three main references referred to are the al-Quran, the Hadith and the teachings of Islamic values about environmental conservation, which can be discerned and perceived through nature. Fakhruddin et al. (2018) suggested that environmental conservation based on the al-Quran should include the concepts of the existence of humans as guardians of nature, knowledge about environmental sustainability as a life system, development of responsibility, respect, a caring attitude toward nature and the wisdom in exploiting natural resources.

The Malaysian school curriculum is committed to developing its students holistically along intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions, as reflected in the National Education Philosophy (Ministry of Education 2013). In line with the National Education Philosophy, the philosophy of environmental education in Malaysia focuses on three (3) components, which are acknowledging the existence of the environment that is subject to God's will, pursuing the knowledge of environmental education needs and fostering the spirit of love for the environment by focusing on ethical, moral and aesthetic values (Hassan 2006; Ministry of Education 1998). Reflecting on the philosophy of environmental education, it can be observed that the integration of tauhidic elements and environmental education is indeed internalized in the philosophy.

Palmer (1998) argues that environmental education must include three elements, namely education *about* the environment, education *in* the environment and education *for* the environment. These three elements of environmental education in learning propose that education *about* the environment involves the cognitive aspects of the individual's understanding and knowledge of the environment, while education *in* the environment is about the aspects of appreciation and emotion that help individuals to become more environmentally sensitive. Additionally, education *for* the environment is about the individual's involvement in the environment, developing attitudes toward the environment, and caring about the environment (Palmer 1998; Palmer and Neal 1994; Aarnio-Linnanvuori 2013). The link between these three elements in environmental education has often been employed in curriculum planning for teaching and learning activities at the school level (Ahmad @ Shaari 2009).

Accordingly, various efforts have been undertaken to strengthen the implementation of tauhidic element integration in the school curriculum, while at the same time, rejecting secularism in the education system. Secularism in education is overemphasized in scientific approaches and rejects all other arguments based on religion and culture (Othman 2014). Among these efforts are the formation of schools that incorporate the elements of science and Islam, such as the Ulul Albab Mara Junior Science College, Imtiaz schools, integrated boarding schools and federal religious schools. These

schools are different from other boarding schools because the emphasis is on strengthening tauhidic elements and science through the al-Quran and the Hadith memorization subjects, as well as specific Islamic subjects such as *Shari'ah Islamiah* and the Arabic language. The ultimate goal of setting up these schools is to produce students with a solid foundation of the al-Quran, a diverse and wide knowledge, a capability of thinking and observing God's creation through sharp eyes and mind (MARA 2018). However, the extent of the effectiveness of the education system that integrates science and Islam in being capable of producing *huffaz* scientists who also love nature should be further explored.

The effectiveness of the educational system in producing students who are balanced physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually is certainly dependent on the application of tauhidic elements in school, either through formal or informal teaching and learning by the teachers. School is also a place for students to acquire the knowledge, skills and various norms that must be followed, as well as the ethics that are the basis for human beings to achieve well-being in life (Hidayat 2015). However, previous studies have shown some constraints in the application of environmental education in schools. Among them are the conceptual barriers of environmental education, logistical barriers (large class size, risk of bringing students out, compact curriculum and time constraints), teachers' competency and teachers' commitment to environmental education (Rahman 2017; Ham and Sewing 1998; Ahmad @ Shaari 2009; Rahman et al. 2018). Rahman (2017) stated that the goal of environmental education has not been fully achieved due to the lack of emphasis on three aspects; namely, moral values, decision-making skills and problem-solving skills related to environmental issues. Therefore, there is a need to examine the extent to which the tauhidic elements for environmental education are applied and practiced in Islamic science boarding schools.

Many previous studies have examined the practices of environmental conservation from the perspective of individuals via self-report where there is a tendency for the individuals to provide positive remarks or responses. Hence, it is important to examine this phenomenon from the perspective of science teachers since the topics or concepts in science are more related to the environment than any other subjects. Similarly, there is a need to pursue the views of Islamic education teachers and environmental club coordinator teachers as they complement the integration of tauhidic elements for environmental conservation in environmental education at schools. The views of these teachers would help in comprehensively understanding the practices of integrating the elements of tauhid for environmental education that take place in the selected Islamic science boarding schools. Subsequently, the findings from this research can further help to facilitate the intervention that could be implemented to improve the practices of environmental education based on Islamic values.

2. Literature Review

Tauhid is one of the fundamental terms of Islamic teaching that refers to the conviction that "there is no God but Allah" (Akhter et al. 2010; Tamuri 2015; Salehudin and Iksan 2017), which is part of a Muslim's belief as well as *aqidah* (belief in Allah) (Djainudin and Sirait 2016). Thus, tauhid can be said as the main source of values and ethics in environmental management theology (Djainudin and Sirait 2016). A combination of tauhidic elements that emphasize Islamic values and environmental education would be more effective in environmental conservation efforts (Aung 2016; Rahman 2016; McKay et al. 2013).

Based on al-Ghazali's views, the process of applying values can be categorized into three main components, namely: (i) beliefs, (ii) character and *akhlak* (Islamic ethics) and (iii) action. The beliefs proposed by Imam Al-Ghazali that can be adapted in the context of environmental conservation are the beliefs that: (i) God is the owner of nature; (ii) working is considered as *ibadah* (religious duty); (iii) there needs to be a close relationship between teachers and students; (iv) the Prophet pbuh (peace be upon him) is a role model; (v) the nature of humans is to obey Allah; (vi) the soul is pure; (vii) the main sources of reference are the al-Quran and the Hadith; (viii) the purpose of life is for the pleasure of Allah (Othman and Kassim 2016). Thus, conservation activities would be considered good deeds (*hasanah*) in this life and the Hereafter (Efendi et al. 2017).

The tauhidic science framework developed by Othman (2016) can be used as a foundation in applying tauhidic elements for environmental education. In the tauhidic science framework, there are three relationships that need to be maintained, which are the relationship between humans and Allah, the relationship among humans and the relationship between humans and nature. The relationship with Allah involves two forms of human roles, namely as a servant of God and as a vicegerent or guardian on earth. As a servant of God, humans need to worship and practice other charges demanded of them. As guardians on earth, human beings are given the responsibility of managing this world as God has bestowed *roh* (spirit), *qalb* (heart), *nafs* (soul), intellect and physicality to them. Meanwhile, in maintaining human relations, human beings need to develop social, economic, political, science and technology systems based on the *syariat* (Islamic laws) and morals taught by Islam. In maintaining the relationship with the environment, humans need to be wise in using natural resources made available for the mutual benefits of humanity without damaging the environment (Othman 2014).

Previous studies conducted on Islamic environmental education in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia showed that various approaches have been implemented including teaching, modeling, coercion, conducting participatory activities (such as cleaning, arranging the garden and the surrounding environment, creating green open spaces) and building collective awareness about the importance of environmental management through daily activities (Albab 2017; Efendi et al. 2017; Fua et al. 2018). Similarly, in the study conducted by Mustam and Daniel (2016), the application of formal environmental education was implemented through explanation, discussion, demonstration, questions and answers, experiment, simulation and role play activities while the application of informal environmental education was carried out through camping, fieldtrips, recycling and competition activities. However, the manner or the ways in which Islamic values are to be infused in environmental education were not clearly demonstrated in these previous studies.

In Malaysia, Iksan et al. (2015) in their study implemented the approach of *tadabbur* (reflection of the al-Quran by observing the nature) while carrying out jungle trekking and *tazkirah* (a brief talk about Islamic religion as a warning or an advising) while doing fieldwork. This approach is a good example of how tauhidic education can be integrated in environmental education. However, the approach was implemented in activities carried out outside of the school environment. Hence, if the approach by Iksan et al. (2015) could be adopted within the school environment, it would address the problems of cost, logistics, and safety for the school students as they would not need to be out of the school setting. Therefore, the practices of integrating tauhidic elements for environmental education need to be examined to understand the real scenario that occurs in Islamic science boarding schools.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Study Context

This research was aimed at exploring the practices in integrating tauhidic elements for environmental education by teachers. This descriptive case study employed the semi-structured interview method to obtain data from science teachers, Islamic education teachers and a coordinator teacher of the Geography and Environment Club from two Islamic science boarding schools. Islamic science boarding schools were selected in this study as they are aligned with the aims of strengthening Islamic understanding among the students while offering them knowledge of different sciences. In Islamic science boarding schools, the students get the opportunity to enroll in several disciplines of science and other professional subjects to become future academicians and to be involved in professional careers that integrate an Islamizing of the various disciplines. Furthermore, these students will then be able to reform the education system and knowledge based on true epistemological foundations of Islam (Baba et al. 2018). In Malaysia, there are four types of Islamic science boarding schools, namely Imtiaz schools, Ulul Albab Mara Junior Science College, integrated boarding schools and federal religious schools. These four types of school implement the central curriculum developed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education in their teaching and learning. However, the Ulul Albab

Mara Junior Science College was established by the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), a Malaysian government agency. The school system and learning facilities for the Mara Junior Science Colleges throughout Malaysia are therefore provided by the MARA institution. In this research, two types of Islamic science boarding schools, namely the Ulul Albab Mara Junior Science College and the federal religious school had been selected. These selected schools were considered adequate to portray the two different education systems of Islamic science boarding schools in Malaysia. In addition, these schools are located in Selangor, a state in Malaysia, and it is among the states that have received huge impacts of environmental problems because of its close vicinity to the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. Furthermore, according to Palmer (1998), experiences of nearby environmental disasters often play a significant role in promoting environmental concern.

3.2. Participants

The participant determination and selection process was carried out based on the purpose and questions of this study. Accordingly, purposive sampling was utilized to ensure that participants would be able to provide the information required and answer the research questions. The participants were two science teachers, two Islamic education teachers and a coordinator teacher of the Geography and Environment Club from one school. In total, nine teachers were involved as participants in this study. The selection of the participants was based on the recommendation of the school principals by considering the teachers' experiences and expertise in the subject matter related to environmental education. In the verbatim transcript, code ST refers to science teachers, code IET refers to Islamic education teachers while code EC refers to the coordinator teacher of the Geography and Environment Club. In terms of the school name, SA refers to the first school while SB refers to the second school.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The researcher held preliminary meetings with the participants to explain the purpose of the study and to obtain their permission to conduct the interviews. The date and time of the interview were then confirmed with each participant according to the availability of the participants based on the schedule provided by the school administrators. This study began with rapport building with the participants so that the participants were mentally and physically prepared to provide the information required to answer the research questions during the interviews. The participants were also informed that this study required the interviews to be recorded and transcribed. Therefore, the participants were requested to voluntarily sign a letter of authorization and acknowledgment as a study participant. These preparations were made to ensure that all the interviews would progress smoothly and efficiently.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis is a critical process where data that have been collected go through various methods of analysis. All the data in this study were obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted. Each interview was transcribed after it ended. The verbatim transcript was then analyzed manually using thematic analysis. In thematic analysis, trends within the data are established and recorded, allowing various aspects of the research subject to be interpreted (Valenzuela and Shrivastava 2008). For the thematic analysis, an open coding was built for each verbatim transcript with the same code that was then incorporated into several categories. The process continued until all the themes and sub-themes related to the integration of tauhidic elements for environmental education were identified and categorized accordingly.

4. Research Findings

Infusion of Tauhidic Elements by Schools

Analysis revealed that both schools have created an environment that supports the integration of *aqli* (acquired knowledge) and *naqli* knowledge (knowledge revealed by Allah SWT to a person,

either through the reading of knowledge revealed by Allah in al-Quran and Sunnah of Rasulullah PBUH or through insights or intuition). At SA, there are three cores that form the main pillar of the education system; namely, Quranic, which is related to the al-Quran, encyclopedic (academic-related) and *ijtihadik* (sports-related), as mentioned by research participant IET_1SA. Students also memorize the Quran to increase their knowledge of Islam as well as their emphasis on other disciplines, especially science. Co-curricular activities are also emphasized to produce students who are balanced spiritually, intellectually, and physically.

> *"There are three cores. The first is Quranic which is memorizing the al-Quran; the second is Encyclopedic which is academic-based, more to science; the third is ijtihadik which is more to sport, meaning co-curricular activities."* (IET_1SA)

Based on the findings, it was found that the integration of the tauhidic elements with the curriculum occurs through the teaching and learning implemented by linking science with the al-Quran. For example, religious values are instilled in science concepts including *qurban* (sacrificial animal slaughter). Usually, a celebration is performed during Muslim pilgrimage in Malaysia. The values associated with sacrifice in Islam are instilled in students whose activities are planned by the Islamic Education Department in school as an annual activity, as stated by ST_1SB teachers.

> *"According to the Islamic Education Department's program, in the course of a year, there are already plans on student outcome in terms of religious values. So, in teaching and learning, the department has also inserted the topic of qurban (sacrificial animal slaughter), slaughtering . . . so involve all the students."* (ST_1SB)

Time is also allocated for al-Quran memorization, academic class, and co-curriculum. The co-curriculum activities offered include sports which are highly demanded to be learned in Islam; namely, archery, horse riding and swimming programs, as mentioned by research participant ST_1SA. Academic class and co-curriculum are complementary with each other to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced, as stated in the National Education Philosophy of Malaysia.

> *"In terms of science, we often relate to the al-Quran. If you see the student's schedule on a day-to-day basis, there will be time allocated for al-Quran recitation. There is time for academic class. There are times for physical, co-curricular activities . . . there are archery programs, go horse riding, swimming."* (ST_1SA)

At SB, the integration of tauhidic elements also occurred as an al-Quran memorization program and the cultivation of Islamic values is included in the teaching and learning sessions. However, the al-Quran memorization program at SB takes place on Saturday and Sunday mornings under the management of the school's Parent–Teacher association, as opposed to the SA where the al-Quran memorization program is included in the learning session. The al-Quran recitation sessions were also taught with *tajwid* and *tasmik* (meaning of the al-Quran verses) to enable students to understand the meaning of the al-Quran verses. This makes the teaching and learning schedule in SB more compact than in SA.

> *"Others if like Saturday and Sunday, we have the Huffaz program under the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), which involves all students. During weekends, on Saturday and Sunday, some of the students have to read the al-Quran, some do the tasmik (teacher listening to Al-Quran recitation by the students) and there are groups that we guide, teach the tajwid."* (IET_2SB)

The enculturation of al-Quran recitation at the SB is also highlighted through official activities where al-Quran verses are read at the assembly every Friday. This practice became a culture in SB.

> *"During the official assembly every Monday, like other schools, we have the principal's speech and singing of the national anthem as usual, but we will have the additional recitation of al-Quran verses. That is the identity of our school."* (EC_1SB)

The school also created the PLC (Professional Learning Community) program where students and teachers are gathered according to their subject matter committee for the purpose of sharing knowledge and encouraging the love of Islam. PLC runs once a week, which is every Friday, as mentioned by participant IET_1SB.

"We have the Professional Learning Community (PLC) where every Friday we will gather according to our subject matter committee and share knowledge. From there, we get lots of new input and we are also encouraged to love our religion." (IET_1SB)

The launch of the hashtag "one imam, one salam" also encourages prayer in congregation, *tazkirah*, and sharing of the Hadith and the al-Quran verses. In addition, there is a Da'wah and Spiritual Body known as BADAR, which is established in the SB to enhance religious and spiritual activities through activities of *usrah*.

"Hashtag one imam one salam (#1Imam1Greeting) . . . prayer in congregation, through this, there are always tazkirah, sharing of the Hadith and sharing of al-Quran verses." (EC_1SB)

"Da'wah and leadership Board (BADAR). So, these students, they have their daily routine . . . they have their group . . . before bedtime they will sit in a circle . . . it is called usrah." (ST_1SB)

The aspect of leadership is also emphasized at SB where the school has launched a leadership theme to maintain the momentum and balance between the academic, co-curricular and student personality outcomes. In addition, *tazkirah* related to environmental issues are also applied in the school.

"There is still maintaining the academic momentum, co-curriculum and student personality outcomes, so we just launched the theme of leadership . . . related to personality, soft skills and leadership aspects." (EC_ 1SB)

"More to tazkirah in the evening, sharing of knowledge at the prayer room . . . Indeed, Islamic values are associated with environmental education." (EC_1FR)

At SA, the heads of department and principal strongly encourage the teachers to integrate al-Quran verses related to the topics taught and to apply Islamic values.

"Every teacher even for the science department itself, our department indeed encourages each teacher to include if possible, to find al-Quran verses related to the topics taught . . . it's just that the content is not compiled yet." (ST_1SA)

"Examples of Islamic values here, first of all, when we start meetings, our teachers and principal do indeed ask us to apply Islamic values." (IET_1SA)

Meanwhile, at SB, the principal launched the "lights-out" program where the lights are switched off at 11.30 p.m. This program was launched because the students have to take up to 11 subjects, including subjects related to religion, namely, Shari'ah Islamiah and Arabic, which led to feelings of tiredness and sleepiness among the students during the teaching and learning sessions. Therefore, the "lights-out" program was implemented to help students manage their time well with regard to managing their time for academics and rest. These show the support from the administration and schools' principals.

