

**What, in heaven's name,
are we teaching our children?**

Religion and social inclusion in Australian public schools.

A dissertation by
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Candidate Declaration

I certify that the thesis entitled **‘What, in heaven’s name, are they teaching our children? Religion and social inclusion in Australian public schools’** and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Social Inclusion, is my own work. It is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged and has not previously been submitted as part of the requirements for a higher degree to any institution other than Macquarie University. I declare that all information sources and literature used are appropriately acknowledged. Research presented in this thesis was endorsed by the Macquarie University Ethics Committee: HE27FEB2009-D06341.

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Acknowledgements

In heaven's name grew from intrigue. I had completed a Masters in the Study of Religion and begun a Diploma of Education. I could not, however, combine my desire to teach in public education with my specialty subject. The public 'secular' system did not want religion teachers and the religious school system wanted religion taught in a rigid way. I was intrigued at the lack of middle ground. In addition, I enrolled my daughter in a public school and faced a strangely limited and discriminatory choice for religious instruction. So, I scratched away at the ground of intrigue and the seed of a thesis was planted.

Only with the nurturing support of my ever-loving husband Alex and my wise and wonderful daughter Kairo has the seed transformed. Thank you both, for your unwavering support, cups of tea, hugs, and the dining table. I am especially grateful to my parents, for the sacrifices they made, so that I could follow my love of learning. They never expected I'd still be 'getting an education' in my forties.

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Dedication

To my little spirit clock, my truth, my Kairos.
And for all our children.

Inspiration

Education is the long term solution to fanaticism.

- Colonel Christopher Kolenda, US Army (Dreazen 2008).

Frankly, if teachers, whatever their personal views, can teach Australian history, the subject of culture wars and intense division in relation to the colonisation of the continent and the character of our nation, they can teach religion. Such a curriculum might actually include the study of secularism, atheism and the rejection of religious belief as a significant part of our history and society.

- Peter Sherlock, Melbourne College of Divinity (Sherlock 2011).

It is not only very cruel to persecute in this short life those who do not think in the same way as we do, but I very much doubt if there is not an impious boldness in pronouncing them eternally damned.

- Voltaire, Treatise on Tolerance (1763).

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Abstract

Australia is both religiously diverse and inter-religiously illiterate. It shows high levels of intolerance and rejection of religious diversity but also suffers from a contradictory political position regarding multiculturalism, aiming for inclusion on the one hand, while protecting exclusive Anglo-Christian privilege on the other. Historic and continuing Christian priority in ‘secular’ public education undermines efforts to teach respect for diverse perspectives. The state’s apparent reluctance to address this dilemma contributes to polarisation of the debate, which tends to focus on ‘getting religion out’ or ‘keeping religion in’ public education. The complexities of ‘good and bad’ ways to teach religion are rarely dealt with.

The research distinguishes between two common and, importantly, different mechanisms for religion in public primary schools – segregated Religious Instruction (RI) via access privileges for authorised providers, and in-curriculum (social science) General Religions Education (GRE). It also examines non-curricular activities (such as school prayers and religious assemblies) which are often bound to school ethos. The study combines quantitative and qualitative surveys in 13 New South Wales schools to examine inclusion and exclusion of religious diversity, exploring the question: Does public primary school religion help or hinder social inclusion?

The surveys find differences between the ideological perspectives and pedagogical preferences of Christian religious volunteers, and parents and professional educators. Taking note of regional variance, the study highlights a potential link between these preferences and children’s attitudes to religious difference, suggesting that the religious identity of the school may influence the development of children’s attitudes to religious diversity. The study includes an examination of the legitimacy of religion in state education. It puts forward arguments for non-segregated secular religions and ethics education in public schools as part of the remedy for reducing intercultural ignorance and inter-religious prejudice.

Research in this field is rare. In Australia the field is increasingly controversial. This study’s contribution includes focusing attention, trialling research methods and instruments, providing insight into debates and practice, and, by raising difficult questions, suggesting both improvements to current policy and pathways to future research.

Publication Components

This thesis includes published articles, articles under review for publication, unpublished chapters, connecting preambles and chapter summaries. Published articles are reproduced here in their typeset form. The following table outlines the publication components.

Chapter	Title and focus questions	Integrated publications
Introduction	What are the processes for religion education in Australian public primary schools? What are the issues and how will the thesis examine those issues?	
One	<i>What is social inclusion?</i> What ideologies and governance models support inclusive religions education?	
Two	<i>What is secular education?</i> What does 'secular' mean in Australian religion education?	[P1] Byrne, C. 2012. 'Compulsory, free and (not) secular': the failed idea in Australian education. <i>Journal of Religious History</i> 36 (2), (in press) – accepted for publication on 22 September, 2011.
Three	<i>The hot potato of religious diversity.</i> How might inclusive religion education contribute to social cohesion and what are the obstacles to its implementation?	[P2] Byrne, C. 2009. Public School Religion Education and the 'hot potato' of religious diversity. <i>Journal of Religious Education</i> , 57(3): 26-37.
Four	<i>Freire's critical pedagogy – the challenge.</i> What is critical religion education? Is it implemented in Australia?	[P3] Byrne, C. 2011. Freirean critical pedagogy's challenge to interfaith education: What is interfaith? What is education? <i>British Journal of Religious Education</i> , 33(1): 47-60.
Five	<i>Ideology in public school religion.</i> How might ideology influence attitudes to religious diversity and approaches to the teaching of religion?	[P4] Byrne, C. 2012. Ideologies of religion and diversity in Australian public schools. <i>Multicultural Perspectives</i> – accepted for publication 28 March, 2012.
Six	<i>'Mummy Jeesis is alive! He is the King of Australia'.</i> How might religion education influence children's social identity development and their tendency to include or exclude religious others?	[P5] Byrne, C. 2012. 'Mummy Jeesis is Alive! He is the King of Australia': segregated religious instruction, child identity and exclusion. <i>British Journal of Religious Education</i> , (in press) – accepted for publication on 18 November, 2011.
Seven	<i>Inclusive religions and ethics education.</i> How are religiously plural nations approaching religion in public schools?	
Summary	Does religion in Australian public schools help or hinder social inclusion?	

Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority.
CRE/CRI	Christian Religious Education/Instruction – segregated confessional teaching of a child into Christianity. This is usually taught by volunteers but in Queensland it is sometimes taught by government teachers.
ICCOREIS	Inter-Church Consultative Commission on Religious Education in Schools (NSW).
NSWDEC	New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, previously NSWDET.
NSWDET	New South Wales Department of Education and Training, renamed NSWDEC in 2011.
NSCP	National School Chaplaincy Program. Persons funded by this Federal program are able to deliver RI (SRI/SRE/scripture) in public schools in addition to their chaplaincy duties if they are approved by the RI provider.
RI	Religious Instruction – segregated confessional teaching of a child into an ‘approved religious persuasion’, taught by volunteers or church employees. The same as SRI (or in NSW, SRE/’scripture’). This research focuses on NSW, where nomenclature is problematic. I will use RI as the congruent form and (SRE) as the incongruent (bracketed) form, except in quotations.
SRI	Special Religious Instruction – segregated confessional teaching of a child into an ‘approved religious persuasion’, taught by volunteers or church employees. The same as RI (or in NSW, SRE/’scripture’).
SRE	Special Religious Education – segregated confessional teaching of a child into an ‘approved religious persuasion’, taught by volunteers or church employees. This is more correctly understood to be RI and is also called ‘scripture’ in NSW schools.
RE	Religion(s) (or Religious) Education – the international nomenclature for an inclusive approach to teaching ‘about’ religion and non-religious world views (by exploring descriptive components such as ethics, rituals, beliefs and history) and ‘from’ religion by reflexively examining meaning applied to one’s own life. This approach is used in varying degrees in England, Sweden, Norway, Scotland and Quebec. It is also referred to as ‘secular RE’ (Braaten 2009) and ‘integrative RE’ (Alberts 2007). It should not to be confused with terminology in some Australian religious schools which refer to Christian catechism (a type of RI) as ‘RE’.

Prologue

To begin, a message from the NSW Department of Education on the appropriate way for public school students to celebrate Education Week:

Loving God, we pray today that we can learn more about your Son Jesus as we read the Bible and hear about how much you love us all. Give us new insights into what it means to care for others, to treat them fairly and properly, especially those who have different ways of thinking, behaving and speaking. Help us to learn to love as Jesus does. Amen (NSWDET Education Week Order of Service 2010, 3).

This prayer encapsulates many issues regarding the present treatment of religion in Australian public education. It highlights the central, privileged position of Christianity (among other Australian faiths and beliefs). It shows how a religious perspective can be promoted at the expense of a secular one within a notionally secular system. It also illustrates the illogic of policy that claims to be neutral but is not equitable. If a state agency acknowledges, and even prays for ‘those who have different ways’, does it avoid accusations of discrimination? The same Order of Service document urges students to ‘learn what is right’, since this will make our society ‘good’ and ‘fair’ (2).

An ostensibly multi-faith Order of Service document was produced for the first time in 2010. Nevertheless, it was also Christian focused. In 2011, the Order of Service (which is Christian, but simply called ‘Order of Service, creating the future’) included the prayer: ‘Merciful God... help us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus ... Give us the courage to know how to listen and obey you’ (NSWDEC 2011a, 4). The alternative ‘Multifaith’ Order of Service asked students to reflect on the ‘benefits of following God’s Law’ (NSWDEC 2011b, 1). Apparently state education perceives a need to divide students into faith groups for Education Week and shows little concern for those without religious beliefs.

This thesis will examine religion in New South Wales public primary schools. It will raise questions about what is ‘right’, ‘good’ and ‘fair’ regarding the provision of religion in Australian public education.

Introduction

This introductory chapter provides a snapshot of the thesis context and content. The chapter gives details about the current mechanisms that enable the delivery of various types of religion teaching in New South Wales public schooling. It examines the broader social issues surrounding current debates regarding religion in secular education. The chapter explores elements of religion education policy and questions the adequacies of those policies in a religiously diverse society. The chapter also provides a brief introduction to the theoretical frameworks and methodology which guided the study. An overview of the structure provides details of the thesis components, including chapters which are published or submitted for publication.

The importance of this research

We quite sympathise with the determination of these colonies ... that there should not be an influx of people alien in civilisation, alien in religion, alien in customs (Chamberlain 1897).¹

Despite the efforts of early colonisers, Australia is a culturally and religiously diverse nation (Bouma 2006). During the late twentieth century, it was viewed as a successful model of multiculturalism. However, during the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, Australian political leaders claimed Christianity as the basis for shared national values and a Christianised nationalism emerged (Maddox 2005). Australia appears to hold an inconsistent position regarding cultural and religious difference – aiming for welcoming inclusion on the one hand, while protecting hierarchical Anglo-Christian privilege on the other. This contradiction is highlighted by different findings in research into Australian attitudes towards diversity and multiculturalism.

According to the 2010 Scanlon–Monash *Mapping Social Cohesion* report, ‘a consistent finding of surveys conducted in Australia over the last 30 years ... is that levels of intolerance and rejection of cultural diversity can reach 40–45 percent of respondents’ (Markus 2010, 41). This survey finds that a ‘core intolerant’ 10 percent of Australians ‘hold strongly negative views on issues related to a diverse immigration intake and multiculturalism (Markus 2010,

¹ Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain’s speech to the Colonial Conference, 1897. *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*. (Eds) J. Holland Rose et al. Vol. VII: Part 1: Australia 1933, 411.

41). This compares with 4 percent in the USA and 3 percent in Sweden. The survey noted ‘rising levels of mistrust and experience of discrimination’ (1), increased negativity towards the possible benefits of immigration, and a majority (53 percent) who believe ‘it is important that the main religion in Australia continues to be Christianity’ (35).

The 2011 Scanlon–Monash *Mapping Social Cohesion* report noted that in some geographical regions (outside of capital cities and in the large, less populous, mining states of Queensland and Western Australia) and among those aged over 55, ‘even higher levels of intolerance are registered’ (Markus 2011, 48). Markus noted, as a ‘finding of concern’, that there are significantly more people who consider that ‘the level of racial prejudice in Australia is more today than it was five years ago’ than those who consider that it is less (2011, 48).