"In 2016, the teachers lamented that with 11 subjects that the students have to take, it is a pressure for them, when they (the students) are not good at managing their time to complete their school work, this resulted in the students often falling sleep in the classroom. And when the principal found out about the issue, he said that sleep quality is very important; hence, the principal launched lights-out. Meaning at 11.30 p.m. all must sleep (lights switched off). So, students will automatically complete their work before 11.30 p.m." (EC_1FR)

Overall, based on the findings, there are four elements in the learning system that were emphasized and focused on by these schools in order to produce students who are well-balanced in terms of their academic, character, spiritual and physical achievements. Therefore, various activities for the students were planned by the schools. Academic development has always been emphasized by the schools, including conducting PLC (Professional Learning Community). Among the applied practices to enhance the students' spiritual elements implemented at the schools were recitations of al-Quran during assembly, *tazkirah*, *usrah*, and prayers in congregation. The development of a student's character is nurtured through leadership programs and the value of appreciating time. Meanwhile, a student's physical development is nurtured through co-curricular activities such as archery, swimming, and horse riding. The values nurtured in the environment of these schools are the basis in teaching the students to be a good servant and vicegerent or caliph on earth in managing the environment. Based on the views of the teachers, the integration of tauhidic elements in the schools require strong support from the school principle. It was found that the teachers and students were often reminded by the principles of the schools to apply environmental values in teaching and learning, as well as to put in effort to enculturate the values in the school environment.

5. Application of Environmental Education and Integration of Tauhidic Elements for Environmental Education by Teachers through Formal Education

The application of environmental education has been indeed carried out in the teaching and learning sessions at the Islamic science boarding schools. Many of the activities conducted by the teachers in integrating environmental education in the topics taught are done formally. Among the activities are the inculcation of Islamic values related to environmental education, learning from the al-Quran, sharing of knowledge with other peers, project-based learning such as modeling or innovation from recyclable materials, learning by example, tree and soil therapy, dissemination of information about the environment through flyers and brochures, video screening, online applications, gallery walks, problem-solving methods, introduction of outside organizers related to environmental conservation such as grab cycle and the use of existing modules related to environmental education. However, this article focused only on the activities where the integration of tauhidic elements and environmental education occurred simultaneously.

Topics Related to Environmental Education

Environmental topics or concepts related to the environment are often associated with science and geography subjects. In contrast, the application of values related to environmental education or environmental awareness is often associated with civic education and Islamic education subjects. Based on the findings from the interviews with the science teachers in both schools, the teachers linked the topics of science with environmental education in the teaching and learning process. Among the topics related to the environment contained in the curriculum were biodiversity, ecosystems, the relationship of chemicals produced from industries, greenhouses, geo-disasters pertaining to land and natural disasters, food chains, human health and human activities that affect the balance of nature. Most of the topics provided information about the effects of the interaction between humans and the environment and how the environmental problems can be addressed and tackled.

"For Form two, Biology topics often do indeed relate to nature. Biodiversity, ecosystems or also topics that are related to chemistry . . . such as chemicals produced from industries . . . or for the greenhouse chapter, the use of recycling materials for homes. Meaning, recycling of water, recycling of energy or using recycled materials for decorations around the house and also those who set up waste bins that separate waste materials. That's considered a greenhouse." (ST_1SA)

"Formally, it is more to the subject of geography, but there is in the subject of science too. For form one with the new syllabus, it talks about geo-disaster. So, we will talk about soil and natural disasters . . . how to overcome . . . " (ST_1SB)

"In Biology, they also learn about human interaction that disturbs environmental balance." (ST_2SB)

Even though there were lots of topics related to environmental concepts in a science subject, the integration of tauhidic elements depends on the creativity of the science teachers. Based on the science teachers' views, most of the topics related to environmental education were pertaining to education *about* the environment which focused on providing information or enhancing knowledge about the environment.

Meanwhile, in the Islamic education subject, the values or ethics related to environmental education were applied both directly and indirectly. Among the topics of Islamic education related to environmental education were earth creation, seeking forgiveness from God for being cruel to the environment, conduct or behavior toward the environment, direction toward doing good and forbidding wrongful behavior toward the environment. Based on the views of the Islamic education teachers, the infusion of environmental education in the subject of Islamic education focused on education *in* the environment that is to instill the affective component related to emotion toward the environment.

"The topic on the creation of the world is evidence of God's wisdom. In that topic, we study about nature . . . the creation of the world is expansive . . . in the universe, we have the earth . . . the creation of the universe in science, there are planets . . . " (IET_1SB)

"For form two, the first topic is to seek the forgiveness of God. It contains types of dalil, being cruel to the environment, to ourselves and being disobedient to God." (IET_2SA)

"Subtopics of manners and morals in Islam. Examples are manners to teachers, manners to parents . . . manners to the environment as well." (IET_2FR)

"What I see is 'amar ma'ruf nahi mungkar' . . . It means we invite them to doing good and forbid from doing wrong. Among the good deeds we can demonstrate is by teaching to protect the environment." (IET_1SB)

Additionally, the topic in Islamic education that is indirectly related to environmental education was about the *rukshah* (concessions) in prayer concerning the tayammum (using the dust to purify themselves for prayer). The topic of *rukshah* in prayer is related to the need for a clean environment to worship Allah.

"It means the student may apply it during the tayammum, which is a concession in prayer using clean dust because there is no water available. For example, if we do not care for the environment, where do we find clean dust if the whole earth is tainted with dirt by our hands, and if there is no water, rivers, all the trees cannot grow." (IET_1SA)

Based on the comparative analysis of the views of the science teachers and the Islamic education teachers, it became apparent that the science subjects focused more on environmental concepts while the Islamic education subject was more focused toward infusing Islamic values related to environmental conservation. These values included goodwill; gratitude for the gift of the environment for the benefit

of humans; environmental responsibility; how the quality of the environment will influence Muslims in their worship through the use of natural resources, such as water and land, to purify themselves. Findings showed that the science subjects tended to infuse elements of education *about* the environment while the Islamic education subject focused more on education *in* the environment. However, education *for* the environment such as issue-based learning, action-oriented learning, problem-solving and action-based learning was still lacking in both the science and Islamic education subjects.

6. Approach for Integrating Tauhidic Elements in Environmental Education

Specifically, the findings displayed that two activities were carried out by the teachers for integrating tauhidic elements in environmental education in the topics taught formally, namely, fostering Islamic values related to environmental conservation and linking al-Quran verses with environmental elements.

6.1. Fostering Islamic Values Related to Environmental Education

Fostering of Islamic values occurred directly and indirectly during the teaching and learning of environmental education. Among the values emphasized in teaching and learning were the role as a caliph, value of cleanliness, gratefulness, appreciation of the environment as every creature of Allah is always reciting the *zikr* (remembrance of God) including the trees, and the wisdom behind the disasters that occur such as flash floods.

> *"We can also connect it back to God who created the universe, and this means that we have a part to prosper the earth . . . "* (ST-1SA)

> *"Islam loves cleanliness . . . for example, if the person does not practice cleanliness, then what will happen . . . there will be rubbish everywhere, the earth will be polluted, the rivers will be dirty . . . "* (ST_1SB)

> *"The value of gratefulness for what we already have now . . . usage of water, for example. Sometimes, there is disruption of water supply. So, it becomes a trouble for students living in the hostel. So, we have to appreciate what we have . . . do not waste."* (ST_2SB)

> *"We link to Islamic values. For like science subject, we express gratefulness to God that has created us perfectly, learn about human beings, the complexity of humans with all the systems, organs, working together."* (ST_2SB)

> *"In terms of food, we may relate it to Islam, for example in the aspect of being grateful . . . We teach them that food is the sustenance from God for us so that we can learn to be grateful."* (IET_2SB)

> *"The thing is indirectly the plants, animals are always saying zikr to God."* (ST_2SB)

> *"We sometimes mention . . . wanting to connect it to the values of Islam . . . when flood occurs. Among our students there are also those from Kelantan (one of the states in Malaysia which got terrible destruction due to flood in raining season). Previously, like the flood . . . we used to see many negative things about the floods. But we have to find the wisdom behind the calamities."* (ST_2SB)

In addition, the concept of *Ihsan* was highlighted by teachers to instill the Islamic values in environmental education. In Islam, *Ihsan* means compassion for others including animals and how to act with respect toward nature. The Islamic values of *Ihsan* are important in creating the awareness of environmental conservation and respect for each creature of the earth.

> *"The values must be practically practiced, only then can you see the effect. I feel in the topic of Ihsan . . . like being kind to animals. Like when I teach the students, I will bring them to the animals, so that they can see closely how starving animals live, how the animals are when they are sick. Only then will they see and realize dawns."* (IET_1SB)

The approach to nurture values related to environmental conservation was also carried out through advice by the Islamic education teachers by linking it to Japan, which is a well-known country that is good with regard to environmental management.

"More in the form of advice . . . here we sometimes teach them by talking with implied meaning, but at the same time educating them. People say let them gain insight through their learning." (IET_1SA)

"Another thing that I'll say is about taking care of the mosque. I will tell them that taking care of the mosque is not merely about maintaining the cleanliness inside the mosque but outside the mosque too. Let's make our mosque beautiful. I tell them let our mosque be beautiful like in Japan . . . that is environmental part too." (IET_1SB)

The fostering of environmental values was also carried out through exemplary behavior by the teachers who showed good examples of environmental conservation behaviors. Through such actions, students are expected to imitate their teachers' behavior in terms of environmental management.

"For me, have to start with the teachers first actually. Teachers have to model what must be done. The teachers themselves must do these things. But if the teachers themselves pay no attention to the garbage they see . . . teachers should not be like that . . . then Insha'Allah the students will follow . . . lead by example." (ST_1SA)

"These students will follow our actions. For example, they are sitting in a circle, the teachers come, sometimes it's the teachers who collect the rubbish, the teachers who sweep the floor." (IET_1SA)

6.2. Tadabbur al-Quran

The common practice applied by the teachers at both schools in integrating tauhidic elements for environmental education was the activity of *tadabbur* al-Quran. *Tadabbur* al-Quran is implemented by linking the verses of the al-Quran and the Hadith to the topics taught, particularly in the fields of science and environment. This approach is more efficient in the schools involved as the students also memorize the al-Quran and study the Hadith. Through this method, students can enhance their understanding of the interpretation of the al-Quran verses they read and memorized.

"For me, for each topic that I teach, I will look for any al-Quran verses that are related to that topic or we will ask the student to give the verses because they memorize the al-Quran. For instance, which verses do you think are related to the science concept? So, if they could not do so, we provide the verses." (ST_1SA)

"We share the al-Quran verses, share whatever values that we get from the verses and continue with our learning." (ST_2SA)

Among the science concepts in the al-Quran that were highlighted by the teachers are reproduction (formation of the fetus), the concept of humans as a caliph or vicegerent and the concept of skin receptors. In Islam, understanding the formation of the fetus provides teachings of the greatness of Allah in creating humans in such a perfect and detailed manner to carry out their roles as servants and vicegerents on earth. Humans are also asked to take heed and lessons of the creation of the fetus in the womb where Allah breathes the spirit into the fetus, grants the senses, intellect, *nafs*, and *qalb* to differentiate between good and bad deeds or actions to help humans in governing the environment. In Islam, humans are reminded through the verses in the al-Quran to equip themselves with knowledge to manage this world. This is why humans are bestowed with intellect by Allah SWT.

"As for me, I will relate it to the al-Quran verses, whatever is related to science. We teach a topic, for example, reproduction, which is in surah ar-Rahman about the formation of the fetus. So, we relate the topic and the surah by looking at the meaning and based on what science says about it. Thus, they will see the correlation between science and the al-Quran." (ST_1SB)

> "They not only memorize the al-Quran, they also need to understand the meaning behind their memorization. So, indirectly, the students understand that the meaning of caliph is a leader. The leader itself actually has a close relationship with God … and the environment." (IET_1SA)

> "For instance, when learning about skin, we also need to look for its dalil from the al Quran and also the Hadith that talks about the skin. What I remember the most is about the bees. The bees have two stomach. This is also stated in the al-Quran." (IET_1SB)

Additionally, the activity of *tadabbur* al-Quran by the students was performed through video screening during *tazkirah* activities as stated by the environmental coordinator teacher, EC 1. Environmental phenomenon such as the effects of global warming that are happening worldwide need to be taken heed of by the students and remembered through *tazkirah*. The students also related the similarities between the environmental phenomenon occurring to those mentioned in the al-Quran as well as the warnings from the Hadiths. This can remind students of their role as vicegerents who have been entrusted to manage the environment.

> "The usual screening that I have watched … that the students carried out is video sharing, sharing of al-Quran verses and what has happened to our earth … the word of Allah demands it and it's our responsibility to conserve the environment. So, during the tazkirah between maghrib and isyak prayers, sometimes there are video screenings of global warming and all that, so by relating to the al-Quran verses … they relate it to the environment. Thus, it seems that the element has been applied … There is always tazkirah, sharing of the Hadith, sharing of the al-Quran verses … and the relationship with the environment is included as well." (EC_1SB)

7. Effectiveness of the Activities of Integrating Tauhidic Elements in Environmental Education on the Students

Overall, the findings from the interviews with the teachers showed that the students already have good environmental knowledge. In addition, the level of environmental awareness and environmental interest among the students from the perspective of the teachers was at a moderate level and needs to be improved. However, the teachers felt that more emphasis should be given on improving students' practices in environmental conservation. In terms of the environmental education application, the science and Islamic education teachers should focus on education *for* environmental education by applying the activities that can change the students' behavior toward the environment. In order to achieve these goals, support from non-formal education components such as the school's environmental club is needed.

> "In terms of environmental knowledge, I feel that the students have exposure. Because on television, there are campaigns being carried out. Only maybe in terms of practice." (ST_1SA)

> "From what I see, some students have their own interest. So, there are some students who are really interested in the environment, whose ambition is indeed related to the environmental field." (ST_2SA)

> "So, to say the least, there must be much more effort for this environmental application." (ST_1SB)

> "In my view, the students overall from Form 1 to Form 5, their awareness should be enhanced." (EC_1SB)

> "They know, but in terms of environmental practices, we still need to educate them. We need to cultivate … the students already have the knowledge. The knowledge is already extensive, but how can we apply the practices … in terms of the process of educating them." (EC_1SB)

8. Discussion

This study investigates the application of tauhidic element integration in environmental education based on the teachers' perspective. Science and Islamic education teachers as well as a coordinator for

the Geography and Environment Club were selected as the study participants because these teachers are responsible for implementing the integration of tauhidic elements in environmental education through teaching practices in line with the schools' mission. Moreover, in Malaysia, environmental education is carried out across the curriculum; thus, there are officially no environmental education subject teachers in schools. Environmental education is widely applied in science subjects because the topics in these subjects are more relevant to the environment. However, environmental education is also applied in and supported by other related subjects and environmental clubs in schools.

In integrating tauhidic elements, Islamic education teachers play an important role as moral activators and help the students to become good citizens by playing a positive role as agents of social change in their local communities (Irham 2017; Tamuri 2015). This study revealed that the Islamic education teachers instilled moral values in environmental education among the students by showing good examples of behavior or conduct toward the environment through advice and support through Islamic programs, such as video shows, *tazkirah* and recitation of the al-Quran in various events at school. These approaches were also mentioned by Kamaruddin and Patak (2018) in their study where they found that Islamic education teachers practice five aspects in instilling students' discipline; namely, giving advice, habituation, exemplary role, reward, and punishment.

Integration of environmental education and science education is needed in producing competent citizens who can solve complex environmental issues (Wals et al. 2014). Consequently, the combination of Islamic education, science and environmental education would enable the integration of tauhidic elements for environmental education that focuses on combining moral development and skills in investigating environmental problems and solutions. The teachers in both schools played their respective roles in applying environmental education in their own unique ways. However, the role as a caliph is important, and to be appreciated and internalized by the students (Djainudin and Sirait 2016).

The integration of the elements of tauhid in environmental education is also parallel with the views of Albab (2017) that emphasized the cultivation and application of environmental practices among students, demonstration of exemplary behavior and good examples toward the environment as well as enculturation of feelings of love and care for the environment. There are three main sources of reference in tauhidic education; namely, the Quran, as-Sunnah and the characteristics of nature. The environment is the gift of Allah to His creatures as *ayatullah* or signs of the greatness of Allah SWT, as a book of knowledge that is always ready to be studied and as a gift from Allah SWT to His creatures to be benefited (Akhter et al. 2010; Djainudin and Sirait 2016; Ibrahim 2010).

The application of environmental education is widely obtained either through the topics contained in the curriculum, teaching and learning activities, or informal activities organized by outsiders or NGOs (non-government organizations). Based on the findings, teaching and learning environmental education emphasized on education *about* and *in* the environment instead of education *for* the environment, which focuses on behavioral changes. It was also found that only two approaches of teaching and learning were involved in the integration of *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge, namely the approach of integrating Islamic values related to environmental education (such as the value of *shukr* or gratitude for all of God's blessings, appreciation of the environment and practicing prudence) and activities linking al-Quran verses to relevant environmental topics. The Islamic values associated with environmental protection, as mentioned in the al-Quran, are important in producing Muslims who are ethical toward the environment (Fachruddin 2010; Yaacob et al. 2017).

There are activities that relate al-Quran verses or the Hadith to related topics to further strengthen the relationship between knowledge of *aqli* and *naqli* among students. Islam combines revelation and scientific facts as a way of determining the validity of knowledge through two major methods, which are the al-Quran and the Hadith (Tamuri 2015). According to Yusof et al. (2011), the Quran and the Hadith are the main incentives that influence Muslim scientific achievements and researchers. It has been estimated that there are 750 verses (from 6236 verses) that refer to various aspects of the environment, as well as the relationship between humans and the environment (Mănoiu et al. 2016). The method of linking relevant al-Quran verses to the environment or *tadabbur* is important in integrating tauhidic

elements in environmental education (Hamzah et al. 2017; Iksan et al. 2015). The process of taking the al-Quran as a reference involves identifying, listing, sorting, and grouping (Haddad 2006). Through the activity of *tadabbur* al-Quran, the greatness of God can be felt, feelings of gratitude can be evoked, and the warnings of Allah as contained in the al-Quran can be learned (Iksan et al. 2015). Nevertheless, it was found that the practice of *tadabbur* al-Quran requires cooperation between science teachers and Islamic education teachers based on their respective fields of expertise.

However, practices of environmental care among the students are still lacking. Previous researchers argued that responsible behavior toward environmental care is increasingly eroding due to the lack of appreciation of Islamic values in relation to environmental management based on the al-Quran and as-Sunnah (Rahman 2017; Ibrahim 2010; Rusdi 2010). To address environmental issues, focus should not only be on infrastructure improvements, technology in environmental management and the law, but also on enhancing environmental care behaviors through environmental education (Kamidin and Roslan 2014). This is supported by McKay et al. (2013), who stated that better results could be obtained if awareness of Islamic teachings and the value of humanity in environmental conservation are raised, compared to efforts of raising public awareness on environmental conservation issues. Overall, there is no doubt that religious or tauhidic elements have the potential to offer something different, but often complementary, to science-based environmental education (Parker 2017).

9. Conclusions

This study attempted to explore the practices in integrating tauhidic elements in environmental education among Islamic science boarding schools. The results of this investigation showed that although the integration of tauhidic elements for environmental education occurred through inculcation of values and seeking the meaning of the verses in the al-Quran or the Hadith, teaching and learning practices are still lacking and need to be nurtured. This integration of tauhidic elements in environmental education in schools is mainly supported by religious activities related to the environment, which have been implemented in Malaysia, such as Friday sermons, *tazkirah*, forums, and campaigns in mosques. However, the evidence from this study suggests that the students' environmental behavior needs to improve even if they have good environmental knowledge, awareness, and interest. Furthermore, students' faith and worldview guide their environmental actions that would subsequently bring about the desire to be involved in environmental protection (Aung 2016). Therefore, the integration of tauhidic elements in environmental education is an essential practice to change the worldview, ethics, spiritual and behavioral attitudes toward environmental conservation.

The investigation in this study was limited in its sampling because the participants involved were selected from two types of school, namely Ulul Albab Mara Junior Science College and federal religious schools. In addition, the views of teachers were selected from the science and Islamic education subjects only, as well as from one coordinator of the Geography and Environment Club, because the teachers of these two subjects and the coordinator of the Geography and Environment Club in these schools were seen as having more relevance in terms of the integration of tauhidic elements for environmental education compared to other subject teachers. Nevertheless, this preliminary study provided new understanding about the reality of the scenario in schools in relation to the schools' practices in integrating tauhidic elements in environmental education. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended that investigations are carried out in more schools representative of the four types of Islamic science boarding schools in Malaysia; namely, Imtiaz schools, Ulul Albab Mara Junior Science College, integrated boarding schools and federal religious schools. Further research should also investigate the practices in integrating tauhidic elements in schools from students' perspectives. This would provide valuable and diverse perspectives regarding the integration of tauhidic elements in environmental education. It is also recommended that different research methods such as interviews with teachers and observations of teachers' teaching in the classroom are carried out in the future to investigate the different angles in teaching practices when integrating tauhidic elements in environmental education. This study can serve as a base for future studies in developing

an integrated module of tauhidic elements and environmental education, for students and teachers, in fostering environmental literacy.

The findings of this study have important implications for future practices in terms of the requirement for science teachers to have competencies in integrating Islamic values and science in their teachings. Competencies in integrating Islamic values and science concepts are crucial as Bagdonas and Silva (2015) contended that most pre-service teachers highlighted the differences between science and religion, and pointed out that they do not feel prepared to conduct classroom discussions on this topic. Therefore, one of the solutions of this situation is to carry out collaborations between science teachers and Islamic education teachers to strengthen the integration of religious values in science teaching and learning. The findings of this research are also compatible for adoption in integrating science learning with other religions or different socio-cultures that focus on the development of environmental management.

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Religious Education in (Post-)Pandemic Times; Becoming a Resilient Professional in a Teacher Academy

Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer

Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, Tilburg University, 5037 AB Tilburg, The Netherlands; m.c.h.vandijk@tilburguniversity.edu

Abstract: The world seems a different place than it was before and now, more than ever, young people are faced with questions that cannot be avoided any longer: who am I? How and where can I find roots to endure the storms in my life? In what direction should I steer my compass? These questions are about resilience; the ability of individuals to cope with rapid societal change, both in their personal lives and in their professional career. Religious Education (RE) can help pupils and students to develop resilience by articulating these questions and pursuing them. The RE teacher's job is to simply be there with them, having considered these questions her- or himself. All teachers and educators have to start with their own reflection: who am I as an RE-teacher in this new, uncertain and rapidly transforming world? Research on how to start this reflective formation process in RE is essential to attracting the attention that RE deserves. In this article, examples of pilots and the research conducted on them in the author's Teacher Academy are presented. The main goal is to contribute to the formation of young people to make them resilient and fit for the -as yet unknown-future. They have to create this future and use their talents to effect the transformation that our world highly needs.

Keywords: religious education; moral compass; resilience; values

1. Introduction

The central research question in this article is: how can young people today become resilient? How can religious education contribute to the (re) discovery of the core values that can help young people become strong young adults who are ready for a professional career in uncertain and challenging times.

Today's world is such that pupils and students can no longer look to their teachers to provide solutions for the future. This is why they must be challenged to design their future themselves. The core values that guide moral decisions are the central starting point here. These values can be found above all in religion and philosophy, although young people are rarely aware of this. Religious education, especially, should be about forming the moral compass, so that young people learn to make their ethical choices based on these core values. This should be the central topic within RE today.

The article discusses two examples of how education that is provided at the author's Teacher Academy is working to form resilient people by bringing students and their teachers together in their development. The educational strategies as well as research conducted with these strategies is presented. These two different examples show precisely that there is a range of new educational practices to work together with pupils and students on this process of professional identity development.

The role of teachers is crucial in this regard, because teachers must, on the one hand, set an example of how a moral compass can be developed in all openness, whereas on the other they cannot predetermine the exact form this will eventually take.

2. (Post-)Pandemic World: Pausing to Reflect

A few months ago, nobody could have imagined the world we are living in now, in which we have to socially distance and stop traveling to work, college or across the world. My hope was that I would be able to write "post-pandemic" without parentheses, but unfortunately the end of the crisis is not yet in sight. For decades, the sky seemed the limit, or better, we took to the skies and flew wherever we wanted to go. Although debate was already underway on global issues such as climate change, the search for sustainability and the negative effects of the enormous growth in technology and digitization, no one can now ignore these issues any longer. In our world, which is on hold due to the Covid-19 virus, we have become aware of the vulnerability of our lives and of our world. We are forced to stop and realize that we must be more careful with our earth and the way we treat everything that lives on it. This is in fact a common theme in the Christian tradition, but one which seems to have disappeared in the more secularized West. However, as the virus has spread across the world and has become "our common enemy", this idea has now also regained currency in this part of the world. This is an opportunity to consider the connection we have with each other. We must become aware that we are a community of people (we are all God's creation, as Christians say), gathered from across the world and interconnected with each other.

We have taken a long time to realize this. The economy and knowledge were the main motives for our actions, often without any consideration of whether the road taken was the best way to grow and expand. We were not in the habit to pause and reflect on the choices we made, to take care of our neighbors, to realize what we are doing to the planet through our consumption and the uneven distribution of resources among peoples. Even the high numbers of refugees moving across the world did not open our eyes. It turns out that we needed a virus to stop us in our tracks and realize these things.

3. Young People's Challenges in Today's World

For young people, in particular, this is proving to be a difficult time. Growing up and going out into the world happens by socializing with others and confronting one's own ideas and opinions with others (Pratt 2006; van Dijk-Groeneboer 2017). These discussions, as well as the establishing of boundaries, help young people to realize what choices they need to make to become the person they truly want to be. However, now that meeting their peers is possible only in online settings, communication is poor and less natural than they would want. Moreover, meeting up is essential to experiencing the safe environment required to share their vulnerability, to open up about their deepest sorrows, dreams, ideals and fears (Roebben 2011). This is essential to growing up and it is not possible in these days when gathering together is prohibited and is even subject to fines.

Despite young people's familiarity with mobile devices, usually only the good times are shared on Instagram and other social media; when they feel insecure or weary, what they need is a friend to meet in person, a real shoulder to cry on or an arm around them. Having to cope with this loneliness is a problem that has become very apparent in these months. Evidence for this is found in the higher incidence of depression and loneliness among students (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2015). In addition, the high figures of burnout among young people must be mentioned caused by high expectations on them and the endless possibilities that they have (Jongburnout 2020). Having too many choices and not pausing to consider which one fits your talents best, is an important reason for these psychological problems. Young people have to learn to be flexible if they are to weather the storms in today's world; to bend with the various expectations and new situations that present themselves, while at the same time staying rooted, grounded, so as not to be blown over (Delle Fave 2014). They have to be trained to become resilient, as will be elaborated on in the next paragraph.

4. Becoming Resilient

Strongly resilient persons are better able to cope with the issues mentioned above (Brewer et al. 2019). The European Commission (2016) defines resilience as "the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, cope, adapt, and quickly recover from stresses and shocks". This article emphasizes the importance of making young people strong and resilient. The focus is on developing a new perspective and new actions in which society, the economy, and governance play an important role. However, being resilient starts with the individual who will be making decisions that affect our world. This article offers two examples of approaches that can support pupils and students in shaping their position in a society that is characterized by growth. The meritocracy that our societies aspire to is in fact vitiated by dividing lines of ethnicity and levels of training, causing social distances between groups to emerge. In the projects presented here, strategies are put into practice to make young people aware of their individual resilience as well as of their public engagement that not only strengthens their resilience but also addresses the other stated challenges of ethnic divisions.

This should, therefore, be an important focus when educating young people. How can young people become strong individuals? How can they be resilient in this time when everything is insecure? Consider the everyday issues in their lives: the degree program they want to take is taught online instead of at school or on campus. The vacation they planned is cancelled and tickets are reimbursed in the form of vouchers. They are fired from their side-job due to too little work. The courses they follow are exclusively online, so they stay in their own room instead of spending time with old friends and making new ones. The job they hope to get after their degree does not exist anymore because of changes in the wider society. They want to move out of their parental home but there are no affordable rooms. It is not simple to deal with all this, and in addition they have to grow up and become an adult, which is a tough process as it is.

More than ever, young people have to rely on their own talents. They have to find solutions that were never found before, they have to be creative and the world needs them for that. It is an important task that faces them, and they have to be strong to deal with it. According to religious educator Schröder (Schröder 2017) strong rootedness and changing perspectives is needed to be able to weather these storms (van Dijk-Groeneboer 2017). Being aware of their own talents and finding nourishment for their roots helps them to become strong resilient adults. If they are able to combine this resilience with knowledge and creativity, they can become strong resilient professionals (Barbara-i-Molinero et al. 2017).

Of course, resilience in itself will not stop any virus from spreading. What resilience can do is to make young people stronger, to develop the ability to stand up when they need to and to create solutions for future problems which their educators cannot foresee. Especially in our individualistic society, religion can be helpful to build this resilience. Religion helps people to cope with situations and to propose new solutions to issues in the world (Zondag and van Uden 2017). Even if religion today is seen as a personal and private affair, it can still help individuals to find their deeper roots and core values. An important dynamic of religious education is to encourage personal reflection and to challenge the student to reassess their essential values. When this happens, a sense of community re-emerges, despite the fact that people's initial motives to turn to these routes may have been individualistic (Bernts and Berghuijs 2016). In today's world, people of different cultural backgrounds interact intensively due to globalization and to the large numbers of refugees, each with their own original values originated in their own historical and cultural background. This being the case, it is interesting to study how and where values originate and develop, and whether they are subject to external influences as described. The challenges in today's globalized world requires people to be resilient and to live with integrity because how we make sense of the world and the values and ways of making meaning are challenged by external influences and the value systems of others (Seymour et al. 1993). Once our knowledge has thus been enhanced, educators and societal organizations could benefit from this by developing value learning strategies that are able to mediate in situations of cultural conflict. Moreover, it will help foster a truly general dialogue about values, including in a wider setting, for instance in the political

sense. This is crucial since previous generations have not been able to find effective solutions for the transformation that humanity needs to survive on this earth; the limits are already coming into view. The young generation has to come up with new creative solutions itself, becoming resilient in the societal changes and building on its own talents and inner set of core values. Young people's values are, therefore, the particular focus of this article. Religious education has to concentrate on facilitating them in becoming aware of these values and in developing new ideas that are aligned with this set of values, this moral compass.

5. Young People's Values

Religious Education is a subject that is contested, especially in non-religious schools, but also in religious schools with a highly secularized population. Despite this debate, even authors who oppose the compulsory status of RE in schools, like Hargreaves and White, acknowledge that the main purpose of RE is to further the moral development of pupils and to inculcate positive social values in the young (Hargreaves 1994; White 2004). Because of the nature of the subject, which uses strategies such as debating, "thinking through", reflecting and critical thinking, RE is the one subject in the school curriculum in which values are best discussed and sharpened. The fact that most values are embedded in traditions that are often rooted in religions is a further argument: the conveying of knowledge about religions and the practice of thinking through religion in RE mean that it is the perfect place to make young people aware of values and to help them form and adjust the moral compass that consists of these values.

To become resilient, young people must develop greater awareness of their talents and of the set of values upon which they base the decisions they make in their lives. Young people are faced with a plurality of values, due especially to individualization, detraditionalization and mediatization (Lindner 2017). Moreover, *knowledge* about values is a necessary precondition for being able to focus on teaching resilience by working with pupils' talents or by discussing values with each other in the classroom. However, the study of values that is required to gain this knowledge is beset by a number of problems.

However, the study of values to gain this knowledge is beset by a number of problems. An attempt to describe what values are shows that they are close to norms and desires. As Joas and Wiegandt (2008) have pointed out: "Values are different from norms because norms are restrictive, and values are attractive. [. . .] Values do not limit the scope of our actions, but rather expand it." (p. 4). Furthermore, "While desires merely consist of what is desired, values express our notions of what is for us desirable. [. . .] Our values cause us to appraise our desires." (p. 4) How can values defined in this way be understood? "We have to inquire what moves us to consider something as desirable, that is, what makes a certain idea of the good subjectively evident and emotionally captivating." (Joas and Wiegandt 2008, p. 5).

Young people and their values have been studied, for example from a theological perspective (Collins-Mayo et al. 2010), especially in Christian youth work (Jessen 2016), and in the educational field especially in relation to the subjects of "worldview" (Bakker and Montessori 2016) and "citizenship" (De Groot 2013). The largest values study ever carried out is the European Values Study (European Values Study 2020), which is based mainly on quantitative data. The EVS divides values into survival values (emphasis on economic and physical security) versus self-expression values (subjective well-being and quality of life on the one hand, and traditional values (religious beliefs and absolute moral standards) versus secular-rational values (freedom for individual choices and high tolerance of the opinions and beliefs of others) on the other. The EVS has nothing to say about how values are, or can be, influenced by education.

For twenty years, I have been conducting surveys every five years in the Netherlands to determine what values young people have (van Dijk-Groeneboer and Maas 2001, 2005; van Dijk-Groeneboer et al. 2008; van Dijk-Groeneboer and Brijan 2013; van Dijk-Groeneboer and Van Herpen-de Regt 2019). Similar results are also emerging from our research in Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic These

results show how different the values amongst young people are in the various countries in Europe, and point us to how to develop these values, combine and mediate them and how to shape the thought patterns and actions based on them in these different contexts.

Despite the rise of individualization in Western Europe, values are not invented individually. In honing their personal values, young people are influenced mainly by their parents and, from the age of about 12 onward, by their peers. Values can, therefore, be studied and learning trajectories can be developed and implemented especially in family guidance, youth ministry and other youth work and educational settings, the settings in which these young people spend most of their time. Further research on the topic will be a great help for educators.

There is much to gain from conducting research to obtain a good idea of what kind of young people actually fill the classrooms, lecture halls or youth groups and what they value in life. Based on these data, educational strategies can be developed, ministry programs can be updated, and parents can be helped to raise their children to become good and happy human beings. Still, there is already much work to do on these moral compasses, to help young people to find their own set of values and to rely on their talents to work with them. It is time to teach resilience based on these values.

6. RE: Teaching Resilience

It is difficult to teach resilience cognitively, like when teaching a language or mathematics. To acquire resilience, it is necessary to experience reciprocal learning in which subject and object are more intertwined, and which includes practicing and thinking as well as experiencing and reflecting (Lanser-van der Velde 2007). For instance, in Dewey's school of thought (Dewey [1931] 1998), the goal of learning can be defined as helping ourselves and others to escape from precarious situations, such as we are currently experiencing in our pandemic world, and to find and create an environment in which we can flourish. Dewey preferred not to speak of development, as this suggests a certain predetermined outcome; instead, he used the word growth. Although he himself had no interest in teaching about and "into" religion, he did advocate openness in the learning process. This open-endedness is a particularly important requirement when teaching resilience by forming a moral compass.

In our Catholic Teacher Academy, we educate RE teachers in a two-year master's program. Furthermore, we collaborate with the other Teacher Academies at our University as well as with Teacher Academies in other parts of the Netherlands who all educate teachers in subjects other than religion (note: we are the only Catholic RE Teacher Academy in the country). As religious educators, we have to focus on our pupils and students, to become student centric. We have to allow *them* to navigate successfully through the world, a dangerous world in our eyes. In our classrooms, they have to build and reshape their moral compass which they use to make ethical decisions. They will have to make our society more sustainable, to improve it and to come up with creative action to devise new solutions for problems that are as yet unforeseen, just as the virus was unforeseen until very recently.