Other research supports this data but other researchers paint a more nuanced picture. For example, *Challenging Racism*, a research project of the University of Western Sydney, found that although 41 percent of Australians have a ‘narrow view of who belongs in Australia’ (Dunn 2008, 2), only one in 10 outwardly express racist views, as opposed to one in three in Europe (Dunn 2011a). As lead researcher on the project, Dunn claimed that results were ‘promising but contradictory ... one-third of Australians supported (both) multiculturalism and assimilation at the same time’ (2011b, 4). Dunn argued that Australia is one of the more tolerant nations in the world; 86 percent of Australians believe it is ‘a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures’ (2011a, 8). Dunn claimed that ‘separatists and supremacists are a destructive vocal minority’, and that ‘the silent majority of Australians are open-minded and accepting’ of diversity. Dunn noted the importance of political leadership, since ‘social norms are considerably powerful and can legitimise poor attitudes’ (2011a, 8).

Earlier, Turner noted that the political contradiction between a nation’s desire to maintain homogenous unity, and its economic need for intercultural exchange, produces a ‘binary division between insiders and outsiders ... aliens and citizens’ (2007a, 411). Turner warned that ‘where nationalism becomes caught up with religion ... it makes the creation of an inclusive community especially difficult to achieve’ (2009, 72). Turner argued that social inclusion relies on policy enabling the overlapping of and interaction between social groups. He theorised that a contemporary emphasis on security (in Australia and globally) through a constructed and homogenised unity, and an ‘enclave’ mentality of surveillance, border control

and ‘managing (as opposed to encouraging) multiculturalism’ (2007b, 125), makes inclusion (through recognising national membership of Muslims for example) ‘an unlikely policy option’ (2008, 1).

Turner further states that a policy emphasis on segregation, supporting a mosaic of ‘separate and sequestered communities’ (2007b, 127) is associated with the development of fundamentalist, evangelical religious groups. Although religious identity can be transnational, when religion becomes entwined with national identity, social policy regarding inclusion becomes conflicted. To address this, Turner argued that plural societies must embrace the liberal tenets of ‘tolerance, multiculturalism, reflexivity, self irony, the rule of law and cosmopolitanism ... to sustain social peace’ (2009, 416).

Australia’s apparent contradiction in this regard raises questions about how religious difference is dealt with in public education. Religious complexity in plural societies raises new challenges by increasing interactions across cultural boundaries. This complexity requires both an understanding of (and openness to) others with different religious histories, practices and values. Australia has not taken the route that some other western plural democracies have urged (see Chapter Seven) towards general education about world religions, ethics and beliefs. Rather, Australian political institutions stress a Christian heritage and its education policies prioritise segregated instruction, largely Christian.

Alongside, and possibly related to, Australia’s problem of cultural prejudice, is the problem of ignorance. Australia is religiously illiterate (Rymarz 2007; Cahill et al. 2004; Flynn 1993). Loria (2006) pointed out that the average Australian public school student cannot distinguish between the Buddha and an ayatollah (citing Crotty and O’Donoghue 2003), that ‘Jesus Christ’ is known mostly as a profanity (citing Zwartz 2003), and that most teenagers are generally unaware of the story or significance of Good Friday (citing Atkinson 2005). Stereotypical views, often developed through media misrepresentation, negatively construct the ‘Muslim other’ for many young people as ‘un-Australian’ (Maher 2009).

Inter-religious illiteracy may relate to a generally low level of political knowledge and intercultural civic engagement in young Australians, measured by researchers during the 1990s. For example, Krinks (1999) noted that civics education programs in the late 1990s aimed to address ‘low levels of knowledge about, and interest in’, politics, democratic values and civic responsibility amongst young Australians. Hahn also found that Australian students ‘exhibited low levels of political interest, efficacy, trust, and civic tolerance’ (2010, 13).

In early colonial debates regarding religion in public education, it was argued that such ‘ignorance of the common people ... is the greatest danger to our peace and security’ (Dillon 1879, 357). This sense of security relied, not on exclusion, or paternal management of difference, but on a unity deeper than a perceived religious common which was frequently fractured. In an 1867 Victorian parliamentary debate, for example, it was argued that:

Nothing can be more fatal to the true interests of this community than ... the conviction that we are ... divided ... having different instincts, sentiments and sympathies in matters of religion ... So long as you sanction in the slightest degree ... the teaching of the youth of this country that there are bounds that separate them and principles that divide them, you will have a community but not ... a united community – the fit germ of a nation (Gregory 1973, 116).

Similarly, an exemplar editorial of the time noted that:

Early friendships exercise a strong influence upon later life ... children of different denominations ... [ought to be] educated together. Separate them – teach them that they do not belong to one another and have no sympathies in common – and you engender a feeling of hostility which the firebrands ... will afterwards readily exasperate [sic] into the bitterest hatred (*The Argus*, 29 March 1855).

Such inclusive liberal sentiment was not evidenced by the federated nation’s first legislative Act, the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, often referred to as the ‘White Australia Policy’ (WAP). This Act laid the foundation for what became Australians’ continuing unease with religious and cultural ‘otherness’, contributing to the exclusively White-Anglo-Christian claim to national identity. While the intention of the WAP was racial purity, not religious hegemony, early census data shows that prior to its introduction, the proportion of New South Wales in the combined category of ‘Buddhist, Confucian, Mahometan’ was higher in 1871, at 1.5 percent, than immediately after WAP repatriations of Chinese and Japanese immigrants. In 1901 this proportion reduced to 0.5 percent (Coghlan 1902). Numbers of Buddhist and Muslim Australians would presumably have continued to rise had the WAP not been introduced. Today, unease with cultural otherness occasionally emerges as religiously focused xenophobia.

Exclusion – an incident and a position

The following incident illustrates the potential for conflict when particular notions of national identity are accompanied by demands for particular approaches to religion in education. Prior to the 2007 federal election, an application by the Australian Quranic Society for the development of an Islamic school in Camden, in rural western Sydney, initiated extreme protest reactions from local residents. This included the anonymous staking of pig heads and an Australian flag on the proposed Muslim school site (Ramachandran 2007). Supporting the protesters, conservative political identity Pauline Hanson (infamously remembered for her anti-Asian speech in parliament), visited Camden in her campaign for a federal Senate seat. She called for ‘a moratorium on any further Muslim immigration, because they are incompatible with our way of life’ (Kinsella 2007a, 1).

A Camden residents’ group member dressed for the protest meeting in green and yellow ‘Australiana’ and an Australian-style bush hat strung with Australian flags. It was a clear claim to national identity. The protester claimed that residents ‘just don’t want [Muslims] in Camden ... we don’t want them in Australia. They’re an oppressive society, they’re a dictatorship’ (Agence France-Presse 2008, 1). The protester argued that Muslim children should ‘attend our schools, so their children can grow up with our values’ (Murphy 2008, 1). In previous years, much media attention was given to an exploration of those values, often described by political and community leaders, as ‘Christian values’.

The Camden area has several Christian schools as well as government (public) schools. A few months after the Muslim school was rejected, the same residents’ group welcomed a plan for a Catholic school on the basis that ‘Catholics are part of our community’ (Creagh 2008). An appeal by the Quranic Society to the New South Wales Land and Environment Court upheld the council’s decision to reject the Islamic school development, partly on the grounds that it would be ‘out of keeping’ with Camden’s ‘character and heritage’ (Maddox 2011b, 173). The implication here is that: Muslims are not included in some people’s ideas of Australian society; that ‘our values’ are Christian; and that this national religious affiliation should be part of the public school’s agenda. This sentiment was fuelled by a decade of anti-multicultural policies and divisive immigration debates under the former Liberal Party (conservative) government and former Liberal Party Prime Minister, John Howard (Maddox 2005).

The Opposition foreign affairs spokesperson at the time of the Camden protests, Kevin Rudd (the future Prime Minister of a Labor government), labeled himself a ‘Christian socialist’ (ABC 2005, 2006). Later, when positioning for party leadership, he ditched half the tag, calling socialism an ‘arcane, 19th-century’ doctrine and arguing that he was ‘not a socialist’ and had ‘never been a socialist’ (Gordon and Grattan 2006), but he retained the Christian label. In the run-up to the 2007 federal election, along with Howard, Rudd attended an Australian Christian Lobby event, streamed live to more than 700 venues including the Pentecostal mega-church Hillsong, to explain the Christian elements of his proposed policies (ABC 2007). For this, according to the tabloid *The Daily Telegraph*, he obtained the ‘blessing’ of the mega-church’s leader, who ‘praised’ Rudd’s ‘Christian values’ (McIlveen 2007). The tabloid claimed that such values were ‘important in key marginal Sydney seats’. This sentiment possibly referred to the previous federal election, in which Labor lost a north-west Sydney parliamentary seat to a Hillsong church member.

Although Maddox (2005 and 2011, 2011a) and Smith (2010) have shown that there is no evidence of a Christian voting bloc, some members of Rudd’s Labor Cabinet suggested that churches such as Hillsong are becoming ‘increasingly strong’ and that ‘it is important for us to outreach to those dynamic churches’ (Higgins 2006). This phenomena of ‘newly religious public personae [of political leaders]’ (Maddox 2009, 357) contrasts with Australia’s earlier aversion to mixing religion with politics. Vocal about his liberal Christianity, Rudd asserted that God was not politically aligned with conservatism (ABC 2005) and did much to declare and promote his Christian credentials.

In addition to participating in the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, Rudd was the only politically progressive member of an exclusive ‘Monday night’ federal parliamentary prayer group (Maddox 2001, 127). In his essay on World War II activist theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudd admired a ‘muscular Christianity’. Although he argued that such a perspective ‘must always take the side of the marginalised, the vulnerable and the oppressed’ (Rudd 2006), these finer philosophical points may have gone largely unheard. What appeared to matter was that Rudd was a committed Christian. After his election at the end of 2007, Rudd continued to participate in weekly media appearances on the doorstep of his Anglican church.

The day before being elected Prime Minister, Rudd opposed the Camden Muslim school development, claiming ‘inadequacy of local infrastructure’ (Kinsella 2007b). After the local council rejected the development application, the then federal Education Minister, Julia Gillard, supported the council’s decision. Soon after his election, photographs of Prime Minister Rudd welcoming Catholic Church leaders and a Catholic World Youth Day cross and icon to Parliament House appeared in major daily news outlets (ABC 2008). While it could be argued that this event promised economic returns, no other religious tradition is offered such high-profile political recognition.

In November 2009, Rudd delivered the keynote address to the Australian Christian Lobby national conference and announced a \$42 million extension of funding for a controversial National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP), sponsoring chaplains into state schools. He claimed the secular principle is ‘alive and well’, since the ‘dividing line’ between church and state, to ensure religious views are not imposed by the state, is ‘rescued by choice’ [since] ... schools can choose the denomination and faith of the chaplains’ (Marr 2010, 65). In an email to the author on October 26, 2010, the NSCP Senior Program Manager Cameron Day revealed that 98 percent of NSCP chaplains were Christian and the majority of those were evangelical Protestants. A total of 45 chaplains across the entire country represented all non-Christian religious traditions – a proportion of 1.6 percent. This is concerning when compared to the national census figures (ABS 2006) which show that 37 percent of Australians do not identify with the Christian faith.

The government funded NSCP effectively replaces church funded programs, which, in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, enabled church-paid religious instructors into public schools. New South Wales has had church-paid RI since the 1980s. Such programs were heavily promoted by the evangelical Scripture Union prior to the federal government’s chaplaincy initiative (ICCOREIS 2005).

The benefits of a public school having a paid religious instructor are outlined in the document *Guidelines for Joint Denominational SRE Employment Boards*, developed for New South Wales by ICCOREIS – the Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (ICCOREIS 2010a, version 2.2). The 2010 version of the document noted that such a formal, financial arrangement made it possible for religious instructors to:

form long-term relationships with students, and become a ‘fixture’ in the school ... [religious instructors] are then in a position to act, not only as SRE teachers, but as volunteers responsible to and supervised by the principal, to take on extra-curricular activities, invite local church youth ministers to lessons or events, attend camps and engage generally with school activities. Access to the school may become full-time rather than once per week (ICCOREIS 2010a, 2-5).

The *New South Wales Education Act 1990* outlaws ‘dogmatic theology’ – the teaching of doctrine – and federal legislation regarding chaplaincy outlaws ‘proselytising’. However, the document that traces the connection between these two school religion programs (RI and chaplaincy), and which outlines arrangements for paid RI teachers, includes in its rationale a ‘vision for Christian education in government schools’ based on ‘Our Lord’s final command: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’ (2-1). It urges local congregations and churches to ‘own the ministry ... like a mission organisation’ (2-5). It notes that ‘A whole-school approach means that more students are reached than would otherwise be the case’ (2-8), an acknowledgment that the program targets students who might ‘otherwise’ not be receiving ministry – such as students who have already opted out of RI. Of some concern is the statement that ‘some schools include RI (SRE) in the reporting system, enabling (paid missionaries) to give positive feedback to students and parents on report cards’ (2-7). One can only hope that feedback for children of atheists, or of any family with a conscientious objection to evangelism in public schools, might be equally positive.

The paid RI program effectively gives financially equipped (mostly Christian) churches permanent outreach opportunities in public schools. The document notes that the establishment of paid religious instructors creates ‘greater opportunity to take ‘the church’ to students ... provides a much broader platform for the church to witness ... expand(s) church-based ministry to children and ... (that) opportunities for links to extra-curricular activities become simple to arrange’ (2-8). State-based paid RI programs, as outlined in the ICCOREIS document, neatly transformed into conservative Prime Minister John Howard’s *National School Chaplaincy Program*. What was once a local, religious volunteer access program of 30 minutes a week, is now a national, government funded, mostly Christian labor-force, permanently on a mission in public schools.

While Rudd's funding for the NSCP was significantly less than Howard's original expenditure – \$165 million in the first three years (NSCA 2011) – and while it included a requirement for a review, examples of Rudd's pro-Christian activity, like Howard before him, show support for Christianity over and above other Australian religious and non-religious traditions.

Rudd's successor, Prime Minister Julia Gillard, continued this inequitable treatment and embodied Turner's including-excluding contradiction by modelling liberal tolerance while supporting Christian privilege. A self-proclaimed atheist, she noted that 'for people of faith ... the greatest compliment I could pay ... is to respect their genuinely held beliefs and not to engage in some pretence about mine' (Gillard 2010a); and that 'you can be a person of strong principle and values from a variety of perspectives' (Kelly 2010). Contrarily, she claimed that Western literature is incomprehensible to those without Bible knowledge (Maley 2011a) and she supported funding projects that privilege Christianity. This included funding faith schools which are more than 90 percent Christian (Buckingham 2010), giving \$1.5 million to support the Catholic celebration of Mary Mackillop's canonisation (ALP 2010) and granting \$222 million for the expansion of the almost exclusively Christian National School Chaplaincy Program (Garrett 2011) – pre-empting Rudd's promised review.

In a lecture on public education, retired High Court judge Michael Kirby commented that:

The result of the bidding war for support from minority religious groups in marginal seats has been the appropriation, actual or promised, of \$429.8 million over the period 2007-2014. By any account, this is an extremely large, indeed astonishing, vote for chaplains both in public and private schools in Australia (2011, 14).

This comment hints at a 'disconnect', a cognitive dissonance, resulting from the suspicion that although Australia has a nominal Christian majority, the lobbying power of this religious tradition appears to be disproportional. Until the establishment of the chaplaincy program, requirements for funding religious activity in public schools were met by religious organisations. The fact that massive funds are now drawn from the public purse for religious activity, in an ostensibly secular education system, seems incongruous. Additional large funds are assigned, in some states, to school-based religious activities which are, according to Kirby, committed to securing converts 'by new and vigorous means' (15). The question of why

Australia's Christian Lobby is apparently so powerful, and quietly obtains significant educational privileges is, though touched on by Maddox (2011a), rarely publicly examined.

In 2011 Prime Minister Gillard met the Australian Christian Lobby and other Christian Church leaders to hear their views on various issues. Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, emphasised the potential for a Christian voting bloc by suggesting to the prime minister that 'Christians are the largest single community-group in Australia' (Benson 2011). As mentioned, Maddox (2005 and 2011, 2011a) and Smith (2010) question the existence of such a bloc. However, it appears that populism still threatens pluralism with the notion that majority justifies privilege.

Australia's current conservative Opposition is even more emphatic in the desire for unified national (and religious) identity. Singular religious affiliation becomes enmeshed with immigration debates, as comments from the conservative side of politics occasionally echo sentiment from the WAP-era. For example, in February 2011, the federal Liberal party Opposition leader Tony Abbott proposed ending overseas development aid for an Indonesian Muslim school building program (Abbott 2011) and a federal Liberal party parliamentarian called for a '10-year moratorium on Muslim immigration' (Taylor 2011). Two weeks later, Abbott supported aid for New Zealand's earthquake recovery because New Zealanders are 'family ... not foreigners' (Australian parliamentary debates 2011, 1162).

Australia's approach to navigating insider-outsider boundaries is reflected in education policy and practice, as school room micro-interactions encapsulate the shift, from a white, Anglo-Celtic, Christian society, to a nation of multiple cultures and beliefs. Prime Minister Gillard spoke of the power of education to temper the tension: 'During a time of challenging global trends and demographic shifts ... education policy will play a key role' (Gillard 2010b). This key role of education is worthy of consideration at a time when religious extremism is becoming more common and Christian evangelism has gained a significant foothold in government agencies elsewhere in the world (Quinn 2011).

In his critiques of right-wing Christian influence in the public sphere in the United States, social commentator Joe Bageant (2007) warned of the growing incursion of evangelism in schools. One example of Bageant's predictions manifesting, was the taking over of the Texan Board of Education by Christian evangelicals in 2010. The new Christian board updated curriculum documents to: deemphasize the role of Thomas Jefferson (who

favoured church-state separation); swap the study of Newton for an examination of scientific advancement through military technology; and remove references to slavery by renaming it 'Atlantic triangular trade' (McGreal 2010). Accompanying this shift is a renewed call for studying biblical creationism alongside evolution in science classes. The shift raises concerns that reach beyond the state borders of Texas, since the Texan education board has significant power with publishers who provide text books for other states.

Bageant (2007) noted that politicians are aware of the liberalising effect of education on society and that conservative leaders are assisting passive anti-intellectualism by supporting Christian churches running fundamentalist schools, and by seeking avenues for these churches to evangelise in public schools. He viewed this effort as 'a terrible and silent crisis', noting that 'working class passivity, antipathy to intellect and belligerence toward the outside world start early' (33–34).

Bageant argued that 'one of the most significant yet least understood political events in America is the conversion of millions of people from apolitical Christians into Christian political activists' (2007, 188). Bageant expressed concern that the social divisiveness of evangelism in schooling is 'always about fearing and, in the worst cases, hating 'the other'' (92). He argued that 'cultish fundamentalist churches ... see the larger secular society as its persecutor' and 'aim to place ever-increasing numbers of believers in positions of governmental influence' (172). Increasing evangelism in some Australian public schools has been outlined by Wilson (2010) and Kirby (2011). The Camden protests and the Christian-centric position of leaders from both sides of politics do not auger well. It remains to be seen whether Australian educators heed Bageant's (2007) and Quinn's (2011) warnings.

Religion in public education – legitimacy

One leading figure in international debates about religion in education, Professor Robert Jackson², in a presentation to the Mater Dei Institute of Education in Dublin, outlined intrinsic and instrumental reasons for the inclusion of education about religions in state schools (2011). Jackson's 'intrinsic' arguments referred to the need for a liberal education to cover all distinctive areas of human experience – all 'forms of knowledge' (Hirst 1974) and 'realms of meaning' (Phenix 1986). As 'instrumental' arguments, Jackson described: the intercultural

² Jackson's 'interpretive approach' to the study of religions is outlined in Chapter Seven.

need for knowledge and understanding; the democratic need for tolerance and both religious and non-religious freedom; the social need for cohesion and inclusion; and the need for individual personal growth and development. In a modern argument tied to the events of September 11, 2001, Jackson also noted the various dimensions (political-military, human, environmental and economic) of the need for security. Jackson highlighted the potential for education about religions to contribute to local, national and global security. These ideas will be further developed in Chapter Seven.

A far less modern, but no less valid argument for religion in public education might be found in the connection between the Latin and Greek root verbs of religion (*relegare*, *relegere* and *religare*) and their educational interpretations. Australia does not define ‘religion’ in legislation or education policy. Most dictionaries reduce the term to a simplified one that relates religion to God, divinity and the supernatural or spiritual. Taylor argued that ‘There is no consensus ... about what the word [religion] means’ (Taylor 2007, 9). The Oxford English Dictionary casts doubt on any agreed etymology for religion.

The argument that Humanism is ‘not a religion’ has been used in Australia to block applications by Humanists wishing to be included in mechanisms that allow groups with particular world views and beliefs to teach their children. During the 1980s and 90s, the New South Wales Education Department required that applicants wishing to deliver religious instruction in particular beliefs in public schools could demonstrate:

‘belief in immanence or transcendence; a recognition of a Being or beings, of a power or powers, beyond the human dimension, of an ultimate goal or purpose, possessing the absolute right to make exclusive demands on the believers and evoking, by nature, a response of commitment which includes the element of worship’ (Rawlinson 1980, section 6.12).

This requirement was removed from policy in the late 1990s to accommodate some Buddhist perspectives whose adherents professed no such beliefs and did not practice worship.

In an exploration of the etymology of religion, Hoyt claimed that ‘religion is akin to diligence and opposed to negligence’ (1912, 128). This claim provides a connection between religion and education. According to Hoyt, the earliest documentation of the source of the word ‘religion’ was made by Cicero in his 45 BCE philosophical treatise *De Natura Deorum*

(*On the Nature of the Gods*). Cicero derived *religio* from *relegare*, meaning ‘to go through or over again, in reading, speech or thought’ (Hoyt 1912, 127). Cicero thus related religion to the reflective element in the educative process. For Cicero, religion involved a double-checking, perhaps the weighing up of ethical principles and personal epistemology (or meaning making) as a way to close the loop in education’s outward and inward journey of discovery.

This reflective nature of religion (as a preventative against ignorance) was understood by Australia’s early legislators. For example, commenting on the historic New South Wales Public Instruction Bill, Parliamentarian Henry Cohen reminded the legislative assembly that: ‘Religion (*religere religens*) means reflective, scrupulous ... [and that] he who is warily observant of duty and cautious of accidental wrongdoing has the essence of religion’ (Cohen 1879, 447). Peck (1898) also reinforced the connection between religion and education by highlighting the relationship between *relegere*’s ‘*legere*’ and ‘lecture’. In this way, religion (‘re-lecture’) involves re-sorting and selecting information in preparation, for example, to present a position in an argument or debate. According to Hoyt (1912) the Roman grammarian Aulus Gellius supported this derivation in the second century.

This reflective (as educative) idea is akin to modern education philosopher Paulo Freire’s ‘epistemological encircling’ (meaning-making by repetitive revisiting without arriving at absolute answers) (1997, 92). Freire was driven to seek knowledge through continual questioning. His critical education pedagogy will be explored in Chapter Four.

Legare is related to the Greek *alegein*, ‘to heed’, to have conscientious scruple about (Hoyt 1912, 127). In the conversion to Latin, this word is associated with the verb *religare* ‘to bind anew’. This association points to an obligation to reconsider. In support of this derivation, Curtius quoted Homer’s 800 BC epic *The Iliad*, in which Achilles reconsiders and ‘takes heed’ of prophecy (Hoyt, 127). The connection between *legere* and *legare* was acknowledged by Conington (1876) since both these words shorten to the root *lego* which involves both inward and outward exploration. On the one hand, *lego* means ‘to send out ... as an ambassador ... (to) dispatch’. At the same time *lego* also means ‘to bring together, gather, collect’.

This notion echoes Freire’s accordion style education philosophy, which aims to continually breathe fresh perspective into rational reasoning and logical conclusions. A critical approach to religions and ethics education may involve such a two-way journeying, out (to

discover information), and back (to reflect upon personal and social meaning). It is in this reflexive process, outlined in detail in Robert Jackson's (1997) *interpretive approach* to religion education (see Chapter Seven), where students' discoveries are comprehended, consolidated and made relevant. In critical secular ethics education, individual reflection provides a student with the foundation to take a position on an issue and provide moral reasons in an argument.

In Walde's Latin dictionary (1906, 176 and 330), religion is associated with choice – the process of selecting. Hoyt's view was that religion was more strongly associated with *relegere* than *religare*, more about selecting information than binding to obligatory relationships (for example between humans and their deities). If we accept that, as Chidester (2005) argued, 'religio' has its roots in 'religāre' – 'to re-bind', then 'we should continually refine and revise our understanding of the term for purposes and contexts' (Tweed 2006, 39). Taylor (2007) argued that this etymological recognition 'creates an open field ... [for] 'creative and plural construction' of, and contention regarding the term religion, its requirements for theistic foundations and its legitimate place in the state school. Taylor argued that 'our inability to resolve to everyone's satisfaction the definition of religion should be viewed positively' (12).