Thus, we have to train our pupils and students to use their knowledge to achieve and secure social values, use scientific procedures to facilitate human relationships and direct technological developments toward positive social effects. We want them to try to ensure that the world resembles our ideal world (the "kingdom of God", Christians would say) as much as possible. We want them to contribute to a world in which the values that we consider worth aspiring to are made palpable through application of their knowledge of our rich traditions and to use their social skills. In addition to helping them acquire this knowledge and training them in transferable skills, we must focus specifically on the choices that have to be made on this basis. Professional decisions are based on professional beliefs and interrelated with a personal value orientation, a moral compass.

We want young people to make decisions based on values such as solidarity with the less fortunate, empathy for and openness toward people with dissenting views and responsible management of our vulnerable world that is now clearly adrift. This type of social community thinking is currently often relegated to the background, even by religious pupils and students. A sense of community must again be fostered, to create a more caring world that is open to people of other cultural and

religious backgrounds, people with different convictions and world views. Empathy with other people and awareness of the vulnerability of our earth are necessary if students are to develop this ethical decision making.

Martha Nussbaum's ideas (Nussbaum 2010) can help us here, because she underlines the importance of creativity and human imagination in education. She states that pupils and students must also be trained to regard people with different views, habits and customs as equals and not as "strangers". This is essential in today's world, and it is an important pillar in Religious Education. Therefore, I think that openness toward the other and a focus on one's own core values and ethical decision making should and can be features especially of RE classes. This ensures that students will not only learn to serve their own self-interest or wish to impress others; it will help them to live according to an inner morality and to strive to serve a higher purpose above and beyond their own self-interest (Brooks 2015).

The values one has forms their moral compass, which students use to orient their actions towards their goals. Furthermore, a person develops that compass by encounter (Selçuk 2018), by really listening to the stories of others. Other people's stories help people to view their own story. Looking through someone else's eyes can give a clear view on their own perspective, on the glasses through which they see lives, their profession and the context they work and live in. Pre-eminently Religious Education can help pupils to practice listening to others and help them become morally responsible and fully human (Shea 2018). And really listening means listening without immediately giving an answer, one's own opinion or judgment. Furthermore, an RE-teacher or religious educator has to listen and be open to what young people are really saying. It is important to not have one's own ideas ready, attempting to teach the pupils or students to think differently, but to stay with them in their process, and delve more deeply into what it is they are trying to say. A teacher really has to rely on their ability to find and further develop their own moral compass. This helps the young people become more resilient, to feel stronger and to become aware of their talents.

That is also why it helps to involve the great stories from the old religious traditions, because people have been making choices for as long as we know. People have always worked on developing their compass (Mitchell 2004). These stories do not have to be presented as the only right way to act, but they can provide new ideas for working with your moral compass. That is why these great stories must be told and why a lot can be learned from religious traditions but in the same open way in which you listen to pupils and students. "Listen" to these stories and make them valuable for your own life, the choices you are making. As a RE-teacher and religious educator, you can offer these stories without judging them, as either right or wrong, you should just let them be the stories they are. Everyone can then reflect on them freely and find the way towards shaping their core values in how they relate to these stories.

Resilience comes from listening to others as well as to one's own stories, to be able to change perspectives (Schröder 2017). However, of course, it also requires reflection, discussion and open dialogue in a safe space where it is possible to think about it out loud. That is the most important prerequisite for teaching resilience. First, the classroom has to be a safe space, then teacher and student can find the safe space in their own heart for it is there that the real strength lies. When the going gets tough, one has to be able to pause and find that safe space within oneself. Darling-Hammond points out that teachers are to be critical in crafting the learning environment for students (Darling-Hammond 2006). It is in a safe space that you will find the answers on how to deal with the chaos that exists outside, the first steps to act in this appealing outer world and the possibility to weigh the different options. If teachers are able to point their pupils or students in this direction, they can teach resilience.

Of course, knowledge too is needed to come up with new answers, to find new technological solutions, to develop new ideas to deal with climate change. Knowledge transfer is essential to become resilient. However, everyday there are moments in which people have to make decisions, however minor. Furthermore, in these moments, a person needs to know how to find one's set of values,

one's moral compass, to make the right decision. This moral compass helps a person to take the blow, to consider one's options, and respond to it. It is in this way people become more resilient.

Obviously, the question as to how these practices of action, reflection and experience must be acquired, needs thorough attention, and the model of the hermeneutic space described by Sharkey (2019) can become helpful here. Sources are to be added at the different stages in the reflective process, and experience through encounter is of central importance as is attending to the meaning of the existential fact that we are in the world (pp. 134–35).

7. Starting with Our Own Compass: Research in Building Resilient Professionals in RE

Any program to develop one's own moral compass in order to be a more resilient person in this (post-)pandemic world, must start with teachers who are willing to facilitate this learning process. The trainers and educators have to be able to facilitate their pupils and students in becoming co-creators in order to find answers the teachers do not know themselves yet. It is not possible to teach these new solutions; all participants have to learn *through* them together. The pupils and students become change agents when they are really respected as true partners in the learning environment.

Anna Stetsenko (2017) has developed tools for an Agentive Transformative Approach (ATA) to teaching and learning in science education that corresponds closely to this. She describes how to create transformation studios in which teachers and students work together to transform their ideas and practices of teaching and learning. These studios are places where activists are trained to ensure ontologically and epistemologically crucial processes (p. 37). Each learner and each teacher then contribute to science authentically and through activism, thus participating in the human endeavor in the context of the world and of everyday realities. The participants add to existing knowledge through creative practices such as critiquing, questioning, probing and innovating. They observe how knowledge is grounded in the past collaborative processes of humanity and the normative and ethical implications that these contain. Furthermore, they explore how to ground knowledge in present and future community practices, in line with aspirations and hopes. Finally, they trace the historical roots of knowledge and transform this knowledge into action that is consistent with their aspirations and hopes. When a learning environment as described here is created and people become real change agents as activists, their development helps the world undergo transformative processes. Stetsenko also states, in line with my reasoning here: "The answers to these challenges [in today's world, MvD] have to be figured out by each individual learner qua actor of social communal practices and agent of the world- and history-in-the-making" (p. 44) This section is a sketch of an example from science classes where pupils become change agents. The following section will present two examples of this kind of teacher–trainer education that I work with in Religious Education classes. We can learn from these two examples and apply the practices in RE classes. Moreover, in RE we should focus transparently on the values that underlie the practice of critiquing, questioning, probing and innovating. This enhances the learning and reflective capabilities of the participants and adds to their resilience.

Firstly, at teachers' academies such as ours, an essential aspect for any trainee teacher is that they should do what they tell others to do: they should practice what they preach. To this end we have developed inspirational days that are held at the start of our Masters' program, in which teachers from our School and students who are training to become teachers, together form a professional learning community. This is done using our colleagues' expertise and our students' input. In this way, we jointly develop new teaching methods for secondary education. These new methods are used by internship students in real school classes, and then faculty members research their effectiveness. A first pilot study of these new, self-designed forms of work was carried out in 2016 (Kienstra et al. 2018). In this study the focus was on religious thinking through (Baumfield 2002) by using activating exercises and measuring the effectiveness of the teacher behaviour gearing active learning. Several new educational themes were introduced in our team of students and teachers and discussed in our own encounters and narrative dialogues. New educational assignments were then developed to introduce this method

to the classroom at secondary schools, and they were tested in six lessons. The research consisted of student questionnaires, teacher logs and classroom teaching materials.

We adopted the conceptual framework of a religious education lesson in which the relationship between the teacher's behavior and the students' practice of "thinking through" religion played a central role. This relationship was influenced by the teacher's lesson design. Teaching scaffolds are important in guiding students through the learning process. The focus in this study was therefore on the role of the teacher. In a person-oriented teaching style, thinking through is an attempt to create an individual, reasonably justified worldview (van der Leeuw and Mostert 1991). 83 students participated in six lessons that were examined. A questionnaire was used in which students were able to score the teacher's activities include scaffolds used such as feedback, hints, instruction, explanation, modeling and questioning (Kienstra et al. 2018, p. 208). Correspondence analysis was used to analyze the data (p. 210).

New scaffolds were found that direct attention towards higher-thinking skills like listening, giving space and showing understanding. These scaffolds made the pupils realize the new way in which this lesson became thinking through education. In this study we focused on how students can be stimulated to think through religious stories and make a connection with their own values and truth, with their own moral compass. It became clear that higher-thinking skills were evident among students during the newly developed and implemented exercises and higher-order scaffolds were used by the teacher thus allowing students to work on their moral decision-making skills. This is how we develop evidence-based lessons (van Dijk-Groeneboer et al. 2017) which help pupils create their moral compass. The lessons make pupils aware of their inner set of values and gives them space to reflect on their judgments in exercises, and in life.

Secondly, another example is presented called the "learning workshops" in a secondary school teacher training program (Kools et al. forthcoming). Although the main focus is not on RE teachers and classes, the underlying line of reasoning as well as the explicit reflective actions add to build a moral compass and makes the example useful here. Learning workshops are learning environments in which students from different teacher training courses learn together with secondary education teachers. A learning workshop consists of teachers from different schools and students who are doing an internship at these schools. Four principles are used in the working method of the learning workshops: (1) focus on the student's learning; (2) work from your own learning need; (3) research and develop; (4) work and learn together. The learning workshops pursue three objectives: (a) training critical (future) teachers who have an eye for the students' learning; (b) integrating the training of students into the professionalization of experienced teachers; (c) contributing to school development. Exchange and reflection are essential in this form of inquiry-based learning (Lomos 2012): participants look for and study sources, test their own insights against those of others and compare the results of new working methods with predefined (learning) goals.

Usually, informal learning activities are stimulated by the principles of learning workshops. The interaction between participants in this professional learning community with different levels of experience is innovative: students and both beginning and experienced teachers all participate. In previous research, both experienced and junior teachers reported similar learning activities when they engaged in interactive learning, such as discussing; exchanging knowledge, experiences and information; giving and receiving advice and help; observing; reflecting; imitating and experimenting. This interaction appears to promote the learning of both the more and the less experienced participants (Geeraerts et al. 2018), and it stimulates regarding colleagues as an important resource for learning. This collaborative learning by teachers and students together in a learning community appears to be fruitful (Kools et al. forthcoming). As a result, the student is taught to become fully engaged in reflecting and learning because the teacher in the same group is similarly engaged in reflecting and learning.

Since 2016, we have developed and held several learning workshops every year (19 different workshops as of 2020). A learning workshop in our context consists of teachers from at least three

different secondary schools and a maximum of six students who are doing an internship at these schools. The majority of the participating students come from university teacher training programs (educational masters). These students have already completed a university degree in an academic discipline (for example theology, history or science) and are now obtaining their first-degree qualification in an educational master's degree. For them, the learning workshop, in combination with their internship, is an intensive way to become acquainted with all aspects of teaching. In the research into learning in these workshops, the focus was mainly on the conditions in which this kind of learning can take place as effectively as possible. Here, too, learning is student centric. Paradoxically, focusing on the student is the greatest challenge for the teachers, because they have to accept that the learning objective or the possible learning outcome is not determined by them but by the student. Working in a joint professional learning community means that the participants have a safe space in which to reflect. Thus, all participants play an equal role in the learning process and higher-order learning is born. Researchers have established that the added value of the workshops lies in joint learning, having time to experiment in their own educational practice and reflecting critically on this together. The mix of participants from different subjects, schools and backgrounds (students as well as teachers) provides interesting results. Through the use of learning workshops, teacher training courses and schools can ensure together that training and professionalization are interwoven to create a broad continuous line of professional development towards the life-long learning attitude that is needed.

8. Becoming a Resilient Professional: Conclusions and Discussion

In this article, I have argued that RE-teachers and religious educators are the most important factor in this religious education program to train and form resilient professionals at our schools and academies. Pupils and students today can no longer look to their teachers to provide solutions for the future. RE teachers are no experts on moral compasses, nor are they particularly resilient or able to teach pupils and students by example. They are important because they themselves are seeking this resilience and they are themselves adrift in our uncharted post-pandemic world. The teachers themselves can learn the most in this entire process. Pupils and students must be challenged to design their future themselves.

Examples presented here such as cocreating in inspirational sessions, learning together in learning workshops and making agentive-transformative approaches in transformation studios can help teachers and educators to facilitate this co creation. The starting point is for RE-teachers and educators to be aware of their own core values and the normative and ethical consequences of their moral compass.

In order to turn students and pupils into co-creators, RE-teachers and educators have to open up and give the floor to their pupils and students if the latter are to become aware of their moral compass. The adult RE-teachers and educators are aware that the way we were used to living in our world is no longer possible, but they also know that they do not have the answers to make the difference by themselves. We need to fully facilitate the young people to be creative, to collaborate and to develop out-of-the-box ideas. This starts with the talents every individual has, and the values that are deeply true to a person. It starts with that moral compass. If we, as teachers and educators, develop our own compass consciously and openly, pupils and students can in turn do the same.

We can learn about our own compass and about the choices to be made by listening to the stories of others, in the here and now as well as in the past. We are now at a point in time where we can consciously do that. All the goals we have set in society have so far revolved around gaining knowledge and the greatest wealth. The Covid-19 virus has shown us that none of this works anymore in our world, if it ever did. We have come to realize that money and knowledge alone cannot help this world. We have to use this knowledge to distribute the resources in our world equally among all people, and to realize that we are living together on this planet and have to care for it and for each other. It is the only way to survive, and it is something that everyone knows deep in their heart.

Therefore, it is crucial in today's world that we create the space in our RE-classrooms to develop this moral compass, to find out what truly is the good life and to orient ourselves to this. We are

aware that human beings are making moral choices, based on what they find in their heart, led by the spirit. This should be valued and taught at our schools and universities, so young people can stand up for it in the world and thus effect change. Furthermore, today's world is more than ready for this transformation. The young people who are growing up now are capable of knowing how to connect to that spirit, of making those choices, of sailing to this course and focusing on the light.

We need our pupils and students to acquire a moral compass to improve our world. Becoming aware of one's own core values and learning to make decisions based on this moral compass, can and needs to be practiced in RE classes. In these classes, they can learn to articulate their core values, their religious values, their world view, in a safe space. In the classroom, pupils and students develop their personal view on life, whether it is to be secular or religious, and they train their ethical decision-making using creativity and similar twenty-first-century skills, such as digital literacy and teamwork. In doing so, they will become strong, resilient, responsible, professional emerging adults and new solutions and actions will flow from their hands and minds.

It is difficult to chart this precise process of forming a personal moral compass, as has been mentioned above. Participants must become aware of their own set of values, by communicating about these with peers and with the teacher (I call this "the micro level", see van Dijk-Groeneboer 2020). They then have to realize that their set of values might be different from that of others, and they must take a critical look at these values, explore possible alternatives and share experiences by realizing that the actions they take are based on their talents and internalized values (this is "the meso level"). Finally, they also have to relate to society and to the surrounding context (I call this "the macro level"). Together with their family, friends and peer groups, young people learn to discover the benefits of value sets that allow the moral compass to serve a greater good. This entire process must take place without instructing the students on how to build their compass. RE teachers and religious educators have to avoid telling pupils and students how to think and feel, and yet they should encourage them to become aware of and able to communicate about highly abstract matters. Giving the other person space, listening and showing understanding are higher cognitive skills for the students, but they also demand a great deal from the teacher. Teachers have to know their values themselves, also in relation to other people and their values, and have to be able to talk about this. Moreover, they themselves have to be willing to open up to their students, something which makes them vulnerable. It all starts with ensuring that the classroom is a safe space.

The moral compass that people develop will be reshaped continuously throughout their lives, as encounters with others always clarify and further refine people's own values. Furthermore, it allows people to acquire better insights with which they can improve their own set of values. RE classes provide a great opportunity to invite young people to develop this compass and reflect on it, and to teach them tools to keep thinking about this compass throughout their lives. It will make them stronger and happier, and the world as a whole will benefit. Pupils should learn to embark upon a life-long learning process and be encouraged to keep it up to date.

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Article

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy for the Religious and Theological Higher Education Classroom

Darryl W. Stephens

Lancaster Theological Seminary, 555 West James Street, Lancaster, PA 17603, USA;
dstephens@lancasterseminary.edu or dws@darrylwstephens.com

Abstract: This article promotes a wider understanding of trauma-informed pedagogy for the higher education classroom, whether in-person or virtual, focusing on undergraduate and graduate teaching in religious studies and theological education. Trauma is not confined to individual experiences of single horrifying events—trauma can be collective (community-wide, e.g., COVID-19), epigenetic (inherited or intergenerational), social-cultural (e.g., racism), or vicarious. Drawing on religious education literature and recent insights from psychology, neuroscience, and public health studies, this article provides a shared basis for further development of trauma-informed pedagogy by religious and theological educators. A principle feature of this article is bibliographic, portraying the state of scholarship at the intersection of religious education and trauma and pointing to resources necessary for further development. It offers a brief survey of extant literature, presents a basic definition and description of trauma, introduces the features of a trauma-informed community approach, and discusses the core values guiding trauma-informed pedagogy. The article also explores religious aspects of trauma and discusses care for instructors, who deal with their own traumatic pasts as well as the secondary effects of encountering, teaching, and supporting traumatized individuals in the religious education classroom. This article concludes with a call for further research.

1. Introduction

"What's wrong with you?" When one of my students is habitually distracted, inattentive, or disruptive, this question might surface in my mind. If vocalized, this response to undesired behavior in my classroom, at best, might suppress outward disruption so that class can continue as "normal." Yet, it could perpetuate a cycle of shame and blame, exacerbating the underlying issue and contributing to an ongoing public health crisis. Over the past thirty years, our societal understanding of trauma has opened up a different way to address these presenting issues. Instead of confrontation, I focus on care. Now, I know to ask instead, "What has happened to you?" (Salasin 2011, p. 18).

This shift from confrontation to care is the crux of a new paradigm in public services, a trauma-informed approach. As educators, we are part of a community of service providers with the power to contribute to or detract from this circle of care. Furthermore, our understanding of trauma (or lack thereof) significantly impacts our pedagogical effectiveness and ability to nurture the best learning in our students. We enter the classroom uninformed about trauma at our own peril—and to our students' detriment.

The importance of bringing a trauma-informed approach to undergraduate and graduate teaching in religious studies and theological education cannot be overestimated. This article promotes a wider understanding of trauma-informed pedagogy for the higher education classroom, whether

in-person or virtual. Drawing on religious education literature and recent insights from psychology, neuroscience, and public health studies, this article provides a shared basis for further development of trauma-informed pedagogy by religious and theological educators. A principle feature of this article is bibliographic, portraying the state of scholarship at the intersection of religious education and trauma and pointing to resources necessary for further development. It offers a brief survey of extant literature, presents a basic definition and description of trauma, introduces the features of a trauma-informed community approach, and discusses the core values guiding trauma-informed pedagogy. The article explores religious aspects of trauma and concludes with a discussion of care for instructors, who deal with their own traumatic pasts as well as the secondary effects of encountering, teaching, and supporting traumatized individuals in the religious education classroom.

2. New Recognition of an Existing Paradigm

Trauma-informed practices have become a community standard among many social service providers, and there are many resources and training materials available for early childhood, primary, and secondary education professionals. Higher education classroom pedagogy has lagged behind. As recently as 2013, trauma-informed pedagogy was still being "proposed" as essential to higher education classrooms (Carello and Butler 2014). This "risky teaching" practice, as described by Neil Harrison and colleagues, is no longer optional; the question is how to engage it effectively (Harrison et al. 2020).

Since the worldwide social and economic disruption of COVID-19 and, subsequently, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in May 2020, the topic of trauma and pedagogy has risen in priority for many instructors in higher education. While higher education resources had previously been available (e.g., Carello 2020; Davidson 2017; Trauma Informed Oregon 2016), many professors scrambled to understand the paradigm of trauma-informed practices. A blog post by Cathy Davidson warning, "online learning this Fall will be wasted if we do not begin from the premise that our students are learning from a place of dislocation, anxiety, and trauma," quickly circulated among professors in higher education (Davidson 2020). Webinars and online resources began to multiply (Center for Faculty Development and Excellence, Emory University 2020). Among these resources, the literature on trauma-informed pedagogy from a religious education perspective is relatively recent in development.

Over the past 25 years, the concept of trauma has made its way into the discourses of various disciplines of religious instruction, particularly pastoral care, systematic theology, biblical studies, and practical theology. Select illustrations establish the growing influence of the paradigm of trauma in multiple disciplines of theological study. Scholars addressing sexual violence took an early lead (Cooper-White 1995; West 1999). The Alban Institute published a book by Jill Hudson for ministerial leaders dealing with congregational trauma (Hudson 1998). Attention to trauma soon became widespread within the field of pastoral care, for example, Cooper-White (2000, 2012) (Doehring 2015; Hunsinger 2015; McClintock 2019; Sullender 2018; Thomas 2020). The imaginatively constructive work of Rambo (2010) has been especially influential in several theological disciplines, particularly biblical studies, (e.g., Frechette and Boase 2017; Groenewald 2018). The literature on trauma-informed readings of the Bible is now extensive. Other theological treatments of trauma include the work of Beste (2007), Jones (2009), Baldwin (2018), and Soto Albrecht and Stephens (2020). In the field of practical theology, works include studies in womanist discourse (Wallace 2010), lived religion (Ganzevoort and Sremac 2018), as well as disaster relief response (Brenner et al. 2010; Hudson 1998; Koenig 2006; Warner et al. 2019) (Roberts and Ashley Sr [2008] 2017).

However, subject matter expertise does not necessarily equate to pedagogical practice. Janice Carello, and Lisa Butler warned, "teaching trauma is not the same as trauma-informed teaching" (Carello and Butler 2014). What had been seen as a "useful lens for biblical interpretation" (Frechette and Boase 2017), a contributor to prophetic studies (Groenewald 2018), a way of understanding liturgical practices (Grundy 2006), and a shaper of theological discourse (Rambo 2019) became a tool

with much more immediate application for classroom instructors during the multiple, worldwide crises of 2020. Building on its 2018 blog series, "Teaching and Traumatic Events," (e.g., Lewis 2018; McGarrah Sharp 2018), the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Religion and Theology featured another timely series of blog posts in 2020, "Teaching and Learning During Crisis," some of which featured trauma-informed teaching practices (Lee 2020; Oredein 2020; Rideau 2020; Silva-McCormick 2020). The publication *Inside Higher Ed* ran a blog post with twelve principles for "crisis-informed pedagogy" (Mintz 2020). Resources on teaching Holocaust studies through the lens of trauma (Gubkin 2015; Roth et al. 2001) as well as articles addressing trauma and pedagogy in relation to peace, justice, and conflict studies (Stoltzfus 2014), moral injury (Antal and Winings 2015), sexual trauma (Crumpton 2017; Procario-Foley 2020), and legacies of abuse by noted scholars and public figures Guth (2018, 2020) took on new, broader relevance for instructors in religious and theological studies. An edited volume by Stephens and Ott (2020) combined embodied learning (Lelwica 2020), perspective transformation (Ott 2020), and trauma-sensitive pedagogy (Crumpton 2020) to undergird a trauma-informed approach to many aspects of teaching theology and religion in higher education, including transnational feminist pedagogy (Pae 2020) and digital pedagogy (Doehring and Arjona 2020).

The concept of trauma is now recognized as a tool to apply not only within one's academic discipline but also to one's everyday, classroom pedagogy—and not just reserved for class sessions discussing trauma or traumatic events. Arguing that "this topic should be more than a niche area of interest, becoming a regular part of the reflective lenses of all religious educations scholars and practitioners," Callid Keefe-Perry and Zachary Moon proposed a trauma-informed approach to religious education that is not nominally "safe" but courageously risk-taking (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, pp. 30–31). They noted an "implicit engagement with trauma already present in existing literature" in religious education and built upon it (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, p. 35). While they focused on adult education within congregational contexts, their insights are germane to the higher education classroom. Drawing on their insights and the best of existing resources, this article seeks to promote this kind of risk-taking by providing a conceptual basis for trauma-informed pedagogy in religious instruction, based on recent insights from psychology, neuroscience, and public health studies.

3. Trauma

Simply put, psychological trauma is the result of an experience that is too much to handle. Judith Herman, a pioneering researcher in the modern understanding of trauma, stated that "traumatic events . . . overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life" (Herman [1992] 2015, p. 33). Trauma engages psychic, physiological, and neurological survival mechanisms when a person feels disempowered to respond to a grave threat. Trauma involves a loss of agency and a profound sense of powerlessness. Yet, a trauma victim is also a survivor,[1] coping with overwhelming danger in ways too deep to fathom. The result is often some variant of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The effects touch the core of being and reside deep in the body.

A central feature of trauma is that it disrupts one's personal narrative, interfering with one's sense of self and experience of the world. Traumatic memories interrupt the present in ways unbounded by chronology. A traumatic memory can be neither coherently articulated nor forgotten. It is an unspeakable response to horror, a response that refuses to be integrated into the past even as it haunts the present[2]. Besser van der Kolk, another pioneering researcher in the field, described it this way: "trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that

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[1] Foregrounding the language of "survivor" over "victim" is an intentional aspect of a trauma-informed response. See glossary of terms in (SAMHSA 2014b, pp. xvi–xix).

[2] Herman called this "the dialectic of trauma": being "caught between the extremes of amnesia or of reliving the trauma" (Herman [1992] 2015, p. 47). Shelly Rambo explored the narrative disruption of trauma as a site for theological exploration and meaning (Rambo 2010).

experience on mind, brain, and body" (van der Kolk 2014, p. 21). A traumatized person relives their terror again and again, triggered involuntarily by sensory reminders.

Because trauma overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms, the experience is fragmented rather than integrated into a person's experience. One result is popularly known as a "flashback," for example, when a war veteran with PTSD responds viscerally to the sound of a car backfiring, as if the noise indicated a mortal danger. For a person with PTSD, the trigger brings the past trauma into the present moment, and they relive the original experience, engaging in survival response to the stimulus. Traumatic memories can be triggered by emotions, sights, smells, noises, and many other somatic reminders of the original traumatic experience. The work of recovery involves practices of mind and body designed to empower a person to integrate their traumatic memories into their sense of self, reducing the past's hold on their present reality.

In 2014, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provided the following definition of individual trauma to serve as a common reference point among various sectors of public service provision:

> Individual trauma results from an event, series of **events**, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse **effects** on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. [original emphasis] (SAMHSA 2014a, p. 7)

This definition highlights what SAMHSA referred to as "the three E's of trauma": events, experiences, and effects (SAMHSA 2014a, p. 8).

An event can be traumatic in a single occurrence or over a series of incidents. Traumatic life events include military combat, natural disaster, life-threatening accident, sexual assault, abandonment, death of a loved one, and many other psychologically overwhelming situations. Trauma can also result from prolonged exposure to threat, including domestic violence, bullying, poverty, abuse, and racism (Davidson 2017, p. 4). Encountering negative biases through microaggressions based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identity markers can also be experienced as traumatic (Nadal 2018; see also Wallace 2010, p. 49). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that trauma is not the event but rather the wound resulting from the event (Baldwin 2018, p. 25). Thus, trauma can result from a variety of events, depending on how the event is experienced by the individual within their community.

The experience of trauma is personal, resting on a combination of factors. Not every adverse experience is traumatic; yet, the same event might be experienced as traumatic by one person and not by another. Researchers use the term "potentially traumatic event (PTE)," since the experience of the event (as traumatizing or not) will vary from person to person (Galatzer-Levy et al. 2012). Personality, social support network, developmental health, previous experiences, and other complex factors shape whether any particular event is experienced as traumatic. These factors contribute to a person's degree of resilience, defined as "the capacity to bounce back from adversity." (van der Kolk 2014). A landmark study in the late 1990s examined the relationship between "childhood abuse and neglect and household challenges and later-life health and well-being" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020). The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study clearly showed that "adverse childhood experiences are common and they have strong long-term associations with adult health risk behaviors, health status, and diseases" (Felitti et al. 1998). More to the present point, "early exposure to ACEs is associated with traumatic stress reactions and subsequent exposure to trauma in adult years" (SAMHSA 2014b, p. 47). Thus, the experience of trauma varies by person and is shaped by previous social, psychological, developmental, and cultural factors.

SAMHSA's definition includes single horrifying events as well as a series of events or set of circumstances experience by an individual as traumatic. Religious educators Keefe-Perry and Moon described these aspects of trauma as temporal and structural:

> Trauma is an experience that is not readily assimilated or accommodated into a sense of normalcy, overwhelming a person's beliefs, values, behaviors, and/or meaningful

relationships. Traumatic experiences have features that are both temporal (occurring in a certain moment of a traumatic event) and structural (occurring as a result of ongoing systemic social and economic inequalities). Trauma leaves a person grasping for new, functional coping strategies meant to facilitate survival, including ways in which to re-develop meaningful relationships. (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, p. 31)

This definition also emphasizes the communal and relational impact of trauma. Trauma is a complex and multifaceted concept—it can be collective (community-wide) (Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth 2019), epigenetic (inherited or intergenerational) (Yehuda and Lehrner 2018), social-cultural (e.g., racism), or vicarious. Regardless of the type of trauma, its effects on persons and relationships are real and noticeable.

In classroom teaching, what is most evident are the effects of trauma. A. Hoch and colleagues presented this list of effects observable in postsecondary learners:

- Difficulty focusing, attending, retaining, and recalling
- Tendency to miss a lot of classes
- Challenges with emotional regulation
- Fear of taking risks
- Anxiety about deadlines, exams, group work, or public speaking
- Anger, helplessness, or dissociation when stressed
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Involvement in unhealthy relationships (Davidson 2017)

Some of these effects were evident in my classroom during the spring 2020 semester, in the first months of societal response to COVID-19. Many of my students suffered from distraction, inability to concentrate, and short attention spans. They exhibited the effects of trauma (though most of them were unaware of this connection). Furthermore, students of color seemed to be the most affected (Oredein 2020). The long-term trauma of racism compounds the effects of ACEs and other potentially traumatic events, contributing, for example, to the well-documented disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and Latinx communities in the U.S. (SAMHSA 2020).[3] Furthermore, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, sparked by the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, compounded trauma upon trauma for many students, their families, and communities. In these circumstances, how can we, as instructors in higher education, contribute to the health and success of our students?

4. Trauma-Informed Approach

A trauma-informed approach signals a recent culture-shift in public services, of which education is one part (Wilson et al. 2013). It is a community-wide effort involving social work, public health, policing, law, education, ministry, and other sectors of public service. While some sectors provide trauma-specific services or interventions, many do not. Thus, it is not the responsibility of a classroom instructor to provide mental health services but rather to partner with mental health and other service providers by becoming part of a trauma-informed community (SAMHSA 2017). Becoming a trauma-informed institution is a campus-wide effort, involving student services, academic affairs, administration, athletics, and all areas of the student experience. "SAMHSA defines any setting as 'trauma-informed' if the people there realize how widespread trauma is, recognize signs and symptoms, respond by integrating knowledge into practice, and resist doing further harm" (SAMHSA 2017; see also SAMHSA 2014a, p. 9). This four-fold description (realize, recognize, respond, and resist) provides guidance for classroom instructors to contribute to a community of trauma-informed care.

Realizing the widespread impact of trauma is essential. For example, "By the time they reach college, 66 to 85 percent of youth report lifetime traumatic event exposure, with many reporting

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3   For an example analysis of a specific geographic area, see (Nowlin et al. 2020).

multiple exposures" (Davidson 2017, p. 5). This is one of many statistics aggregated by Shannon Davidson of Education Northwest on the prevalence of trauma. The ACEs study revealed that adverse childhood experiences are disturbingly prevalent in U.S. society.[4] The point is, trauma is not an unusual experience, and many people bear the effects of trauma in their everyday lives. Furthermore, students bring "their whole-messy selves" to the classroom, including past experiences of trauma (Lelwica 2020). Thus, a trauma-informed approach does not view the student exhibiting the effects of trauma as the exception. Rather, "trauma-informed care is initiated by [the] assumption that every person seeking services is a trauma survivor" (Salasin 2011, p. 18). A trauma-informed approach to pedagogy is for the benefit of every student.

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma is essential, as is understanding the causes. Common external indications of trauma, listed above, can often be observed in students by classroom teachers. It is important to understand that these behaviors are adaptive. Trauma overwhelms a person's normal stress-response and elicits a survival-based alarm system. The effects of trauma include adaptive behaviors essential to survival, including fight, flight, or freeze responses. However, when traumatic memories are triggered (often with no conscious awareness by the survivor), the body responds as if the original threat were still present. The very behaviors that ensured survival in the first instance become ineffective and inappropriate when triggered at other times and places. The response is individualized: "resilience and recovery look different for each individual. Thus, what educators often identify as maladaptive behaviors are really misapplied survival skills" (Davidson 2017). The classroom teacher, recognizing the signs of prior trauma in students, can then learn to respond in appropriate and helpful ways.

Responding as a trauma-informed organization involves more than strategies for immediate intervention. A trauma-informed institution "responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices" (SAMHSA 2014a, p. 9). Thus, a set of classroom pedagogical techniques is but one part of an overall, organizational response, the purpose of which is to "promote a culture based on beliefs about resilience, recovery, and healing from trauma" (SAMHSA 2014a, p. 10). In higher education, it is just as important for administrative assistants, administrators, housing directors, and athletic coaches to become trauma-informed as it is for classroom instructors. For example, the Association of Title IX Administrators identified "failing to understand and use trauma-informed investigations and questioning" as the first of "The Seven Deadly Sins of Title IX Investigations" (Henry et al. 2016).[5] For classroom teachers, this means we are partners with all of the other offices on campus contributing to any aspect of the student experience in our institution in responding to the effects of trauma.

Resisting doing further harm is the fourth aspect of a trauma-informed approach. Failing to realize, recognize, and respond appropriately to a survivor of trauma can do harm. Re-victimization can easily occur when I fail to shift from an attitude of blame, "What's wrong with you?" to a stance of care, "What has happened to you?" This shift in perspective, to a trauma-informed approach, allows the classroom instructor to become a partner in recovery and resilience for survivors of trauma.

5. Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

A trauma-informed approach requires not only knowledge of trauma but also commitment and action. "The foundation for effective trauma-informed classroom practice is the educator's grasp of how trauma impacts students' behavior, development, relationships, and survival strategies" (Davidson 2017, p. 17). However, subject matter knowledge is not the essence of trauma-informed pedagogy.

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4   SAMHSA cited the ACEs report as one of two studies significantly influencing the development of the trauma-informed care model (SAMHSA 2014b, p. 8), the other being (SAMHSA 2007).
5   According to this 2016 whitepaper, Title IX investigations should include four trauma-informed components: understanding the impact of trauma, promoting safety and support, proactively avoiding retraumatization, and promoting choice and empowerment of the trauma survivor (Henry et al. 2016).

teaching about trauma is not the same thing as using trauma-informed pedagogy and educators should aim to reduce the risk of retraumatization (triggering or reactivating trauma-related symptoms originating from earlier life events) and secondary traumatization (experiencing trauma-related symptoms from learning others' stories) when exposing students to potentially sensitive material. (Davidson 2017, p. 17)

I would hasten to add that trauma-informed teaching is not reserved for "potentially sensitive material" but rather recognizes that many of our students arrive in the classroom already dealing with past traumatic experiences (Carello and Butler 2014, p. 164). A trauma-informed pedagogy is guided by five core values: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment (Fallot and Harris 2009, p. 3). Each of these values can guide classroom pedagogy and practices, allowing classroom instructors to contribute to a community of trauma-informed care.