Using these etymological arguments, it seems unnecessary for people to be believers in supernatural beings for a study of religions (and their ethical and cosmological frameworks) to be an appropriate lens through which to view self and others and so, to learn. So it follows, that it is not necessary for Humanist and other non-theistic systems of belief or world view perspectives to be excluded from state school mechanisms which use 'religion' as a criterion for participation. Thus, it is also possible that education might rethink, and to some extent reclaim the pedagogical domain of religion. As Willaime noted, Christianity is no longer perceived as the central aim of schooling and RE has become 'more a school project than a church project' (2007, 60). Religion then, as a process of reflective selection, entails a search for and an application of purpose in the outward process of education. As students, we might 'bind' ourselves with a sense of ethical obligation to what we discover, and also to how we use those discoveries. In this way, education becomes an ethical and, in the broadest sense of the term, 'religious' endeavour.

Religion in public education – controversy

Religion in Australian public schools has emerged as a contentious issue in the twenty-first century. In New South Wales, a hotly contested *Education Amendment (Ethics) Bill* 2010 enabled, for the first time, a secular ethics alternative to segregated Religious Instruction (RI) in public primary schools. In Victoria, a legal challenge to Christian default privileges in RI, and alleged discriminatory government funding of an evangelical RI provider, resulted in changes to policy (Victorian DEECD, 2011). At the federal level, a High Court challenge from a concerned parent, ombudsmen's reports of 'poor management' (Richards 2010, Asher 2011), and lobbying from academics (Zwartz 2011) and secular organisations (ASL 2010) pressured the government to make changes to its National School Chaplaincy Program (Garrett 2011).

Inclusive-exclusive tensions are exacerbated by modern media's desire for, and focus on, conflict (Lester, 2011). Lester theorised that the ever-present message of insider-outsider tension creates the belief that accommodating both religious minorities and Christian conservatives in public policy is 'too controversial or impossible practically' (2011, 4). Australian media shows some support for a broad-based approach to comparative education about the world's religions in public schools (Topsfield 2011a; Zwartz 2011; Harvey 2010). However, adversarial articles dwell on potential conflict (Topsfield 2011b) and over-simplify the issue to one of polemical support for, or objection to, religion in schools. This simplification confuses different types of teaching and assumes that all education regarding religion is akin to indoctrination. Australian media presents little or no complexity.

For example, *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne reported accusations of proselytizing by a Christian group which provides chaplains and RI in Victorian public schools (Topsfield 2011c). The article included a simplistic 'yes' or 'no' reader poll asking the question of whether 'religion in schools programs' should be supported. Dispassionate examination of the issues and nuanced exploration of various types of religion teaching programs seems to be missing in Australian public debate. Rather, polarised views from the fervently religious and the equally fundamentalist (perhaps reactionary, perhaps atheist) church-state separatists warp the discussion into a battle between extremes. As a result, many parents and educators self-censor into silence rather than risk association with either of the warring factions.

Meanwhile, incidents of proselytizing, promoting biblical literalism, Christian privileging and lack of accountability are left unaddressed (Byrne 2009, 2010, 2011). It seems that the more Christian privilege is ignored, the more strident the anti-religious voice becomes, boosting a more fervent (mostly Christian) defensive claim to privilege. Australian media coverage of this polemic tends to argue either that ‘religion belongs in church, not schools’, or ‘we’ll all be ruined without God’. The public arena then becomes weighted with simplistic shouting, drowning out the moderate voices and the more complex dialogue.

This polarising effect of mainstream media thus contributes to a lack of middle ground, with neither side being shown to listen to, or to understand the other. As in any playground conflict, words and actions are sometimes distorted. The protagonists then resort to a caricatured role-play, scripted not by deep thinking, but desperation to be heard and understood. For example, in a 2010 public debate about whether ethics should be offered as an alternative to religious instruction, a specialist religion broadcaster for the affirmative team argued that the ‘champions of the gospel are ... fragile hothouse flowers that only flourish in an artificially regulated environment’. Countering for the negative team, the director of the Australia Christian Lobby reverted to the simplistic notion that ethics without a religious foundation operates in a ‘moral vacuum’ (Harvey 2010). Earlier in the year, the Bishop leading Australia’s largest Catholic diocese delivered, as his Easter sermon, the message that ‘secularism leads to Nazism, Stalinism, mass murder and abortion’ (Maley 2010b). Letters to the editor in response to the Bishop claimed that his ‘ugly pitch was aimed at ignorant ears with the intention of inciting hate’ (Sydney Morning Herald, Letters 4 April, 2010). The ensuing exchange was described in one national daily as a ‘propaganda war’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 15 April 2010).

This histrionic dynamic fuels the educator’s concern about explosive division and so, religion (as policy and classroom content) is avoided, or at least kept at arm’s length. Many politicians, educators and bureaucrats balk at the very word ‘religion’. As a trainee teacher, I enquired about teaching the Board of Studies approved senior elective ‘Studies of Religion’ (SOR) in New South Wales schools. In a phone conversation and several email exchanges with a representative of the New South Wales Teachers’ Institute, I was informed that ‘religion is not taught in public schools’ and that ‘teachers aren’t paid to teach it’. Further enquiry with the organisation established that there *are* paid teachers in New South Wales

who teach the SOR course but that some members of the Teachers' Institute confuse 'Studies of Religion' with 'Religious Instruction' (which government teachers are not able to teach). Religion is not considered a specialty subject and thus a teacher will not be hired if religion is their primary subject area. In addition, the same information exchange revealed that the New South Wales senior course 'Society and Culture' (in which religion is a significant area of study) is 'being wound down'. Conversations with trainee teachers in various education institutions confirmed that religion as a possible subject area is generally 'talked down'.

'Studies of Religion' was the fifth most popular subject (by student enrolments) during the New South Wales matriculation Higher School Certificate in 2009 and the sixth most popular subject during 2010 (Board of Studies 2010). Despite its popularity, with more enrolments than history, economics, chemistry and art, religion is not a teaching major (unlike history, economics, chemistry, art). Within the bureaucracy, the subject is given minimal support – possibly reflecting earlier anti-religious sentiment, when even the word 'religion' was removed from syllabus documents (Lovat 1989).

With such a problematic dynamic for religion in the public domain, the challenge appears to be in establishing a different discourse, one in which critical education about the various religions of the world and of Australian communities, is understood to be of some benefit. I suspect that until religious leaders (preferably Christian) acknowledge and address historic and current privilege, and until the mislabelled 'secularists' in education defend against an extreme atheist push, the voice from the middle ground won't be heard. This thesis is an attempt to mark out potential middle ground, and to explore the sociological complexities of different approaches to teaching religion in public schools.

This thesis examines the possibility of several principles acting as a grounding fulcrum for the 'see-saw'³ controversy of school religion. Such principles may help to balance the arguments in a rethink of how religion might be approached in public education, with the aim of a less divisive discourse. These principles envisage an education that is: inclusive; secular; plural; critical; de-segregated; and intercultural. They offer a means of anchoring and mediating the debate and are examined in detail in the following chapters.

³ A 'see-saw' is a playground lever, also known as a 'teeter-totter'.

In Chapter Seven, I propose that a professional, secular general religions and ethics education program, that links the battling sides, is both possible and desirable. This grounded middle provides a position between the ‘religionist-atheist’ extremes and enables a space for the positive contribution of religion to public schooling. It is a hopeful flanking tactic, an effort to entice each mob to be less wary of the other and rather, to stake out and legitimise mutual ground. This is an effort to move away from the unedifying see-saw scuffle in the playground towards a practical, pragmatic professionalism.

Iranian Philosopher, Abdolkarim Soroush’s theory of the evolution of religion claims that religion is a living, social force (Sadri & Sadri, 2000). He argued that religion in society cycles in a pendulum of progressive liberal expansion and reactive conservative contraction. Like breathing, this movement happens with or without conscious intervention. This view presupposes immanent change in society and raises the important question of what role societies should play in shaping the way in which religion is understood, engaged with and managed in the public sphere. Without conscious exploration of such questions, Australia risks missing opportunities that may arise from such effort, and mis-managing emerging threats from religious extremism. The choice, to examine the issue consciously, or to let things roll along as they have done since school religion legislation was implemented in the 1880s, is a choice whose time has come – again. It appears that the educational issues need now to be addressed with a more nuanced debate on the role of education in religious prejudice, and on the potential of critical, secular, plural education about religions and beliefs to contribute to a more diverse, yet inclusive society.

This examination invites professional educators (religious, irreligious, and undecided) to reconsider the place of religion in education. It urges educators to populate the vacuum that currently exists in the discourse on the potential partnership of religion and ethics, to stake a claim in the field of religion education – for the sake of good education.

Controversies that have acted as obstacles to such an effort include: heated debates about Australian public funding of religious schools; a rapid increase in Australian religious (largely Christian) schools; government funding of religious teachers and chaplains in public schools; difficulties faced by Australian religious minorities in attempts to establish their own schools; and concern over extremist teaching by volunteer instructors from several different faith traditions. These controversies raise questions for Australia that have been posed by

others about religion in public education in plural societies. Jackson received global recognition for his book *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy*. In this book, Jackson asked:

Should there be some form of education in religions in schools and, if so, what should be its aims and methods? Should religious education in state-funded schools promote some kind of generic religiosity ... a national cultural identity? ... Should it, rather, concentrate on ... increasing understanding of different religious views, or should it be primarily concerned to help young people to develop their own beliefs and values? Alternatively, would it be better to take religion out of the curriculum of state schools altogether? (2004, 4)

My thesis examines Jackson's questions in the Australian primary school context. It considers Australia's conflicted commitment to cultural diversity and social inclusion, and a perceived twenty-first century political problem in multiculturalism. It proposes that some of the difficulties relating to religion in public education are the result of much earlier religious division and that the current mechanisms, designed and defined more than a century ago, are inadequate in Australia's contemporary plural society. The thesis also identifies that (in current and earlier debates) a significant influencing factor is ideology.

Ideologies of education

From any point on an ideological spectrum, education is a mechanism for social engineering. It can be used well or poorly. Chapter One examines notions of inclusion and the relationship of these to ideologies and governance models in education. Chapter Five takes a closer look at ideologies of education in relation to religion pedagogies. It is important, prior to that, to establish a basic understanding of the function of ideology as it relates to education in general, and some terms for describing ideological differences.

Jenks, Lee and Kanpol (2001) distinguished three ideologies of education which have particular application to cultural and religious studies: conservative, liberal and critical. There is difficulty with the breadth of implied meaning and the international variance in the understanding of the term 'liberal' – to the extent that it may invert to its opposite in some contexts. For example, Hayek noted that: 'what in Europe is or used to be called 'liberal' is in the USA today with some justification called 'conservative' while in recent times the term 'liberal' has been used there to describe what in Europe would be called socialism' (1982,

121). Some scholars use the terms ‘classical liberal’ and ‘modern liberal’ to describe the difference (Ryan 1995). Hayek pointed out that ‘none of the political parties which use the designation ‘liberal’ now adhere to the liberal principles of the nineteenth century’ (121). A nineteenth century ‘classical liberal’ is now a ‘neo-liberal’ and a ‘cultural conservative’ (Gray 1998, 125).

For the purpose of clarity within this study, I will use Jenks, Lee and Kanpol’s (2001) terms ‘conservative’, ‘liberal’ and ‘critical’ as outlined below. These ideologies have particular characteristics which align with exclusion, passive inclusion and active inclusion – which I will examine in detail in Chapter One.

Conservative – ‘classical liberalism’

According to Jenks Lee and Kanpol, a conservative ideology favours cultural homogeneity, which they described as ‘uniculturalism’ (92). The stance assumes that the conditions for justice exist in a competitive market economy and that the aim of schooling is to ‘assimilate students into the mainstream culture and its attending values, mores, and norms’ (90). Such assimilation requires the elimination of certain differences, since competition occurs on an assumed ‘level playing field’. The logic of ‘upward social mobility’ of the individual (91) is employed with the rhetoric of ‘excellence’ – a belief in the survival of the fittest – people are responsible for their plight, and make their own opportunities. Descriptions of ‘classical liberalism’, associated with John Locke, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville and Friedrich von Hayek similarly emphasise individual autonomy, responsibility and property rights (Ryan 1995). A culinary metaphor for this ideological and educational stance, particularly regarding cultural difference, has generally been one of ‘a melting pot’ – where all comers are effectively blended into a single entity. The goal is unity through commonality. As a fruit dessert, the ideology might be imagined as stewed apples, without cloves, cinnamon or sultanas.