Safety is a high priority—not only physical but also psychological. A person dealing with the effects of trauma must feel safe in order to de-escalate their physiological survival-response, allowing them to regain some sense of control in the present. While the need for safety pertains to all aspects of a survivor's life, in the classroom, safety may involve clearly marked exits, nearby restrooms, and the ability to leave the classroom at any time. The level of commitment to and awareness of safety is communicated from the first contact. Trigger warnings are one way to provide classroom safety (Crumpton 2020).[6] How might a commitment to safety shape the kind of welcome and introduction activity used in one's classroom?

Trustworthiness is also necessary for a trauma-informed approach. Many traumatic experiences are due to a person in authority abusing their power over someone more vulnerable. Re-establishing trust is imperative for many survivors. In order to lessen perceived threats and to provide a conducive environment for recovery, classroom teachers must be clear and transparent about policies, procedures, expectations, professional boundaries, and roles—including self-disclosure in the classroom (Crumpton 2017, pp. 142–44). How might a commitment to trustworthiness shape the way one presents the course syllabus and assignments?

Choice is important for survivors of trauma. Trauma robs a person of agency and exposes a deep sense of helplessness. Providing adequate information about their rights and responsibilities and offering choices, when appropriate, can help restore a sense of agency to trauma survivors. For example, Stephanie M. Crumpton developed a classroom "Covenant of Presence" for this purpose, assuring not only a degree of safety and trust but also choice and control (Crumpton 2020, pp. 35–36). How might a commitment to the value of choice change the way one shapes assignments, deadlines, and forms of communication with students?

Collaboration is essential to becoming a trauma-informed community. Resilience from trauma is greatly increased by a social support network, and for this to work to the survivor's benefit, the survivor must have agency in the process. The event of trauma is something that happens to a person, overwhelming them; healing and recovery is a process that happens with a person, inclusive of them. How might a commitment to the value of collaboration change the way one understands teaching and learning in the classroom?

Empowerment underlies all of the above values. Restoring voice, choice, and agency to a survivor is key to recovery. Empowerment means helping the student discover and develop their own capacities. Trauma-informed classroom teachers are part of the community that acts on the belief that "trauma-affected students can learn self-efficacy and social-emotional skills" needed to transcend the grip of the past and live fully into their present potential (Davidson 2017, p. 13). As classroom instructors, we are in a privileged position to assist trauma-survivors. There are few things more

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[6]   SAMHSA provides guidance for professionals to help empower survivors to return to the present and to regain focus when such triggering occurs (SAMHSA 2014b, p. 151). Trigger warnings in higher education have prompted no shortage of debate, see for example (Siegel 2016).

empowering than education. How might a commitment to the value of empowerment change the way one teaches in the classroom?

6. Theological Implications

The above sections on trauma, trauma-informed approach, and trauma-informed pedagogy drew primariy from well-researched, secular resources. What does a faith commitment and religious context contribute to these secular insights? Keefe-Perry and Moon provided five markers of trauma-informed religious education:

1. Actively acknowledge the widespread impact of trauma and recognize potential signs and markers of trauma in congregants, families, staff, and community members;
2. Integrate knowledge about trauma into policies, training, and pedagogy;
3. Explicitly seek to resist re-traumatization, even while knowing this is a challenge that [religious education offerings] may fail to meet in every case.
4. Understand that there are responses that encourage spaces supportive of courageous risk-taking and provide participants with healthy means to consider the potential value of taking a risk on deepening relationships with others and God.
5. Incorporate practices that emphasize interpersonal identity, embodiment, and the importance of the imagination for flourishing and healing. (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, p. 38).

Their first three markers (acknowledge, recognize, integrate, and resist) correspond to SAMHSA's fourfold definition of a trauma-informed setting (realize, recognize, respond, and resist). Their last two markers are fruitfully compared to (though not identical with) the five core values of trauma-informed pedagogy (safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment) presented by Fallot and Harris (2009, p. 3). Keefe-Perry and Moon intentionally prioritize "a space co-created by those present" over a facilitator-dependent sense of "safe" space (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, p. 33). Through this approach, they locate trustworthiness as an attribute of the entire classroom community, not just the instructor, and emphasize the value of courageous risk-taking as an expression of choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Thus, they claim, "Religious education spaces, among others, can support life-giving processing, courageous meaning-making, and trust building" (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, p. 34). Indeed, this form of courageous risk-taking animates their vision for trauma-informed religious education, with the potential for "deepening relationships with others and God" (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, p. 38). Regardless of one's location on the spectrum of classroom safety and risk-taking, it is apparent that trauma-informed pedagogy in religiously affiliated higher education classrooms shares much with secular contexts, drawing on the same insights from psychology, neuroscience, and public health (e.g., Carello and Butler 2014, pp. 163–64). Furthermore, as religious educators, we have the advantage of being equipped to talk about God.

For instructors in theological education and religious studies, it is important to remember that trauma is a spiritually disruptive experience. Trauma affects mind, body, and soul, causing the survivor to reassess who they are and who God is. Trauma disrupts narrative and engages the body in ways too deep for the mind to process. Rambo explored this reality through Holy Saturday, a theology of remaining hovering between life and death, and the witness of the Holy Spirit in the midst (Rambo 2010). Jones examined its impact on our understanding of grace and the cross (Jones 2009). Beste wrestled with its implications for human freedom and divine grace (Beste 2007). Baldwin reexamined everything she had been taught about God and the human condition (Baldwin 2018). Whether viewed through the lens of theopoetics (Rambo 2010), reformed theology (Jones 2009), a revision of Rahnerian theology (Beste 2007), or the crucible of one's own faith journey (Baldwin 2018), trauma interrupts and reframes faith. It changes the way we think about God, sin, and salvation. Previously held theologies of atonement and redemption may prove unhelpful or even false.

As classroom instructors, we do not have to become experts on these theological loci—and it is beyond the scope of this article to explore the many and deep theological dimensions of trauma. Nor is it our role to provide a therapeutic space or psychological counseling. Yet, Keefe-Perry and Moon

asserted that religious education can appropriately become a place to "establish a bond" (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, p. 33). This is true not only in congregational settings but also undergraduate and graduate classrooms in religious and theological contexts. Noting "how trauma can impede the ability of the survivor to develop new relationships with ideas, people, and God," Keefe-Perry and Moon emphasized the relationship-building potential of religious education (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, pp. 32–33). Trauma-informed pedagogy contributes to this potential through its core values, which nurture a supportive learning community in which students can risk sharing and hearing experiences that may not make rational sense. Thus, Keefe-Perry and Moon also emphasized the affective and embodied experiences of learning as important features of trauma-informed pedagogy: "embodied, aesthetic, and theopoetic knowledges are lifted up as important as rational, propositional discourse" (Keefe-Perry and Moon 2019, p. 37). Ott and I emphasized a similar combination of pedagogical lenses through our study of teaching sexuality and religion: perspective transformation draws on affective learning to increase empathy and embodied learning attends to the whole person in the classroom (Stephens and Ott 2020, p. 2). Combined with trauma-sensitive pedagogy, we described our approach as "a holistic endeavor bringing many challenges and potential benefits to classroom pedagogy about religion" (Stephens and Ott 2020, p. 2). Trauma-informed pedagogy is indeed a risky and courageous venture.

7. Care for Instructors

Classroom instructors are on the front lines of community support and are potentially exposed to many survivors and their trauma histories. The more one practices trauma-informed pedagogy, the more attuned one becomes to the survivors of trauma who surround us daily, including one's own self. Practicing trauma-sensitive classroom techniques may prompt a more conscious awareness of one's own unhealed traumatic wounds. Furthermore, the more reliably one upholds the core values of trauma-informed pedagogy, the more students will perceive one to be safe, trustworthy, and empowering, thus prompting more frequent divulging of the traumas that are already present within their lives and one's classroom. Trauma is remarkably prevalent, and the increased awareness of and proximity to this reality can itself become traumatic.

The experience of vicarious or secondary trauma (sometimes accompanied by compassion fatigue) is a real and present danger. Secondary trauma refers to the physiological, emotional, and mental effects of being exposed to the primary trauma of another person, either as a witness to the traumatic event itself or bearing witness to the traumatic effects on that person. It is important that classroom instructors take time to debrief with colleagues, pastors, counselors, and other professionals about the emotional, spiritual, and physical toll that such work demands (Davidson 2017, pp. 20–21). Being aware of trauma helps us through this journey, but the vicarious effects are no less intense and no less real. It is important to remember that a trauma-informed approach is the work of an entire community of support.

8. Conclusions

This article has set forth an argument for the importance of trauma-informed pedagogy, particularly for higher education instructors in religious and theological settings. The existing literature at the intersection of religious education and trauma-informed pedagogy is in its infancy. Thus, a principle feature of this article was bibliographic, portraying the state of scholarship at the intersection of religious education and trauma and pointing to resources necessary for further development. The article promoted further development of this literature by providing a shared, conceptual basis for trauma-informed pedagogy in religious instruction, based on recent insights from psychology, neuroscience, and public health studies. The article defined and described trauma, introduced the features of a trauma-informed community approach, and discussed the core values guiding trauma-informed pedagogy. The article also explored religious aspects of trauma and the danger of secondary trauma for classroom instructors, especially those with a heightened attunement

to the indicators of trauma history. This article raised significant points of debate within the study of trauma-informed pedagogy and implied avenues of further research.

Significant points of debate within the study of trauma-informed pedagogy include the following. First, trauma-informed pedagogy has been presented as a mode of teaching, yet trauma-informed practices also are used as scholarly tools in specific disciplines as well as a subject of study in their own right, serving as content for classroom discussion. How are these different uses and purposes distinguished in trauma-informed teaching? Second, much of the conversation revolves around safety and risk in education. If trauma-informed pedagogy should be seen not as an accommodation to some learners' needs but rather a standard classroom practice for all learners, how does one negotiate or issue trigger warnings when teaching about trauma or assigning potentially sensitive material in a classroom assignment? Third, trauma is present in the classroom whether we address it or not. When practicing trauma-informed pedagogy, how should the instructor navigate between sensitivity to trauma-laden subject matter in the classroom and the pre-existing trauma histories that students (and instructors) bring with them to the classroom? Fourth, trauma involves experiences that cannot be adequately shared through words yet manifest themselves in our bodies. How do affect and empathy enter into the perspective transformation we may desire of our students? Finally, trauma-informed pedagogy causes us to reevaluate the very nature and goal of religious education. Does our pedagogy have mainly to do with content delivery, skills development, relationship-building, or some necessary combination of all of these aspects of learning?

This article also implied avenues for further research. More research needs to be done on how this model of pedagogy works in practice, such as the three-year study by Harrison et al. (2020). Future research should attend to Carello and Butler's proposals for trauma-informed teaching (Carello and Butler 2014, pp. 163–64), particularly in relation to the five markers proposed by Keefe-Perry and Moon (2019, p. 38). Furthermore, each of the elements of trauma-sensitive teaching presented in this article need illustration and example in a variety of institutional contexts.[7]

Trauma-informed pedagogy, despite the risk it entails, is no longer an optional means of instruction; it is a necessary and essential tool for religious educators in higher education. Furthermore, the analysis of theoretical discourse presented in this article is very important for any kind of education, not limited to religious education. As classroom instructors in higher education, it is imperative that we equip ourselves with the tools of trauma-informed pedagogy and contribute as helping professionals to a trauma-informed community of support.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
MDPI	Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute
PTE	Potentially Traumatic Event
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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[7] One such effort is an issue of *Spotlight on Teaching* in *Religious Studies News*, a publication of the American Academy of Religion, on the topic "Trauma-Informed Pedagogy," planned for fall 2020. https://rsn.aarweb.org/spotlight-on/teaching.

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Article

Digital Stories as a Creative Assignment for Studying World Religions

Charles S. Chesnavage [1,2]

1 Unification Theological Seminary, New York, NY 10036, USA; c.chesnavage@uts.edu or cchesnavage@mercy.edu
2 School of Liberal Arts, Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522, USA

Abstract: The incorporation of creative assignments in the form of digital stories and artistic assignments in undergraduate and graduate World Religions courses has resulted in positive feedback from the students, and these courses were considered the favorite of the semester. They have given students, many of which identify as "spiritual but not religious", or "non-practicing", an opportunity to connect themes from various world religions to their own life stories, implicitly or explicitly. The purpose of this article is to encourage educators in both a secondary and a college/university/seminary setting to consider digital stories as a creative assignment that deepens their understanding of world religions within the context of a World Religions course, or other religion and religious education courses. This article will present the institutional support provided by Mercy College (Dobbs Ferry, New York) and the context for the World Religions class in which the digital stories are assigned. It will be followed by the process of making a digital story, the directions given to the students, the different platforms that students can choose to make the digital stories, and examples of digital stories created by the students. The paper will conclude with a summary of comments made by the students about the assignment and connections with additional articles on the benefits of digital stories to increase empathy and replace the dominant stories that cause oppression and injustice, like racism and white supremacy, with stories that offer resistance and counter the status quo of oppression and injustice.

Keywords: digital stories; world religions; Bloom's Revised Taxonomy; religious education; world-view education

1. Introduction

Digital technology is an important pedagogical tool and considered one of the strong points among many students who frequently use cellphones, laptops, and desktop computers for everything from photos to videos, Instagram, Snapchat, and other social media sites (Lim et al. 2009; Armstrong 2014). Having these various kinds of devices and technological skills does not necessarily translate into a student's facility in making digital stories (Buturian 2016). A learning curve and guidance, which will be explained in this article, is still needed. A digital story incorporates pictures, videos, a musical background, and a script that can be based on a spontaneous voiceover, a text, or both, using a digital platform to make the digital story on a particular topic or theme. Daniel Meadows, a photojournalist and one of the leading promoters of digital stories in England, described digital stories as "multimedia narratives, short movies told in the first person with feeling". "Our approach insisted on a strictness of construction: 250 words, a dozen pictures, and a duration of about two minutes". " . . . . when made as a shared experience in workshops run by skilled facilitators, the stories produced were often tight as sonnets. Multimedia sonnets from the people" (Meadows 2021).

In the Digital Storytelling Cookbook, a primary resource for Digital Stories, from the former Center for Digital Storytelling, now called the Story Center, Joe Lambert captures the inherent spiritual nature of digital stories:

79

Story is learning, celebrating, healing, and remembering. Each part of the life process necessitates it. Failure to make story honor these passages threatens the consciousness of communal identity. Honoring a life event with the sacrament of story is a profound spiritual value for these cultures. It enriches the individual, emotional and cultural development, and perhaps ultimately, the more mysterious development of their soul. (Lambert 2010, p. v)

The purpose of this article is to encourage educators in both a secondary and college/university/seminary setting to consider digital stories as an assignment that involves the highest levels of learning with "more emphasis on creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, information fluency, and innovation than on the ability to operate the technology" (Clemens and Kreider 2011, p. 74; ISTE 2021). Linda Buturian characterizes the creation of digital stories as an assignment that requires the highest level of thinking skills through the a creative process using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Preville 2021). "Bloom's Revised Taxonomy reveals that higher level thinking skills are required for educators to develop stories which effectively communicate content, as well as for students to create stories that successfully demonstrate their academic learning" (Buturian 2016). "Digital storytelling can be a potent learning experience that encompasses much of what society hope that students will know and be able to perform in the 21st century" (Robin 2021 in Buturian 2016).

Armstrong offers a contrast between the lower levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy that involve the ability to remember through recalling facts and basic concepts, defining, and memorizing with the highest levels of learning that a digital story can produce.

Researchers regard technology as a primary method to empower students to take control of their own learning. Rather than merely listening to teachers disseminate information and dutifully taking notes, students actively search for information and make decisions about the product they are creating. In essence, technology is transforming students into explorers and teachers into guides (Armstrong 2014, p. 41).

The digital story assignment in a world religion course offers students the opportunity for a deeper and more personal engagement with oftentimes abstract religious themes, sacred truths, and practices that can impact their own faith formation and development in relation to those belonging to various religious traditions or none. They can also offer the students an opportunity to create stories of resistance or counter-stories challenging traditional religious teaching that contributes to, or ignores, the oppression or persecution of people due to race, gender, or sexual orientation. These digital stories allow for a creative incorporation of personal pictures and video, or images and video from the internet that help students to express their own personal story and ontological narrative in relation to a theme from a world religion implicitly or explicitly expressed. This article will begin with the institutional support that made these digital stories possible at Mercy College and provide the context and purpose of the World Religions course that informs the digital stories. Mercy College was originally founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1950, in Dobbs Ferry, New York, before becoming an independent, nonsectarian, coeducational four-year college with campuses in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Dobbs Ferry, New York. This paper will include the directions given to the students, the different platforms that students can choose to make the digital stories, the seven elements of making a digital story, and examples of digital stories created by the students. We will conclude with a summary of student feedback related to the digital story assignments and additional articles that support the benefits of digital stories, including different categories of digital stories and how digital stories can increase empathy, and offer stories of resistance and counter-stories to the dominant stories of oppression and injustice.

2. Institutional Support and Context for Digital Stories in a World Religions Course

Mercy College and the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) have invested in the promotion and value of digital stories as a classroom activity and assignment. There are intensive workshops in June which teach faculty members how to make digital stories and ongoing Digital Story Working Groups that meet periodically throughout the semester

for support and the exchange of ideas. Mercy College also invites students to submit their digital stories for special recognition at what is called the Digi Awards. The Mercy College library also has a Research and Tutorial Section that includes digital stories (Digital Story Home 2020). This tutorial section involves resources for every stage of the digital story process. It includes tutorials on the software platforms that can be used to make digital stories with Adobe Spark, iMovie, and others; the Digital Storytelling Cookbook by Joe Lambert and the Story Center, that includes all of the resources needed to make a digital story (Lambert 2010; Story Center: Listen Deeply. Tell Stories 2021); the seven basic elements of the digital story; ideas and themes; guidance on script writing and the story arc; the use of a storyboard; and additional resources. A similar resource can be found at the University of Houston (Robin 2021), and by Helen Barrett (Barrett 2011). Storying Faith offers digital story resources specifically related to faith formation (Storying Faith 2021).

The World Religions course is an introductory survey course on world religions that includes a primary textbook (Fisher and Rinehart 2017), and additional books, guest speakers from different religious traditions, TED Talk assignments, YouTube videos and documentaries, a number of précis assignments on different articles, Discussion Forum topics, an artistic assignment based on a drawing, painting, haiku, or some other creative assignment with a brief description and citation, and the digital story assignment. Some very rich Discussion Forum topics include distractions, procrastination, and experiences of death. See a student comment on the artistic assignment.

> The artistic assignment was a good refreash (sic) on religion. Many people went all out in their drawings while others kept it simple. Every religion is amazing in their own way and that's the beauty of it. Including when it comes to shows either it's a movie, TV show or Anime, it shows the world the spiritual meaning and may even debunk false information out there. The artistic assignment showed me how passionate everyone was during presentation and also showed me a lesson that I never really paid much attention to up until now. My lesson is to keep an open mind on different religions out there. Most people get upset when someone they know is part of a different religion

The following comment by an LGBTQIA+ student after viewing a TED Talk on gender fluidity within the Hindu tradition shows critical thinking that is resistant and counter to the traditional teaching on gender and same-sex orientation within Catholicism.

> I chose to listen to this TED talk because being part of the LGBTQ+ community it interested me the most. I come from a Catholic family where I was taught only a man and woman was acceptable in marriage. From personal experience, I have been compared to my religion and beliefs for my sexuality. Hearing about the Hindu religion and that there are same gender relationships reassures me that the LGBTQ+ community is supported and not discriminated by other cultures. Being a female athlete and playing sports my entire life, I was always given looks for playing with the boys. Some parents or even some of the kids always made comments when I was going up to hit on the baseball field or on the ice with them during hockey. I was there for the love of the sport at the time and put my heart and soul into the game. Why did it matter that I was a girl then if I was playing the same way as the boys? It was a very informative TED Talk and I already shared with many of my friends who are also in the LGBTQ+ community. This opened my eyes to do research in other religions and see the different aspects on same sex gender, love, and attraction.

The first couple of classes are dedicated to building a community within the classroom, with introductions that include three things about the student and something that is considered unique. A name game is also incorporated in which the students are asked to choose a positive adjective that alliterates with their first name like "Kind Karen", or "Judicious Jay". The name I choose is "Catholic Chuck", which identifies my primary religion of Roman Catholicism along with the original Greek meaning of the word, which

is "universal". I describe myself as a white, cisgender, straight male born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, of Eastern European, Polish, Slovak, and Lithuanian ancestry and currently living in Yonkers, New York, which was once the land of the Munsee and Lenape Nations before a colonization and conquest that continues into the present day. I am married to an Afro-Latin X cisgender female of Honduran/Garifuna ethnicity. My dissertation research was an exploration of interreligious prayer as a graduate of Fordham University and the Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education. A unique thing about me is my last name, which is unique to my family, since it was Americanized when my Lithuanian grandfather arrived in the United States. My preferred pronouns are he/him/his.

This name game has proven to be a positive activity for in-person classes and for online classes when the students could add their new name to the Zoom window. Students were also invited to submit video introductions, especially if it was an asynchronous course, to allow other students to see them and hear the same introduction. A recorded introduction of myself was also made available to the students in Blackboard LMS. The introductions also offer opportunities for students to state their preferred pronouns, which can also be entered into a Zoom window for an online class. The pronoun preference is not to be taken lightly, as 34% of transgender youths are less likely to have suicidal thoughts when preferred pronouns and names are used (The Trevor Project 2020). See the following comments from students posted in the Discussion Forum on the "Name Game and Introduction" activity.

> The name and game introductions was very important because we are being introduced to new peers and a new professor. I have always enjoyed meeting new faces because we come in contact with different cultures and backgrounds and we tend to become more social and interactive with them. The name and game introductions was very enjoyable because we learned adjectives that describe a person and gives us an idea of the type of person they are.

> The Name Game and Introductions shared this same idea. In the Name Game we chose Positive Adjectives to attach to our names, and I believe, although little, it made a big difference in the class. When I logged onto Zoom for my World Religions 622 class, I was happy and exicted (sic) for the class because of the positive energy that was in the class each time, and I believe the names supported this energy I felt in the class.

> The last topic I think was very important was the Name Game and Introductions. For me, It was as if Professor Chesnavage was helping me to find out who I was for myself. I would never think to label myself with a creative adjective (sic) that best describes me and my abilities (sic). It allows yourself to express who you are in one simple word. I am also glad we did introductions because if it weren't (sic) for that, I wouldnt (sic) know who my classmates are behind the closed zoom windows. It also created some sort of social aspect when no physical ones could be made (From an LGBTQIA+ student).

The beginning of the semester is dedicated to walking through the syllabus, the details of the LMS, and tools of analysis for understanding world religions. Some of these tools of analysis include Krister Stendahl's Three Rules of Religious Understanding (Hobbins 2010). These three rules are the following: If you want to learn about a particular religion, ask the adherents of that religion and not an enemy; Don't compare your best to their worse; Leave room for "Holy Envy" or appreciation for the other religion. Different lenses for analyzing a religion are also reviewed, including the history, beliefs, practices, symbols, holidays, and more specific details concerning the roles of women and gender identity and religious teaching regarding the LGBTQIA+ community (Fisher and Rinehart 2017, p. 27). Different principles of religious education are reviewed, including an understanding of the words religious and education, with religious understood as learning about your own religion in relationship with other religions, so that religion is always understood in a

plural sense. Education is expanded so that it is understood beyond that which is learned in the classroom. It is lifelong, with and without end, and there are daily encounters with world religions in our everyday life, in the daily activities of going to school, work, or shopping, and meeting friends and family, and in the food that we eat and the places we go to, be it a house of worship or living near a house of worship (Harris 1989, pp. 116–22; Harris and Moran 1998, pp. 30–41). A rich discussion occurred around the meaning of the concept of "place determines practice" from an indigenous perspective and a more universal perspective, and another rich discussion focused on the image of Our Lady of Ferguson, which is a contemporary iconic image that addresses the problem of gun violence and introduces the history of icons and Christianity, with links to Judaism and Islam (Web Editors 2016; Mark Doox 2021). A final element of the course in the Fall and Spring semesters is to follow the Calendar of Observances and study holidays and events as they occur in different religious traditions (Calendar of Observances 2021).

Early in the semester the different symbols for the world religions are identified with a brief introduction that is considered an "appetizer", to whet the appetite of the students for further information, or the main "entrees" of world religions. These different symbols become some of the possible images that students will draw or create for their artistic assignment. Two very important feedback assignments are requested of the students after the Mid-Term exam and before the Final Exam, asking them to identify the three most important lessons of the course at each moment. The artistic assignments and digital stories are two of the most important classes and lessons of the course, based on student feedback. The course is guided by the principle of "Each one, teach one", and both of these assignments incorporate this principle along with the presentations "that are informed by a multicultural pedagogy which fosters critical and creative thinking" (Buturian 2016).

3. The Process of Digital Storytelling: Getting Started

A great way to understand a digital story is to make one. The Mercy College library tutorial recommends picking 5–10 images/pictures and a script of less than 300 words. The first digital story I made was overly ambitious but very useful. It consisted of 25 images and was nearly seven minutes, which is far too long for a typical digital story. It became the digital story that describes the history and mission of the Westchester Coalition Against Islamophobia (WCAI), which is a community-based organization that opposes bigotry and discrimination against Muslims and Islam. It continues to be edited, updated, and used for purposes of introducing public officials and the public to the mission of WCAI. This would be an example of what Linda Buturian calls a digital story as a social education tool and a teaching tool (Buturian 2016). The most recent digital story I created was in keeping with the original directions and based on the object of a mirror, six pictures, and a 274-word script. The script used the image of a mirror as a metaphor for seeing the world through the lens of COVID 19, contrasting the hopes and dreams of the ball drop marking the 2020 New Year and the impact of the pandemic, that personally impacted my wife's family, with the death of her mother and her two siblings. All three deaths occurred during Holy Week and Passover, when the angel of death was very busy, and my wife was hospitalized due to COVID. In the digital story a question was asked: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is my sibling, relative, and family member?" (In light of the pandemic), the answer was "the least among us". This would be an example of two other kinds of digital stories that Buturian would call digital stories as reflective assignment and/or a digital story that communicates a concept (Ibid.). The length was 2:25 minutes, well in keeping with a digital story, which is best kept to 2:30–3:30 minutes in length. Another digital story is on the history of a local not-for-profit home improvement association to generate support for the membership and ongoing survival of the community house, built by a historical African American community that will be sixty years old in 2023.

4. The Seven Elements of a Digital Story

The Digital Storytelling Cookbook recommends a seven-step process. The first three steps are script-related and focused on owning your insights (idea), emotions (engaging the audience), and finding the moment (the climax of the story or the moment of change). The next steps are more technical: seeing (visual images) and hearing (voice, and the inclusion of music). The final steps are the assembly of these elements and the sharing via a software platform (Lambert 2010, pp. 9–24; Iwancio 2010). These seven steps can be condensed into a story with a beginning, middle, and end. A beginning that introduces an issue, obstacle, or desire; a middle that offers a context, with more information needed; and an end that brings about change, transformation, and resolution. Ohler describes the steps as a call to adventure with an interruption, crisis, or tension; a problem-solution and transformation; and a closure that ends with a meaningful conclusion, and not necessarily a happy ending (Ohler 2005–2006, p. 45). "Twelve tips" were offered for digital stories within a medical school for motivating medical students for deeper learning (Sandars et al. 2008, pp. 774–77). A storyboard could also be part of the planning of the digital story, mapping out the images with the script (Lambert 2010, pp. 31–35).

5. The Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling Adapted to Rubrics

Clemens and Kreider turn these seven steps or elements into rubrics for assessing the digital stories. They describe the elements as (1) Point of view (A first person narrative). (2) Dramatical Question (A moment of change). (3) Emotional content (How do people connect). (4) Pacing (Time spent in the story, including pausing, and number of pictures). (5) Economy (The right number of media to support the story). (6) Voice (Optional vs. script/subtitles or music and images only). (7) Soundtrack (Musical background) (Clemens and Kreider 2011, p. 77; Rubistar 2000–2008).

The following example of a rubric for images and soundtrack uses four levels of assessment.

Little or no attempt to use images to create an appropriate atmosphere/tone.

An attempt was made to use images to create an atmosphere/tone but it needed more work.

Images create an atmosphere or tone that matches some parts of the story. Image choice is logical.

Images create a distinct atmosphere or tone that matches different parts of the story. The images may communicate symbolism and/or metaphors.

Music is distracting or inappropriate.

Music is ok, and not distracting, but it does not add much to the story.

Music stirs a rich emotional response that somewhat matches the story line.

Music stirs a rich emotional response that matches the story line well (Clemens and Kreider 2011, pp. 78–79).

These rubrics, along with the seven elements, help answer the questions many students have. The big question many students ask is "how long should it be?" A good time frame is 2:30–3:30 minutes, but this can vary at the discretion of the teacher depending on the purpose of the assignment and the topic. Some students go below or over the time frame and the digital stories can still be acceptable. The digital stories also include pictures, with script or voiceover or both, and some incorporate video as well as musical background. The biggest critique refers to pacing and whether the pictures or script are left up long enough for the students to read the script and look at the picture. Some students use a split screen slide with an image on one side and script on the other. Many students include quotes or sayings obtained on the internet. Many pictures and videos are of a personal nature or from the internet and Google images. Other questions could include: Was there a balance between the number of pictures used, the script, and the video? Did the story have a beginning, middle, and end? Did the story have a personal element or was it more of an academic presentation? All digital stories should be saved as an MP4 file. A small number of students use PowerPoint to complete the digital stories. Digital

Citizenship can be an opportunity to teach the students to give proper citations to any pictures or video that are copyrighted (Clemens and Kreider 2011, p. 75). Having gone over the institutional support, the context of the class, and the seven basic elements and rubrics, it is strongly suggested to include a story circle exercise and process. In my classes, a world religions theme sheet is given to the students for ideas for their digital stories.

6. The Story Circle

A strong recommendation for digital stories is to create a story circle to provide feedback to the person writing a script. Great suggestions and exercises for this process can be found in the Mary Hess article that describes a "Basic Four-Role Story Circle" and a "Story Titling Exercise" (Hess 2020, pp. 33–34). The first exercise involves a story that is told based on a chosen topic, like a moment that questions the meaning of religion, or a moment of transcendence, or a moment of curiosity about a particular religion. Each person has a role to play that involves listening for facts, emotions, and values. After each story is told and feedback is given, the roles rotate. The Story Title Exercise involves the student telling a story and then turning their back while story titles are suggested. The turning of the back during the exercise makes a difference between seeing the facial expression, which can impact what is heard, and "hearing" the suggestion and "seeing" who is making the suggestion (Ibid.).

In my classes, the story circle is replaced by showing examples of digital stories that were created by students in previous semesters, and there is a collective evaluation and analysis of each story, which include the theme(s) of the digital stories and how they were technically created with photos, personal and stock, video, musical background, pacing, script or voiceover, and other observations. Students are given very basic directions, which include the links to the library resources and the primary platforms for making the digital stories, that include Adobe Spark (2021) and iMovie (2021). As time has passed, students have discovered additional platforms for making the digital stories, which include Animoto (2021), Movavi (2021), and special effects with Canva (2021). The various digital platforms include free and paid subscriptions. Samples of Digital Stories are also found in the Mercy College Library Digital Story Tutorial. Very little technical assistance is given to the students and very little help is requested. Most of the students are able to complete the digital story, with a few relying on PowerPoint to create the story with pictures, script, and background music, narration, or live voiceover. Very few students choose not to do the assignments, and the presentation of the Digital Stories involves a very brief introduction and Q and A after the presentation, that is part of a participation grade for the course. While the technical aspects and the various platforms are briefly explained and can be chosen by the students, a world religions theme sheet is given to students to help them with ideas for their digital stories. Students also have opportunities to improve the digital stories based on feedback after the first draft.

7. The World Religions Theme Sheet

Christopher Booker's book *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* offers the seven basic plots that are repeatedly told in storytelling (Booker 2005). While some of these plots like "rebirth" and "tragedy" may be found in digital stories, additional ideas or "plots" for digital stories are given in the Digital Storytelling Cookbook. These include character stories that express how we love and find meaning in our relationships; memorial stories that recall the memory of someone who died; and adventure and accomplishment stories. The Mercy Library DS resource offers prompts for digital stories related to "First, Lasts, Bests, and Worsts" experiences; for example: your first trip abroad; your last mystical or spiritual high; your best family moment; and your worst financial crisis. In my classes, students are given a world religions theme sheet that begins with the following quotes: "That which is most personal is also that which is most universal". "That which is most particular to a religious tradition is also that which is most universal". Examples and a discussion of both quotes are given as preparation for what the digital stories will achieve. Universal themes are

read from the sheet, with examples given of how previous digital stories expressed these themes. These universal themes include love, compassion, pain, suffering, birth, death, redemption, forgiveness, friendship, role models, inspiration, transformation, resurrection, conversion, the spiritual but not religious or NONE classification, and MORE.

In addition to these universal themes, more specific themes are given from some of the world religions. For Christianity, the following themes are presented, with questions and ideas for digital stories: The Birth of Jesus: Is there a significant birth story of your own or someone else? The Life of Jesus and the call of his disciples: Is there someone who inspired you? Jesus taught forgiveness: Have you had an experience of forgiveness? Jesus healed the sick and performed miracles: Have you had an experience of sickness or suffering and healing? Jesus suffered and died on the cross: Have you had any experience of suffering or death in your life? Jesus resurrected from the dead after three days: Have you had a resurrection experience or new life experience?

In a similar way, the dominant theme of suffering in Buddhism, or the teachings of Buddhism, can be incorporated into a digital story. Various holidays or celebrations are also offered in different religious traditions, and students share how they celebrate these holidays, like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Holi, Passover, or Ramadan. Prayer, symbols, and pilgrimage and travel are additional themes for students to choose for a digital story, among others. After a brief introduction to digital story platforms, viewing digital story examples, and an explanation of the theme sheet, the students are given the chance to create their own digital stories. The following examples will add brief details to the digital stories created by the students. Of particular note is the multicultural pedagogy and the critical and creative thinking within the digital stories.

8. Examples of Student Digital Stories

8.1. Holidays

Advent: A Roman Catholic student showed how her family celebrated the customs of Advent over the course of her lifetime from a young girl to a young adult.

Christmas: Some students do a digital story that shows how their families celebrate Christmas in both sacred and secular ways, and some explicitly mention the scripture stories or the Christian meaning of Christmas, while others emphasize Christmas as a time of gift giving and spending time with one's family. One student focused on Los Posadas, or the Christmas rituals from her Mexican culture, that involve the faithful travelling from house to house singing songs and praying as they reenact the story of the Holy Family finding no room in the inn in the Gospel story of Luke. Family celebrations tend to include and reveal the culture of the student.

New Year's: A student from Ecuador showed the unique custom of burning effigies that resemble superheroes or cartoon characters in bonfires around the city. Another student from the Dominican Republic showed the custom of taking a suitcase and running around the house to suggest travel and exploration for the new year along with the eating of twelve grapes.