Liberal - ‘progressive, modern liberalism’

A liberal ideology favours ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘group-differentiated rights’ (Kymlicka 1995, 6). This stance acknowledges the problems associated with an un-level playing field and attempts to ‘bridge the gaps that exist between the mainstream culture and that of the culturally different’ (Jenks 2001, 91). It is sometimes referred to as ‘modern

liberalism' (Ryan 1995, 293). While progressive in intent, the stance nevertheless 'masks the conflicts and contradictions inherent in our society, ignoring what at times seem like 'irreconcilable and divisive identity issues revolving around race, class, and ethnicity ... insufficient consideration is given to power constructs ... which stand in the way of achieving equity' (Jenks, Lee and Kanpol 2001, 92).

The rhetoric of this stance promotes 'celebrating differences' 'equal opportunity' and affirming tolerance and democratic ideals. In Canada, the term 'reasonable accommodation' is part of this discourse. Critique of this stance includes that it naively 'pays little attention to the role of the dominant culture in preventing equality' (92). Jenks, Lee and Kanpol argued that the liberal 'let's get to know each other better' approach to studying different cultures 'sidesteps, or is ignorant of, the root causes of racism and inequality' (93). The goal is respecting differences. As a dessert, liberalism serves up the 'mosaic' of a fruit platter. There is colourful, perhaps even exotic variety, but the fruits are distinct, the flavours discreetly separated.

Critical – 'critical liberalism'

Critical ideology demands 'interculturalism' – where, in education, the narratives and contributions of subordinate groups form part of the school curriculum (deliberation, design and delivery). In this stance, (sometimes referred to as 'critical liberalism') 'curriculum must be transformative' and educators ... must 'enter into a democratic dialogue with each other to develop programs that promote critical reflection and inclusionary knowledge' (Jenks, Lee and Kanpol 2001, 94). This stance assumes that 'a not-so-hidden curriculum ... reflects the social inequalities of the society' (94). Therefore, the stance demands that the curriculum must consciously explore the social stratification of institutional structures and how inequalities are replicated through texts and teaching (Banks 1994, 1997, 2004; Grant and Sleeter 1997; Gutmann [1987] 1999; Beaman 2008, 2008a, 2009).

According to Jenks, Lee and Kanpol the approach requires students to examine power and resource distribution and to participate in community action projects, to learn how to address inequity by taking action. This stance has practical social justice applications. Beyond getting to know each other, this is about students taking action together to effect social change. The goals here include balancing the aims of commonality through a comprehensive

analysis of differences – ethnic and equity. As dessert, this is a mixed fruit and nut salad with a spicy melding sauce.

A history of education ideologies

Throughout history, influential education philosophers can be seen to align with the above demarcation of these three (conservative, liberal, critical) ideological stances. Edmund Burke defined the conservative ideological position. He ‘detested’ democracy and saw education as the channel for transmitting and preserving human heritage – for cultural reproduction (Stanley 1952). Conservatism has two general streams of thought on education. Firstly, that the development of autonomous individuals challenges communal norms and thus weakens society, so therefore, state education should support unified national values and accepted majority beliefs. The second conservative stream relies on free-market theory which argues that education is a private good and should be privately funded, and so therefore, the state should not be involved in education in any way.

John Dewey (1897) argued that there are two politically divergent ways of perceiving the purpose of education. Dewey described the conservative approach as ‘institutional-social’, in which schooling serves society by molding a child into a civilisation, replicating community standards and beliefs, and feeding the systems (job roles and production lines) which maintain cultures and achieve productivity growth. The conservative approach emphasises the economic instrumental value of education. It entails a socially defensive focus on the provision of acceptable answers and the historic (backward-looking) duty to protect the status quo. It effectively stabilizes and reinforces the known. The rules are defined by those who came before us.

Dewey’s outline of a second, ‘liberal’ way, he described as ‘individualistic–psychological’, in which schooling serves the individual by enabling each person to pursue their own goals. This serves society through creative, iterative change but emphasises the intrinsic value of education for the individual, as a tool to develop autonomy. This ‘liberal’ way emphasised a questioning, forward looking duty – to seek that which is yet to be discovered. Although Dewey’s liberalism incorporated some aspects of social critique, it did not entail the radicalism of post-modern critical ideologies which take a ‘group-socio-political’ approach, emphasise social action and draw more from Marxist frameworks.

There is some overlap in the historical development of the various ideologies outlined by Jenks, Lee and Kanpol (2001). The progressive and critical liberal views (although the former is individually focused and the latter is more socially focused) assume that, through education, humanity may increase our ability to adapt to and to create a better place, to improve on our lot, not simply enable us to accept or fulfil our lot. In this way, critical and progressive approaches can be viewed as complementary rather than oppositional. Both views see education as, not simply as a training ground for the production lines, but as the creative cauldron of social consciousness, a directive tool by which we set humanity's course.

Social and individual efforts to learn, for increased awareness and for the greater good, with respectful curiosity – of self, and other, and of place, and with the implied imperative to take action to bring about this greater good, I consider the heart of education. This is not a new idea. It echoes the hopeful assumption of philosophers who have articulated these edifying qualities in education through the ages. Socrates, for example, in 400 BC, considered the art of questioning the pinnacle of learning and the basis for civil society (McCall 2009). His 'Socratic circle' is a philosophy-based method which places the teacher inside a 'community of enquiry' on the same level with the students. This emphasis on group and individual questioning encourages students to not only determine and defend their own ideas, but to examine their own and others' social and political contexts. This method is used in modern ethics classes today (Saunders 2010).

Building on such foundations, constructivist philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, examined the ideals of a questioning education. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1911) and John Locke (Tarcov 1984) emphasized the importance of natural curiosity, reflection and self inquiry, to expand the realm of knowledge. Johann Pestalozzi followed on with the argument that children should not be given ready-made answers, but should be free to arrive at their own conclusions. He saw education as a way to honour cultural and spiritual growth (Miller 1997). In a similar vein in the early nineteenth century, Robert Owen, Johann Friedrich Herbart and Freidrich Froebel emphasised the power of education to create ethical social change. These philosophers valued the individual's spiritual and moral experiences as part of general education (Curran 2007). Later, Marx's emphasis on class differences resulted in his call for the state to assume society's educator role to ensure social equity.

Supporting the responsibility of the state for education, Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) noted that education is the means of 'social continuity' (3). In his advocacy of democracy, Dewey considered that schools and civil society needed continual reconstruction to encourage the development of social intelligence and plurality. Dewey asserted that genuine democracy relied on ensuring that public opinion is fully informed and that politicians are held accountable for educational policies. Dewey argued that uncritical education methods, which focus on authoritarian ideas and pre-ordained knowledge, were not properly concerned with understanding students' experiences. Dewey emphasized that the school is an important domain of a child's social life and that schools have a duty for moral and ethical training, particularly regarding children's needs for understanding group interactions. He stated that 'the best and deepest moral training is precisely that which one gets through having to enter into proper relations with others' (1897, 15).

Industrialisation and the wars of the twentieth century posed the greatest challenge to liberal education, because demands were placed on education systems to produce factory workers. Post-structural theorists such as Foucault and Bourdieu once again challenged the industrialized notion of education as a labor force generator for the free market. This era marked the emergence of more critical social theories, and concurrently, critical education ideologies.

One of the most globally recognised educational revolutionaries in this school of thought is Paulo Freire. In the 1970s Freire drew on Catholic liberation theology to pursue social and individual emancipation through literacy education. Working with poor communities against communists in Brazil and Chile, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974) claimed education as a 'democratic egalitarian weapon' (Gibson 2007, 178). Freire viewed religious sectarianism as an obstacle to critical, democratic citizenship, because 'sectarians confuse the interests of the few with the interests of the many' (204) and because it relies on 'fear of the people, elitism ... support of privilege ... mesmerized mass action and passivity' (204). Freire emphasised the moral and material imperative of equity:

There is no more ethical or truly democratic road than one in which we reveal to learners how we think, why we think the way we do ... while giving them concrete proof that we respect their opinions, even when they are opposed to our own (1998, 40).

Freire saw education as a continual, lifelong pursuit and a tool for human social and individual evolution. He argued that understanding comes by not claiming absolute certainty, but by always honouring the question and, in so doing, continually rebuilding knowledge. He argued that ‘by re-entering into a problem, previous understandings are confronted with new perspective ... (and that) ... in this, lies the whole force of education’ (Freire, 1974, p. 137).

In this light, my thesis begins by standing on the less than certain blocks of what we think we know (about the rightness, goodness or fairness of religion in public schooling – perhaps because ‘we’ve always done it this way’), to peer just a little further out. I imagine what might be, and seek out what some do not yet imagine is possible. In Chapter Seven, I examine the international trend towards critical, secular religions and ethics education. This comparison marks out a new middle ground possibility for religion in Australian public education. In this process, I entrust myself with the extroverting role of *educare* (Latin – ‘to lead out’). Part of progressive and critical education is this external seeking, unearthing the latent potentialities of individuals, communities and nations. I intend to examine current policies and processes for religion in Australian public schools and to raise questions about how things are done, here and elsewhere, and how they might be done differently.

Before venturing out, it is important to establish where we are.

Current mechanisms

Public schools in Australia are the fruit of nineteenth century campaigns for education to be ‘free, compulsory and secular’. Despite the legislative attempt to create a secular emphasis, the various state-based policies include several mechanisms to enable religion programs (some of which might not be considered secular):

1. Optional segregated Religious Instruction (RI) – in some states this is referred to as Special Religious Education (SRE), Christian Religious Education/Instruction (CRE/CRI) or ‘scripture’. This is predominantly ‘confessional’ or ‘enfaithing’ (encouraging a particular faith affiliation). RI is delivered via an access privilege for authorised volunteer providers. It generally takes the form of weekly 30–40 minute classes, but in South Australia the mechanism allows for less regular school seminars;

2. In-curriculum (social science) General Religions Education (GRE) delivered by professional teachers;
3. Non-curricular activities related to school ethos (such as school prayers or religious observances at assemblies, particularly during the festivals of Easter and Christmas);
4. Extra-curricular activities delivered by specific religious organisations and sometimes offered in place of compulsory sport. These include girls-only make up and hygiene discussions and boys-only teamwork and ‘what makes you a man’ programs of a religious nature. These programs frequently ‘connect’ children with evangelistic off-campus clubs and intensive ‘Jesus’ boot camps.
5. A National School Chaplaincy Program which operates at a federal level, but was originally supported by legislation in several states.

Each state application of these mechanisms varies, in procedural details, time allocation, and nomenclature. No state currently offers RI access for groups representing Indigenous Aboriginal spirituality although ‘Aboriginal Studies’ is included by some schools in GRE. New South Wales enables all five mechanisms. It is important to understand their differences.

Differentiating types of school religion

Internationally, there are three recognised approaches to teaching religion, usually referred to as ‘learning into’, learning about’ or learning from’ religions. Each of these approaches have both particular and overlapping characteristics.

RI, instruction *into* a single religious tradition, usually excludes non-religious perspectives and has a normative, theological basis. It asks: ‘What should we believe?’ Learning *about* religions (Grimmitt 1987, Hull 1978; 2002) is internationally referred to as ‘RE – Religions Education’, ‘SOR – Studies of Religion’, ‘RS – Religion Studies’, ‘GRE – General Religions Education’, and ‘ERB – Ethics, Religions and Beliefs’. It has also been referred to as ‘secular RE’ (Braaten 2009, 126) and ‘integrative RE’ (Alberts 2007, 1). This type of religion teaching is cognitive – it involves descriptive and interpretive elements and includes non-religious perspectives. It has a non-normative, educational basis and asks: ‘What is religion and belief?’ Some have argued that this approach is too factual and that students find it boring. In part as a remedy for this clinical emphasis, the notion of learning ‘from’ religions (Grimmitt 1987, Hull 2002) was originally associated with the affective ‘feeling’ domain and required self-reflective analysis which related strongly to a student’s own

experiences and interests. Grimmitt noted that this type of learning focused on ‘what pupils learn from their studies in religion about themselves’ (225).

Some studies of religion scholars view the ‘learning from’ emphasis with suspicion, as it appears to offer a pathway back to a theological emphasis. Jensen argued that the educator’s role is one of enabling, not controlling, and thus, although reflective analysis may offer students the opportunity to learn something ‘from’ the religions taught ‘about’, this should not be an explicit aim. ‘It must be left to the pupils themselves what it is, if anything, they learn from the religions they meet and learn about’ (2008, 137).