Holi: A Hindu student shared the celebration of Holi, cut short by COVID, which is a celebratory holiday that involves the throwing of colorful powders on each other as a celebration of Spring and a Hindu myth celebrating good over evil.

Ramadan/Eid: Muslim students have shared how their family celebrates Ramadan and the Eid holidays, and one student compared the celebration of Ramadan and Lent within a Christian context, given her multi-religious family.

8.2. Birth Stories

Students have shared the significance of their own birth, if there were any problems, or the birth of a sibling, or the tragedy of a miscarriage, and the happiness and new life of an upcoming birth. One of these digital stories on a stillbirth won a Digi Award. Some students make an explicit connection to the birth of Jesus, while others are more implicit,

by not mentioning the birth of Jesus. Many digital stories have multiple themes, which include love, family, suffering, hope, healing, and new life.

8.3. Suffering and Sickness

Students have shared very powerful stories of near-death experiences or serious illnesses they or their family members have experienced. One student shared his story of being a hit and run victim and how his church and family prayed for his recovery. Another student shared the touching story of her father, who had a stroke right before her Quinceañera, and after he went through the long process of rehab was able to celebrate it with her. She won a Digi Award for this digital story.

8.4. Death

Some of the most powerful digital stories are about death. Oftentimes, it reveals the close relationship a student had with a parent or grandparent. This past semester, Spring 2021, two students shared stories of close friends who died from opioid overdoses. Other students have shared the death of family members to gun violence. After a guest speaker for the class spoke about Spiritualism and communication with spirits and individuals on the other side, a student put together a digital story called "Pennies from Heaven" that included signs from the other side that included pennies, numbers, and the hummingbird that were associated with the loved one who passed away. This digital story won a Digi Award. One student began her digital story on the death of a beloved uncle with a voiceover and had to switch over to script given her emotional feelings while doing the narration, which expressed profound sadness and pain.

8.5. Islamophobia and Islam

A powerful example of a digital story without script or voiceover addressed Islamophobia, which is one of the topics discussed in class. The digital story was created by a student from a white, Christian background. It had four parts with a musical background. Part I were images of Islam, showing symbols like the Quran and mosques and pictures of Muslims eating and celebrating their culture and religion. Part II was the 9/11 event. Part III was the aftermath of 9/11 and acts of Islamophobia with protests against Muslims and attacks on mosques. Part IV was the response of Muslims protesting against Islamophobia.

Another Muslim student showed a digital story about the stabbing of his father, that occurred on a playground when another family asked his family to leave. It began with video footage of 9/11 and the planes hitting the Twin Towers. It addressed the impact of 9/11 on the Muslim community leading up to the incident. His father survived the stabbing but left behind a traumatized student and family. These were the final words of his digital story. The entire length was 1:31.

> It wasn't the world I was afraid of. It was the ignorant people who judge Islam based on the horrible actions of a few individuals. It triggered a huge shift in my community. Families became protective of their children. My sisters no longer acted the same. They became aware of how people viewed the hijab and saw them as a walking target. They became terrified of the world. This will forever affect my life, because it affected my religion, my culture, my identity, but most importantly it affected me.

One of the Digi Award winners involved a Digital Story, without script or narration, entitled Hope, that was created by a student with expertise in filmmaking. He used visual montages of his family church and included his Latin X family members in the digital story. It had an obvious reference to the Christian symbol of the cross and included the church his family attended.

8.6. Digital Stories by Veterans

The digital stories created by students who have shared their experiences as veterans have been particularly powerful. One student shared the memory of his mother crying on

the day of 9/11 and how that inspired him to join the military. His video story included photos from deployment and images of his deceased brothers who died in combat. The inspiration of this digital story was Islamophobia and not believing everything that is said about Muslims based on his experience in the military. Another veteran shared his pictures of deployment, his attempted suicide, and eventually finding recovery and support with a marriage and baby.

8.7. Immigration

One student began her digital story, called A Dangerous Journey, with a tweet from President Trump. It used anti-immigrant rhetoric and was dated 2 April 2018.

[Donald J Trump @RealDonaldTrump

Honduras, Mexico and many other countries that the U.S. is very generous to, sends many of their people to our country through our WEAK IMMIGRATION POLICIES. Caravans are heading here. Must pass tough laws and build the WALL. Democrats allow open borders, drugs, and crime. 8:12 PM–2 April 2018.]

The student was from Honduras. Her digital story did not have a musical background and consisted of images of people protesting the Trump policies. The posters held by protestors of different ages in the story stated these messages: "All we want is a better life". "We are not criminals. We are hard workers". "We the people are greater than fear". "Open borders. Open Minds". "No somos criminales. Somos trabajadores". (We are not criminals. We are workers.) "Good enough to work. Good enough to stay". "Keep families together". "Not 1 + Deportation". A map of the United States in the form of an American flag with "Made by Immigrants" under it. The only sound in the digital story was a video showing the sound of a crying baby in an inner tube with his/her parents while crossing a river. Under the video image were the words "Going on a dangerous journey for a better life".

8.8. Domestic Violence

One student created a digital story on her own experience with domestic violence. She was willing to show the digital story to her classmates but was not able to remain in the room during the showing of the digital story. The students were very supportive of her upon her return to the classroom.

8.9. Death of Pets

The first digital stories about the death of pets occurred in the Fall 2020 semester. They revealed the close relationship with pets and questioning how God can allow animals to suffer. The stories included the image and poem known as the Rainbow Bridge Poem (2021) and the relationship of the pet with family members living and deceased. Additional digital stories on the death of pets continued into the Spring 2021 semester as a result of seeing examples from the previous semester. These stories would impact my own personal experience during this Spring semester, 2021, with the death of my dog Happy, who was put to sleep in March, a week before the passing of my father. Happy would have been seventeen in May 2021, and my father passed away at 100. Both losses were deeply felt, and the digital stories helped me cope with my own loss.

8.10. Colorism and COVID 19

A unique digital story created by an African American student concerned the issue of colorism both within and outside the black community. Her initial idea came from our class discussion on the caste system of Hinduism in India. Later, she spoke about her inspiration being the "white-washing" of Jesus in Christianity. It was an example of how the interpretation given to a digital story by the creator can change over time from its original inspiration.

Another student addressed the source of COVID 19 as it related to bats in China. He connected it to the concept of "karma" in Hinduism.

8.11. Digital Stories by Graduate Students at the Unification Theological Seminary

The digital stories have also been assigned to graduate students taking a World Religions course at Unification Theological Seminary (New York). One example from these students was called "God's Real Home". The student incorporated her children in the digital story when they raised the following question: If God lives in a Christian church, what about their friends who are Muslim? Does God live in their house too? The student proceeded to show images of different houses of worship to her children, starting with their own Christian church and moving on to a mosque in the Islamic tradition, a Temple from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, a Gurdwara in the Sikh tradition, a Baha'i Temple, a Buddhist Temple, a Hindu Temple, a Jain Temple, the Jewish Temple Mount in Jerusalem, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and the Obando Central Methodist Church in the Philippines, where the family is from. She also included indigenous traditions. Her daughter asked, "Momma, where God stays (sic) when some other people are having other problems and they can't go to church?" The student answered her daughter and showed pictures of the poor being helped by others and said, "God is everywhere. He is with the rescuers, compassionate neighbors, and all individuals who have a heart to help. He is also with you when you choose to help. And when you share what you have to others he lives in you, especially when you show love to each other. I believe he also lives in our family". "Wow, God lives in me", both of them shouted. "God lives in us", my husband shouted too. "Truly, God's real home is in the heart of each individual shared with one another".

All of the digital stories are very powerful and personal and engage the entire class in both mind, body, and heart, stimulating the cognitive and emotional parts of our brain. While these digital stories are best seen than explained, they express what Sonja Vivienne describes about digital stories among queer activists as "self-representation by everyday people" (Vivienne 2016, p. 11); "self-revelatory . . . in explicit . . . and alternative ways" (Ibid., p. 14). She describes the term voice "to encompass discussions around how marginalized individuals find the confidence (or agency) and the means (or access) to articulate personal stories" (Ibid., p. 16). The digital stories created by the students express their marginalized voices and various cultures, ethnicities, gender, and socio-economic realities. Most of the students are African-American, Latin X, African, Caribbean, LGBTQIA+, with a minority that are European, and many are first-generation college students.

It is clear from the digital stories that many students have expressed some experiences of trauma, not to mention the impact of the pandemic. These experiences and the awareness of trauma-informed pedagogies affirm ideas that are already part of the class and others that can be added to the class (Hess et al. 2021). The introduction process and name game and pronoun preferences mentioned earlier offer an opportunity to build a classroom community of support and safety. Taking the time for breathing exercises is another helpful exercise that could be included in the class. The digital stories themselves give the students an opportunity to address issues that can bring about relief and healing or trigger past traumas. It will be important to give students permission to process these feelings or be prepared in advance for trigger experiences and to offer them campus support services through the counseling department.

The feedback and comments from the students regarding the digital stories show signs of spiritual growth and insight. Students expressed emotional connections to digital stories that expressed the loss of a pet. Students who identified as Spiritual But Not Religions (SBNR) appreciated the digital story of a student who revealed various images of how she sees God throughout different places she has traveled to with wonderful quotes. A student found joy and happiness through the companionship of her birds, describing them as family, and even went so far as to identify with her birds by putting on colorful eye shadow that mirrored their look. Another student expressed how the digital stories helped her to get to know the students in a closer and more personal way and how happy she felt being able to express herself and the way her culture celebrated New Year's in a unique way. Students acknowledged not being alone when hearing about the struggles of fellow

classmates, and their appreciation for every student accepting the challenge of learning a new skill in order to make the digital stories. A student encouraged her classmates to be less judgmental and to be open to exploring other cultures and religions—like her own background, coming from the Arab community and facing misunderstanding and judgment about her own cultural and religious identity as an Arab Christian. Another student expressed the transformational impact of the digital stories, that allowed her to see things in a different light and inspired her to be more kind.

In addition to these comments expressing spiritual growth and insight, there are other benefits of digital stories, that include different categories of digital stories that can challenge the stock stories maintaining oppressive systems through alternative stories under the categories of concealed, resistance, and counter-stories. Studies in neuroscience have also revealed how effective storytelling, whether it be fiction that is read or digital stories that are seen, can lead to an increase in empathy which reduces biases and promotes a more inclusive world.

9. Different Categories of Digital Stories

In a collaborative session at the Religious Education Association Conference, entitled "Embodied Digital Pedagogies for Trauma-informed Teaching and Learning in Religious Contexts", Mary Hess introduced four different kinds of digital stories: stock, concealed, resistance, and counter (Hess et al. 2021). These categories are found in The Storytelling Project Curriculum: Learning About Race and Racism through Storytelling and the Arts (Bell et al. 2008, pp. 7–9). The purpose of the collaborative session was to "address issues of trauma, race, gender and sexuality as they intersect within a religious or theological learning context" (Hess et al. 2021). The identification and application of the four different kinds of digital stories to race and racism in the United States can be very helpful for students before making their digital stories and also for gaining more tools for the critical analysis of race, racism, and religion in the United States and the important work of antiracism.

Stock stories, referring to those stories told by the dominant group, are the most public and found in mainstream institutions of government, media, and schools. They are found in historical documents and can be part of rituals and monuments. They can reveal much about the status quo view of race and racism (Hess et al. 2021; Bell et al. 2008, p. 8).

Concealed stories coexist with stock stories, but remain hidden in the shadows. These are stories told by those in the margins of society, out of view of the mainstream. They provide a critique of the mainstream stock stories and a forum for expression among those oppressed and victimized by the dominant group (Ibid., 2021 and 2008).

Resistance stories are those told by "heroes" and "sheroes", that resist and challenge the stock stories that uphold or normalize the systems of racism and injustice. These are the stories of Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the #metoo and #Black Lives Matter Movements. They can provide examples and inspiration for antiracism work (Ibid.). Can figures or scriptures from various religious traditions offer material for digital stories of resistance? Yes. The life stories of many of the religious founders offer stories of resistance, with some paying the ultimate price by being put to death, or those facing persecution and martyrdom up to the present day.

Counter-stories are new stories that capture the essence of the concealed stories, and resistance stories challenge the stock stories. They "enable new possibilities for inclusive human community". "They interrupt the status quo and work for change" (Bell et al. 2008, p. 9). Having examined these four kinds of digital stories, I can find some of these characteristics in the digital stories created by my students. In particular, the digital stories mentioned about Islamophobia as a concealed story, and the stories about colorism and immigration are stories of resistance. The introduction of these concepts will add an additional tool of critical analysis for the study of world religions to examine if, how, and when world religions promote or prevent genocide, racism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, heteronormativity, hypermasculinity, and other acts of hate within the

human community that are inflamed by the unholy alliance of religion, law, and the media and maintained through stock stories. Many of the basic teachings within the world religions offer teachings that counter the status quo and the stock stories of their day. The concept of Tikkun Olam, in Judaism, or the repair of the world, offers rich images for digital stories and also relate to the perils of a planet threatened by climate change and global warming, which threaten the survival of humanity (Dorff and Willson 2008). The document written by Pope Francis, Laudato sí, On the Care of our Common Home, is an excellent source document for digital stories within the Roman Catholic tradition on the impact of climate change and global warming (Pope Francis 2015).

Some of these different categories of digital stories and the theme sheet available in a World Religions course can be applied to other courses and give students additional ideas and ways of critically thinking about and analyzing a given topic in a course.

10. Digital Storytelling and the Promotion of Empathy

Perry Frith wrote a three-part series on storytelling, empathy, and advocacy (Frith 2015a, 2015b). She revealed studies that showed an increase in empathy towards people as a result of reading fiction. We become what we read and can be influenced by what and who we are reading about. Studies show that reading what a character is doing or smelling interacts with the motor and olfactory parts of the readers' brain, so sensory words that are read light up the same parts of the readers' brain (Frith 2015b). Frith mentions three elements for effective storytelling. She found that stories that generate empathy are stories that "transport" people, capturing their full mental and emotional attention. A story that promotes empathy leads to postsocial action and can inspire someone to help others. Effective stories that promote empathy can break down biases and foster inclusiveness (Frith 2015a). A story that increases empathy is a story that builds and increases tension or includes the dramatic arc. It is a key part of a successful digital story and the seven elements or parts: the beginning, middle, and end. In addition to the attention-grabbing nature of these moments of tension, the release of oxytocin, which is the hormone associated with empathy, is also important. It is the hormone associated with people being more compassionate, charitable, generous, and trustworthy (Ibid.).

The studies that support the promoting of empathy by works of fiction and effective storytelling, are complemented by the neuroscience research that concerns mirror neurons (Hess 2012). Just as the previous studies showed how reading fiction could promote empathy through the brain's identification with sensory words and the dramatic arc "transporting" the reader, resulting in the release of oxytocin and the increase in empathy, mirror neurons mimic and imitate what is viewed within the visual realm of media—and, for the purposes of this article, digital stories. Daniel Stern explains how watching someone reach for a glass is mirrored in the same way in the mind of the observer of the visual action. This translates into how the visual representations and storylines in digital stories can also be imprinted on the mind of the viewer and, depending on the effectiveness of the story, promote empathy. Stern explains, "In brief, the visual information received when watching another act gets mapped on to the equivalent motor representation in our own brain by the activity of these mirror neurons. It permits us to directly participate in another's actions, without having to imitate them. This 'participation' in another's mental life creates a sense of feeling/sharing with/understanding them, and in particular their intentions and feelings . . . " (Stern 2007 in Hess 2012). Why is empathy such an important feeling to develop through fiction and digital storytelling? Because psychologists believe it is the biological foundation for morality, with the help of good stories and good examples to watch and witness, along with the release of oxytocin (Gray 2014). It seems that both studies on the impact of fiction, effective storytelling, and mirror neurons that promote empathy offer further reasons to include digital stories in one's course assignments. One of the comments from a student about the digital stories mentioned how the digital stories "made me see things in a different light, we all go through storms and nobody knows unless

you tell them. Which is why it's important to be kind to one another". This statement suggests an increase in empathy for her as a result of watching the digital stories.

11. Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to encourage teachers and professors in secondary and higher education to consider incorporating a digital story assignment not only in a World Religions course but also in other religious education or religious studies courses. In a faculty for young adults and adults, the students need to move away from "content only" and seek methods that encourage them to reflect more deeply, think more profoundly, and connect their whole being to their essential identity.

Many resources, like those offered by Mercy College, can be very helpful regarding the process of making a digital story that includes the seven elements of digital stories, examples of rubrics that can be used, and how a world religion theme sheet or different categories of digital stories can help give students ideas for their own digital stories. Student feedback to the digital story assignments shows a depth of appreciation, a deeper learning about the world religions, and a deeper relationship with other students based on the personal stories that were shared in their own voices. Both undergraduate and graduate students have benefited from the digital stories, and there is no reason to believe that students taking other religion and religious education courses cannot benefit in the same way.

The benefits of using methodologies such as digital storytelling and similar formats in religious education are that they engage the highest levels of learning, according to Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, including creativity and critical thinking. In addition, methods such as digital storytelling provide an opportunity to challenge cultural norms or oppression and injustice and can increase empathy, which helps reduce biases and thereby support the creation of a more inclusive worldview.

As noted by one student's reflection on her digital story: "I felt like I had so much freedom to focus on what is important to me in my life". The more faculty and teachers are able to consider diverse pedagogies and technologies, the more students will be challenged to learn more profoundly and deeply. With each new generation of undergraduate and graduate students, this becomes increasingly true. The Millennials and Generation Z students are steeped in technology and social media. The use of digital storytelling and student reflections and comments shows us that such methodologies are going to become ever more critical for theological and religious educational content.

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