More recently, learning ‘from’ religions has broadened to include both this process of reflection on meaning and purpose, and a consideration of (and perhaps participation in) social justice actions. ‘Learning from’ religions then, has both an existential and applied ethical basis. It asks: ‘What are the ethical and moral bases of religions and belief systems? And how can they be useful in social action?’

This research focuses on the policies and practices of New South Wales but, for comparison, will refer occasionally to situations in other states.

For example, Victoria provides optional RI in various faith traditions (though government funding for the development of curriculum materials is limited to a single evangelical Christian group, Access Ministries). The contract for services between the Victorian Government and Access Ministries (for RI and chaplaincy) acknowledges that its primary aim is to ‘promote Christian values’. Since the 1950s, Victorian children who did not officially opt out were, by default, placed in Christian RI, with no alternative activities allowed. Recent public debate and legal challenges forced a 2011 policy change which removed the Christian default privilege and enabled non-religious opt-out activities such as: ‘community service, peer mentoring, participation in clubs or instruction in areas outside the core curriculum’ (Victorian DEECD 2011).

In 2006 Victoria enabled a provision for GRE but did not commit funds to develop curriculum materials or to train teachers. The *Victorian Education Reform Bill* 2006 defined ‘secular’ (I will argue wrongly) as meaning ‘outside of religion’ and defended the lack of GRE or comparative religion studies in public schools as being ‘appropriate to a secular society’ (Parliament of Victoria 2006, 5).

Queensland removed the term ‘secular’ from its education statutes in 1910 to allow for RI and to enable government teachers to give Bible lessons. Queensland does not offer GRE and legislates against students being placed in RI classes without parental consent. However, according to Wilson, more than 80 percent of Queensland students doing RI ‘should never have been placed in the RI program because their parents had not nominated a religion on the enrolment form’ (2010, 112). Wilson ascribes responsibility for this situation to ‘complicity’ between the government’s education department, Education Queensland, and the evangelical Religious Education Advisory Committee which effectively controls how religion is dealt with in public schools. Letters to me from several Queensland parents raise the concern that public schools in that state are being used by evangelical church groups as places of worship, that donations to schools of goods (such as sound systems and computer equipment) and services from these churches (such as discounted building and garden maintenance) are making it difficult for parents to opt their child out of RI for fear of reprisals. The possibility that opt-out children are not separated from the RI class in many cases, and that some Queensland RI is becoming highly evangelistic (and thus excluding of non-religious or minority faith communities) is a subject worthy of further investigation.

South Australia’s *Education Act*, 1972 replaced weekly religious instruction with a dual system of optional religious seminars and GRE. This move provided for the first compulsory general religion education in the country, which, however, was never introduced on a broad scale. Teacher training for the subject was taken up by Catholic system but not supported in the public sector. A recent government commissioned Religious Diversity Taskforce concluded that ‘many Government schools do not teach students about religious diversity’ (South Australia 2010, 12). As in all other states, South Australia’s uptake for broad ‘Studies of Religion’ courses at the senior level is low in public schools.

Western Australian religion education policy followed the South Australian model. It includes limited social science based GRE and RI (SRE) and recently made the news when one of its primary schools received hate mail for removing the Christian ‘Lord’s prayer’ from its school assembly (ABC 2011a). Other issues in that state include the concern that some Christian schools have changed their version of the national anthem to incorporate the Christian faith perspective: ‘With Christ our head and cornerstone, we’ll build our nation’s might’ (ABC 2011b).

Tasmania ran a primary school trial of general religion education in the late 1970s which was ‘abandoned after public protests’ (Rawlinson 1980, section 5.69). Other states and territories have similarly difficult histories, policies, practices and problems.

Religion in New South Wales schools

The provision of religion in New South Wales public schools was part of Henry Parkes’s *Public Instruction Act* 1880 (NSWDPI 1912). This Act determined that both doctrinal ‘Special Religious Instruction’ (SRI) or ‘Scripture’, and non-denominational (generic Christian) ‘General Religious Teaching’ (GRT) had a place in colonial public education. The Act determined that, for segregated SRI, ‘a portion of each school day, of not less than one hour’ would be ‘set apart, when the children of any one religious persuasion may be instructed by the clergyman or other religious teacher’. Parkes described non-segregated GRT as ‘such religious knowledge as was common to a Christian people ... such a knowledge of the Bible as all divisions of the Christian Church must possess ... a knowledge of the great truths of Revelation’ (Rawlinson 1980, section 5.65).⁴ In this light, from 1880 until the late 1950s, the NSW Education Department continued to produce Christian Bible scripture readers for public school children in primary and secondary schools for use in general education (section 2.16). Parkes’s Christian-centric limitation of school religion will be explored in more detail in Chapter Two.

Concerns regarding the appropriateness of this Christian focus, in a secularising, pluralising society, continued to be raised. In the mid 1960s, under a progressive (Labor Party) state government, New South Wales educators attempted to introduce a world religions syllabus. The document was ‘withdrawn quickly’ because it ‘separated Scripture from Social Studies’, it ‘extended the definition of religion’ to include non-Christian interpretations, and it made ‘little general reference to Christianity’ (Rawlinson 1980, section 2.17). According to Lovat (2002) the major Christian churches rallied together at the time to ensure it did not get support. This pluralist syllabus was replaced by a General Religious and Moral Education syllabus which retained Christian scriptural references as integrated components of curriculum and, while it made ‘some provision for considering other religions, the scope was limited’ (s. 2.17).

⁴ The original Rawlinson report with original page numbering was unavailable. My sources have conflicting page numbers but consistent section numbers, so only section numbers are provided.

During the seventies, all Australian states prepared to review the place of religion in government schooling. In New South Wales, with the 1972 change to a conservative (Liberal Party) government, a similarly conservative Christian Inter-Church Consultative Commission on Religious Education in Schools (ICCOREIS) was formed. The new conservative Education Minister, along with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSWDET), invited ICCOREIS to participate in the Rawlinson review into religion in NSW public schools. ICCOREIS provided ‘significant submissions’ to the enquiry, and ‘draft documentation was referred to denominational and diocesan authorities before each decision was finalised’ (ICCOREIS 2011, 2-1). The Rawlinson Committee Report – *Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools (1980)* acknowledged that ‘significant problems have remained in the working of the religious education clauses of the 1880 Act. A wide range of people from the churches, the teaching profession and the community have questioned the relevance of the principles underlying those clauses’ (Rawlinson 1980, s. 1.7). Recommendation 70 of the Report, which was duly implemented, was the establishment of the NSW Education Director General’s Consultative Committee on Special Religious Education, comprising mostly conservative Christians from ICCOREIS. Issues in relation to the representative nature of the Consultative Committee will be explored further in Chapter One.

In relation to SRI, Rawlinson found that: 75 percent of teachers rated the conduct of SRI classes as ‘fairly inadequate’ or ‘completely inadequate’ (s. 4.33); that five percent of primary pupils did not attend SRI (s. 4.13); that the most frequently cited reason for non-attendance was the lack of availability of a teacher for the particular religious group (s. 4.12); that ‘other religions of the world and non-religious views of the world’ were not included (s. 4.28); that some schools had unacceptably large SRI class sizes, with nearly ten percent of schools having classes of 60 to 80 students (s. 4.20); and that SRI instructors had ‘poor’ teaching skills resulting in ‘discipline problems’ (s. 4.22). These concerns continue to be relevant today and will be examined in further detail in Chapters Five and Six.

Regarding GRT, Rawlinson reported that teachers showed ‘reluctance to include this teaching in general curriculum ... less knowledge about GRT ... less willingness to provide it ... and inadequacy of guidance’ (s. 4.44). Today, the NSWDET offers some comparative GRE (General Religion Education – or learning ‘about’ religions) in the senior primary

Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) social science syllabus. However, the religion component is limited and poorly supported (NSWDET 2008). For many ‘stage one’ students (kindergarten to grade 2), there is only RI. In a 2009 telephone conversation with the author, the Department’s HSIE Senior Curriculum Manager commented that ‘GRE does not begin in practice until children are in senior primary’ (pers. comm., April 3). Recent changes in curriculum documents strengthen the emphasis on GRE though practices vary between schools. Confusion as to GRE’s status is reflected in the Department’s ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ about whether GRE is optional and indeed whether the entire (HSIE) curriculum is necessary in ‘stage one’ (NSWDET 2008). The GRE component is contained within the smallest strand of the HSIE curriculum and its aims and outcomes have limited teaching time.

In relation to the third mechanism – religious observances, Rawlinson acknowledged that ‘understanding and appreciation of the ways and beliefs of others are ... important, (s.5.33). The report also noted that such observances ‘have been mainly of an undenominational Christian character ... such as nativity plays and carols prior to Christmas ... school prayers, hymns, songs and Bible readings’ (s 5.49). The committee noted that such observances ‘have become embedded in the culture and so reflect the general and official life of the community’ (s. 5.51). The report noted that ‘Our cultural norms ... include civic religious observances (which) ... serve as expressions of the corporate life of the community, including the school, even where all members do not share fully, or even partially, in the religious significance’ (5.51).

The report recommended that such observances ‘continue to be permissible’ and suggested that schools should try to show ‘sensitivity to minority groups’ (5.54). It noted that ‘the school assembly is a corporate educational activity which should ideally be shared, without exception, by all pupils ... (and that) schools should employ forms of observance which maximise corporateness’. At the same time, it enabled the ‘right of non-participation’ – so that dissenting parents may withdraw their children, since ‘it cannot be assumed that teachers and pupils will believe in any one religion and could therefore ... meaningfully share in corporate worship’ (5.56).

The ‘sensitivity’ of these opt-out arrangements is questionable. In practice, they require prior notification from the school, alerting parents to any forthcoming religiously marked events and the provision of alternative locations and supervision. For many schools, the

additional effort (and staffing) is impractical and rarely provided. It is easier to not notify parents and to run the low risk that parents will firstly, find out about any offending instances, and secondly, have the time and courage to object. Parents do not wish to ostracize their children or risk harmonious relations with the school, and so, will rarely object or request their child be removed. Letters from parents outlining such situations in several states were sent to me during the course of this research. If a non-Christian child feels that they are unable to participate in a school activity, and the school policy suggests that the situation be managed by the child not joining in or by being physically removed, the approach shows a degree of 'insensitivity'. The onus for action is on the marginalised, who, if they act, are further marginalised as 'non-participants', rather than on the system, which rests in the inertia of perceived majority norms.

Among the Rawlinson recommendations adopted as 'an agreement between the churches and the government' (NSWDET 2010, 3.2), was the continuation of provisions for both SRI and GRT. These provisions are enacted in the *NSW Education Act* 1990, section 32, through which, schools are required to provide: 'General Religious Education' (GRE) and RI-style 'Special Religious Education' (SRE). SRE is best understood as religious instruction due to its focus on doctrinal 'enfaithing' (Lovat 2002, vi).

One of Rawlinson's recommendations, endorsed by the Minister for Education in 1986, was that students who opted out of RI should be given 'opportunities for purposeful secular learning' (Rawlinson 1980, section 6.62). Implementing this provision had been avoided, largely on church insistence that such alternatives raise a 'conflict of choice ... for the parents or the pupils' (s. 6.62). This 'avoidance of conflict of choice' was interpreted so as to privilege religious families via a policy which specifically outlawed 'alternative lessons in the subjects within the curriculum or other areas, such as, ethics, values, civics or general religious education' (NSWDET 2007). Consequently, parents of non-religious children, or parents who would have chosen a general religious education, were not given equitable choices. For decades, those who opted-out were minimally supervised, often in large groups, and severely restricted in their activities. In some schools, at the request of devout parents, or as a result of literal interpretations of policy, this included the banning of knitting, drawing or playing chess (Russell, 2011). In 2004 a NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens

Associations survey revealed that some schools had 80 percent of children opting out of RI (Longstaff 2010).

Today, RI is delivered by thousands of volunteers across NSW in segregated settings, usually for 30 to 40 minutes each week. There are no official figures, but according to ICCOREIS there are approximately 10,850 religious volunteers, 10,000 (92 percent) of whom are Christian and 850 of whom represent non-Christian religions (ICCOREIS 2011a, 2). In addition, since amendments in 2011 enabling the ethics alternative, 210 secular volunteers deliver an ethics program to less than 5 percent of primary schools in the state (Primary Ethics 2011).

RI is delivered sometimes in combined aged groups and sometimes on different days within the same school – due to the availability of religious volunteers. The situation creates unique logistical and industrial relations challenges. Comments from current and ex-teachers collected in formal surveys and made during informal discussions as part of this study, refer to the ‘administrative nightmare’ of ‘unreliable volunteers’, ‘large numbers of children opting out’ and the ‘unfairness’ on teachers who feel obliged (by a duty of care) to supervise an RI class, when that time is officially considered to be time used for lesson preparation. Letters from parents (sent attached to formal surveys, or sent separately to me during the course of this study) include stories of: inappropriate teaching strategies; of RI opt-out children being silenced but yet being kept in the same room as participant children who are given sweets and encouraged to sing; of children ‘missing’ in the playground due to lack of RI roll-checking; and of parents feeling powerless to speak up about their objections due to the nature of the relationship between particular churches and their schools.

Some parents have resorted to anonymous approaches to the media rather than use the departmental complaints mechanism – which requires them to take up issues directly with the school’s RI providers. For example, in February 2011, the Australian Broadcasting Commission on the New South Wales south coast reported parent’s complaints that children:

‘came home distressed after being told God is going to burn the world’ ... (and) walked out of class when the religious instructor claimed he could ‘cure’ homosexuals ... [and that] children with non-Christian faiths are allowed go to the library, but ... atheists go to the detention room where children are ‘punished’ (ABC 2011c).

At the same time however, RI is potentially inclusive. For many parents and teachers, the recognition of some form of religious element in the school curriculum is seen as a valuable opportunity to encourage respect for religion generally and to promote awareness of the various religious traditions in our society. Some families and religious communities also value their children being given the opportunity to develop knowledge in their particular faith. Whether or not that opportunity is ‘right’, ‘good’ and ‘fair’ for all public school students is the question that must be examined. Chapter One will delve into this question in some detail.

In NSW RI is still commonly referred to as ‘scripture’. Some urban public schools have a range of approved providers. For example, one Sydney school RI list includes: Protestant (Church of England, Presbyterian, Uniting), Catholic, Jehovah’s Witness, Latter-day Saints, Baha’i, Hindu, Muslim and non-scripture. However, many regional schools offer only a combined Christian option and some do not provide an opt-out. In addition, if a parent enrolls in a NSW school but leaves the ‘religion’ question blank, or writes ‘no religion’ on the enrolment form, this ‘does not automatically exclude’ a child from being placed in RI classes (ICCOREIS 2008, 1). Exclusion from RI requires an additional letter from the parent, specifically requesting the non-religious opt-out. Some NSW schools place children who are enrolled as ‘non-religious’ (but who have not officially opted out of RI) into default Anglican classes. RI practices vary between schools and regions and do not always reflect policy.

There appears to be some policy contradiction regarding the status of RI. The NSWDET *Implementation of Religious Education Policy* advises that RI ‘should be an integral part of school activities, taking place in school hours and under the jurisdiction of the school (2007, 3). However, the document notes that the NSWDET does not require trained teachers to be present during classes and does not take responsibility for the conduct or content of classes.

In addition, (despite requirements for most persons entering school grounds), volunteer RI providers are not required to be police-screened for criminal offences regarding children. The volunteer simply signs a ‘Prohibited Employment Declaration form’ which is kept on file by their sponsoring religious organisation. Assurance for child safety is thus left with the RI provider. There is no legal requirement for a police check. It is ‘not the [NSW] DET’s expectation ... that police checks and screening be mandatory’ (ICCOREIS 2008b, section 5.1). Some might consider this an abrogation of risk. This lack of accountability is of concern, considering that RI teachers may request ‘accommodation to conduct interviews of a religious

nature with students of their own persuasion, in the lunch hour or other agreed upon times' (NSWDET 2002, 8).

In a telephone conversation with the author in 2009, a NSWDET HSIE Curriculum Officer commented that RI classes are 'outside departmental jurisdiction' (pers. comms., April 2). The Department does not collect enrolment statistics for RI – so no official figures are available on various denominational enrolments or on numbers of children opting out.

It is important to note the historically significant change to the provision of RI in New South Wales as a result of the 2010 secular ethics amendment. The amendment enabled a positive alternative to RI which had been banned for the previous century. However, it may be a short-lived victory for non-discrimination. In late 2010, the conservative New South Wales Opposition announced they would unwind the ethics classes amendment if elected (ABC 2010), but in February 2011, immediately prior to the March state election, the Opposition Education Shadow Minister pulled back from this position and argued that 'the battle over ethics classes is finished' and that ethics classes were to stay, regardless of the election outcome (Nicolls 2011a).

Successful at the polls, the new conservative government came under lobbying pressure from the Christian Democrats, a minor party sharing the balance of power in the New South Wales Legislative Council. The Premier acknowledged that he would consider their demands to remove the classes (Nicolls 2011b). In response, the state's peak parents' group, the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations' annual conference called on the Premier to 'stick to an election promise not to remove the classes' (Patty 2011). Results from a *Sydney Morning Herald* reader poll (a poll which usually garners 3000 to 4000 responses) asking readers where they stood on ethics classes, received a record 26,743 responses, with 92 percent of respondents being 'for' the classes (Sydney Morning Herald 2011).

The Department of Education Director General's Advisory Committee on RI objected to the secular ethics program (Saunders 2010), along with several major Christian churches – many of these members of ICCOREIS. The Australian Christian lobby initiated a 'Save our Scripture' campaign (ACL 2010; Hinds 2011), which ICCOREIS supported on its own website. Given its significant role in advising the NSWDET on religion in schools (with a significant majority in the Director General's Committee), it might be said that ICCOREIS had a conflict of interest in relation to this issue. ICCOREIS spoke against the ethics program

before its trial was announced and objected to the provision of the ethics alternative because ‘it was offered to all children’ (in the same manner that RI from any religious persuasion is offered to all) (ICCOREIS 2010, 1). This position of objection was toned down late in 2010 ‘in the interest of the continued smooth operation of SRE in government schools’ (ICCOREIS 2011a, 1), and the ICCOREIS website was rewritten to reflect a more balanced perspective.

Some church organisations are aware that ethics in schools has strong public support, and that if churches demand its removal, then such a demand may force government to consider replacing RI altogether with a professionally delivered GRE. To defuse this potential radical outcome, ICCOREIS wrote to the leader of the Christian Democrats, parliamentary member (MP) Reverend Fred Nile, advising that most of its members opposed his call for the removal of ethics classes (ICCOREIS 2011a). MP Nile’s Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill, to remove ethics classes from New South Wales schools, was read in Parliament in August 2011. In his reading of the Bill, MP Nile claimed that the ethics course was ‘based on a philosophy linked to Nazism and communism’ (Nile 2011, 1). In a public indication of support for Nile from major Christian churches, MP Nile pointed out that he had a note from the Anglican Archbishop Peter Jensen stating that Jensen had ‘always opposed the introduction of the ethics classes and regards it as an unfortunate breach of our long established principle’ (Hansard Ethics Repeal Bill Second Reading Nile, 5 Aug 2011, 4). MP Nile also noted that both Bishop Jensen and Catholic Archbishop Cardinal George Pell were ‘anxious [that] there be no drawn out controversy in the media’ (4). Debate on the Bill was adjourned to September 16. Intriguingly, the Legislative Council did not sit on that day.

However, away from the spotlight of public scrutiny, the Chairperson of ICCOREIS met with the new conservative Liberal Party Education Minister in August to outline strategies ‘to ensure that SRE was supported and strengthened’ (ICCOREIS 2011a, 1). As a result, ICCOREIS representatives will ‘meet regularly with the Minister’s senior advisor to discuss ongoing issues related to the Christian provision of SRE (ICCOREIS 2011a, 1). ICCOREIS representatives also met with Reverend Nile in late September. This train of events suggests a level of governance access provided to some Christian churches that is not available to other religious and non-religious organisations. In fact, the *SRE Employment Boards* document notes that the NSWDET Director-General’s Consultative Committee on SRE ‘gives the churches ... access to the highest levels of the DET’ (ICCOREIS 2010a 2-3).

I suggest that the lack of a clear government position or statement of principles regarding the teaching of religions, ethics and beliefs in public education ensures that these types of backroom lobbying activities will continue. Chapter Two will examine the ambiguity of current and historic policy which has contributed to a lack of willingness (on the part of both politicians and bureaucrats) to address this issue publicly. The lack of both policy clarity and public scrutiny may itself protect poor practices and limit accountability. Chapter One will examine the official avenues for religious organisations to access governance mechanisms in relation to RI in New South Wales schools. Chapter Seven will examine how other nations have addressed similar difficulties by using publicly acknowledged principles which help to bring discussion about school religions and ethics education out of the shadows.

In November 2011, the New South Wales Government announced a parliamentary enquiry to examine:

the objectives, curriculum, implementation, effectiveness and other related matters pertaining to the current operation of ‘special education in ethics’ being conducted in State schools, and whether the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 should be repealed (NSW Legislative Council 2011, 1).

The enquiry committee is dominated by conservative Christians and ethics classes ‘may be abolished less than a year after they began’ (Nicolls 2011c). There has never been a similar examination of Religious Instruction classes. The disparity is stark and, in a secular public education system, discriminatory. The government also announced a mandated minimum of RI teaching time and an annual celebration of RI ‘to recognise the efforts of scripture teachers’ and to ‘strengthen’ the teaching of RI. The announcement prompted accusations of a deal between the New South Wales Premier and the Christian Democrat MP Reverend Nile.

Although the legislation enabling ethics classes passed in 2010, twelve months later, the NSWDEC had not published an amended policy to reflect the legislated provision of ethics as an RI alternative. The published *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* of late 2011 still noted that alternative activities ‘should neither compete with SRE nor be alternative lessons in the subjects within the curriculum or other areas, such as, ethics, values, civics or general religious education’ (NSWDET 2002, 3). However, ICCOREIS updated and republished their *Handbook on SRE* which reiterates that ‘Pupils withdrawn from SRE should be provided with opportunities for purposeful secular learning which, however, should be of

such a nature as to avoid conflict of choice either for the parents or for the pupils receiving SRE' (ICCOREIS 2011, section 6.62). Once again, it appears that 'choice' for religious parents has primacy over 'choice' for the non-religious. Although ethics classes have begun in some schools, their legitimacy is under threat and their longevity is doubtful.

Research questions

Despite (or perhaps because of) the increasingly controversial nature of the debate, religion in public schools is little researched. This thesis examines religion in Australian public primary education – its rationale, methods, and potential outcomes. In so doing, it explores notions of principle that relate to social inclusion and cohesion, religious and cultural prejudice, constructions of 'secular', national and individual identity, ideology, critical pedagogy, pluralism and interculturalism.

My general research question is: Do Australian approaches to religion in public schools help or hinder social inclusion?

My field-work research aim is: to examine the relationship between community attitudes about religious diversity and children's tendencies to include or exclude religious others.

Most Australian state-based religion education policies describe their aims in terms of promoting respect for cultural diversity. For example, the NSWDET has an anti-racism policy which states that 'All teaching and non-teaching staff contribute to the eradication of racism by promoting acceptance of Australia's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, challenging prejudiced attitudes' (NSWDET 2005, Objective 1.4). The Department offers RI access privileges to all approved religious persuasions. Anecdotal evidence (obtained through discussions with teachers and RI providers during the course of this research) shows that for some faith communities such recognition is a valuable and socially inclusive activity. For some children, faith-based RI provides a safe space to validate their culture and generally teaches values of respect for difference. However, there is limited analysis of educational and values outcomes.

If Christian dominance in Australian society manifests as Christian privilege in education, then such privilege may make equitable inclusion of non-Christian communities difficult and create obstacles to the implementation of genuinely inclusive religions and ethics education.

Given Australia's social tensions, this research explored seven questions:

1. What is social inclusion and how can this policy platform be understood in the context of public school religious education?
2. What is 'secular' education in Australia's historical context and might the secular principle provide a foundation for socially inclusive approaches to religion in public education?
3. How might inclusive religion education contribute to social cohesion and what are the obstacles to its implementation?
4. What social and educational theories underpin critical pedagogy and are they applied to religion education in Australia?
5. What are parents' and educators' perceptions about how religion is taught and what are their preferences for how religion should be taught? Are these perceptions and preferences ideologically driven?
6. Do children get conflicting messages about religious difference from professional educators and RI volunteers? Are school and community attitudes to religious difference related to children's tendencies to include or exclude religious others?
7. What approaches to public school religion are being used elsewhere and what are their implications for Australia? What are the emerging best practices in this field?

Each of these questions provides a focus for each chapter of the thesis.

The research is considered in the context of an Australian and international trend towards desecularisation in the public sphere (Habermas 2006). Habermas wrote at length on the reversal of Berger's (1999) secularisation theory. Habermas argued that religion in the public domain has strengthened rather than weakened, partly due to pluralisation, but also due to the focus on religion brought about by the events of September 11, 2001. Habermas described the public school as an informal public sphere and noted that nation states must address their responsibilities in this sphere. The school and its curriculum are key instruments in social construction. How nation-state schools manage and maintain their relationships with national identity (and identities), when faced with the 'changing dynamics of nation-state civil

cultures in multicultural societies' (Schiffauer et al. 2004, back cover), is an important consideration in this research.

Theoretical frameworks

The theoretical contribution of religion education to social cohesion is well established (Jackson 2004, Jackson and O'Grady 2007, Miedema 2006, deSouza et al. 2006, and Willaime 2007) and will be further explored in Chapter Three. However, there is limited research into school religion and social inclusion in Australia, especially into the relationships between various ideological and pedagogical approaches and child attitude development. Dejaeghere (2002, 2006) examined the religious dimensions of citizenship in Australian curricula. In an email to the author in October 2008, Dejaeghere noted that 'religion in Australian public education is not well researched' and that 'despite there being quite a broad literature on religion and education internationally, little of it ... addresses ethnicity, culture and religion in Australia' (pers. comms).

The study draws interdisciplinary inspiration from Freire's critical education theories (1993, 1997 and 1998) which address notions of social reproduction and argue that educators should be conscious of the political implications of their social roles. It relies on the socio-psychological framework of Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1979) which relates the development of individual identity to social groupings and normative pressures. In addition, it applies Law's (2007) theory of an ideological spectrum of preference for religion pedagogies to the Australian context. It examines the potential effect of those preferences on children's tendencies to include or exclude religious others. These theories are examined in more detail in following chapters.

Methodology

Complexity theory emerged from economic systems theories which were concerned with how larger systems or 'wholes' interacted with their comprising 'particles' (Mason 2008). The theory emphasised the importance of a perspective that enabled both multiple and shifting points of focus, from the general to the particular. Complexity theory underpins both the philosophy and methodology of this study which examines the possibility of collective pressures on individual attitudes and behaviours.

The theory emphasises the dynamic, contextual nature of phenomena, and pays attention to the potential of critical mass enabling the emergence of unpredicted outcomes. One example of critical mass considered in this thesis is the emergence of a perceived majority popular opinion – the perception of a preference for Christian privileging in education due to a nominal Christian majority in society. Unexpected outcomes include extraordinary public funding of Christian activities in an ostensibly secular education domain.

Complexity theory is being applied to difficult policy problems, which have been identified by the Australian Public Service Commission as ‘wicked’ (ASPC 2007). Such problems are ‘characterised by chronic policy failure’ and seen as ‘resistant to resolution’ and ‘without clear solutions’ (5). According to the ASPC, fixing such seemingly ‘intractable’ problems requires: ‘holistic thinking ... grasping the big picture ... [as well as] interrelationships between the full range of causal factors’ (35). In addition, the ASPC argued that complex problems require solutions that incorporate ‘a stronger, principles-based approach’ (38). Chapter Two examines the chronic policy failure of public school religion education. It explores the secular principle as a possible foundation upon which to develop appropriate solutions.

As a useful prism for educational research, Morrison (2002) noted that complexity theory’s emphasis on relationships, suggests the need for case-study methodology and interpretive accounts. The ASPC also argued that to successfully address complex or ‘wicked’ policy problems, requires coordinated action by various stakeholders, significant and sustained cultural change, and broader, more collaborative approaches. The ASPC noted that ‘Because wicked problems are often imperfectly understood, it is important that they are widely discussed by all relevant stakeholders in order to ensure a full understanding of their complexity’ (ASPC 2007, 27).

This emphasis on relationships raises the value of anecdotal reports as contributing guide posts in the discovery of emergent issues. Mason suggested that if educational situations are complex, then research should be understood as descriptive and explanatory, offering a range of interpretive possibilities (2008) and legitimising otherwise peripheral sources of data. I have included some anecdotal reports, but kept these separate from empirical findings in Chapters Five and Six.

Complexity theory resonates with Freire's (1998) notion of the unfinishableness of human knowledge, and suggests that between modern, rational, orderly, positivist predictability and post-modern, relational, chaotic, unfathomable relativism, there exists an analytical approach which is, intuitive, pragmatic, probabilistic and uncertain (Geyer 2003). The fieldwork analyses of Chapters Five and Six, while limited as evidence due to small sample sizes, draws some strength from this idea, and encourages further research on a larger scale.

The standpoint of pragmatism is of particular importance in complexity theory. As Fiala (2005) pointed out, a pragmatic view offers a middle way between extremes. Fiala argued that tolerance and inclusion are virtues to be practiced in a pragmatic plural society – to ensure that, on the one hand, dogmatic intolerance and imposition of particular beliefs are not acceptable, and on the other hand, that sceptical indifference and a rejection of the responsibility to make judgements, are not the only options guiding social policy.

Complexity theory implies methodological pluralism, balancing holistic 'big picture' issues alongside reductionist, evidence-style empiricism. Consequently, this study uses mixed methods of data gathering and analysis, and draws on multiple contexts of enquiry. It analyses historical narrative alongside current policy debate. It focuses sharply on field data (quantitative and qualitative) but is also guided by policy documents, meetings with policy influencers and anecdotes collected from parents and teachers in less formal settings. A constant refocusing, from high altitude generalities to detailed data scanning, was applied throughout the study. Curiosity cannot be corralled. It tends to cross boundaries.

Storm's (2010) examination of the appropriateness of various methods in religion studies noted that while quantitative methods provide more focused hypothesis testing, they have a range of objections, including that religion is 'too context-dependent', 'sensitive to measurement error' and 'too complex to be classified and measured at all'. Another concern regarding the examination of religion lies in its focus on the individual. This study does not measure religiosity, but its focus on associated ideology and prejudice raises similar methodological concerns.

Addressing these concerns, Davie stressed the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and complementary methodologies noting that:

There are times when a sociologist of religion must go with a hunch, searching for innovative sources of data to support an idea that is difficult to substantiate ... (and that) the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enable the researcher to build up as complete a picture as possible (2007, 112).

As Casebeer and Verhoef noted, it is ‘more instructive to see qualitative and quantitative methods as part of a continuum of research techniques, all of which are appropriate’ (1997, 1), and, as Richardson and Cilliers argued: we need both mathematical equations and narrative descriptions ... one should not be seen as more scientific than the other (2001, 12). Flick suggested that mixed methods should be employed to ‘access ... different versions of the phenomenon that is studied’ (1992, 194), or, as Morgan described it, pragmatic inter-subjectivity enables ‘different frames of reference’ (2007, 71).

Complexity Theory honors critical realism – it recognises that a situation can only be known imperfectly since all knowledge is limited (Mertens, 2010). It acknowledges that there is no universal structure or end point to knowledge and that greater knowledge may require increased humility and deeper recognition of limits. According to Geyer, complexity theory involves a ‘politics of uncertainty’ (23). This openness, to ‘mistakes and learning’, and to ‘failure’ and ‘clumsy adaptation’, ‘leads to exploration’ (Geyer, 2003, 7). Given that the field of religion in Australian public education has been little examined, my findings can be considered preliminary. As such, they are suggestive, perhaps provocative, highlighting uncertain but intriguing avenues for more detailed discovery.

During research and analysis, objectivity was held as an aim, and guided the application of standardised procedures. I am also aware however that, as an agent in this relatively unexplored domain, my own ideological (critical liberal), theological (plural and complex), educational (pragmatic) and philosophical (spiritual humanist) biases have directed the research design and interpretation. This is not a confession, but an acknowledgement of the existence of subjectivity.

Overview of structure

The thesis comprises the introduction, seven chapters and conclusions. Five of the chapters include (or are comprised solely of) articles which have been published or submitted for publication. In these articles, there is some overlap and repetition of ideas and information

which I have endeavoured to minimise. In addition, the highly contentious nature of the subject meant that government and legislative changes occurred during or subsequent to the publication of articles. Consequently, article P2 refers to superseded law (disallowing ethics classes), though the political inertia and clerical opposition to proposed changes in religion education remain. Given this, I have included an introductory note for each chapter to outline necessary updates or inconsistencies of this nature. Reference and spelling styles vary due to the different requirements of each journal.

Each chapter of the thesis asks inter-related questions:

Chapter One outlines definitions of ‘social inclusion’ and examines the limited application of social inclusion in Australian political discourse. The chapter asks: What is social inclusion? What ideology of education and what model of democratic representation and governance enables inclusive religion education? What responsibility does inclusive public education have regarding religious plurality and diversity? What issues may emerge for religion in New South Wales public schools as authority devolves to local school boards?

Chapter Two provides an historical overview of the meaning of ‘secular’ in education and examines the secular principle on which public education might rely when considering religion in a plural democracy. The article explores how the issue of religious inclusion in education has been vexed from the start in Australia. This chapter examines the contemporary implications of ambiguous applications of the secular principle in nineteenth century Australia. Publication 1 [P1] is a forthcoming paper in the *Journal of Religious History*, 36 (2), (in press) – accepted for publication on 22 September, 2011.

Chapter Three examines how inclusive religion education can contribute to social cohesion. It explores reluctance in Australian education policy to embrace a multi-tradition approach and provides an overview of the issue of Christian privileging. Publication 2 [P2] can be found in the 2009 *Journal of Religious Education*, 57(3): 26-27.

Chapter Four explores Freire’s (1989, 1993, 1998) critical pedagogies and notions of otherness in multi-tradition general religion education. The chapter questions Australian attempts to apply critical principles within Christian-focused institutions. Publication 3 [P3] is in the 2011 *British Journal of Religious Education*, 33(1): 47-60.

Chapter Five brings sharp focus to the insider-outsider boundary dispute in religion education through an exploration of two different pedagogical approaches: one that excludes religious others and one that embraces them. This chapter examines connections between Laws' (2007) theory of a pedagogical spectrum – from liberal (progressive or critical) to authoritarian (conservative) – and the potential links with positions on that spectrum to preferences for teaching religion. It is a fieldwork report on adult preferences (N=123) for styles of teaching religion and adult attitudes to religious diversity. It asks: Does the ideology of the religion teacher influence their pedagogy and their attitude to religious diversity? Are community attitudes about religious diversity reproduced in public schools? Publication 4 [P4] was accepted (post-thesis submission) by the journal *Multicultural Perspectives*.

Chapter Six explores Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory in relation to the development of children's religious identity and their tendency to exclude religious others. It is a case study report (N=10) from children in two public schools in New South Wales. It asks: if a child is taught, or perceives that they are taught that 'Australia is a Christian nation', how will they perceive and treat non-Christians? And, what are children taught (implicitly and explicitly) about 'our religions' in 'our schools'? Publication 5 [P5] is a forthcoming paper in the *British Journal of Religious Education*, (in press) – accepted for publication on 18 November, 2011.

Chapter Seven explores the international trend towards secular general religions and ethics education in public schools and outlines elements of emerging best practice. It examines ten nations' legal and curriculum approaches to the questions raised in Chapter One.

The concluding chapter summarises the contribution and limitations of this study and offers answers to the thesis research questions. It includes reflexive analysis of the surveys undertaken and suggests opportunities for further research.

Summary

In this introduction to a study of religion and social inclusion in Australian public primary schools, I have outlined some of the current sociological issues for consideration, such as inter-religious prejudice, Australia's historically divisive approach to intercultural otherness, the political nature of Christian privileging and its implications for public schooling. I have outlined the current mechanisms for religion in public education and given a brief insight into

both the processes that resulted in current policies and the continuing controversies. I have suggested opportunities for identifying a legitimate presence for religion within the educational ‘public sphere’ despite a de-secularising trend, particularly if the issue can be identified as a complex, ‘wicked’ problem. I have also touched on the philosophical and ideological foundations from which to investigate these opportunities. I have provided a basic overview of my methodology, which will be expanded within the publications.

Chapter One will outline a definition for social inclusion and examine current approaches to inclusion in regards to cultural and religious communities and the governance of religion in public education. It will delve into the question: What is social inclusion and how can this policy platform be understood in the context of public school religious education?