



From Confessional Religious Ed to Comparative Religious Ed?

Teaching Religion and Ethics
in the Republic of Ireland

Different Levels of Ethos

- School ethos at any given time is the outcome of a number of influences; [James Norman 2003]
 - 1. Instrumental Ethos - curriculum
 - 2. Organisational Ethos - religious denomination, management etc
 - 3. The expressive culture of the school – relationships
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The Origins of the Irish School System

- 1831 – a state controlled primary school system was introduced in Ireland which was multi-denominational
- Children of all denominations would be educated together in ‘secular’ subjects
- Separate arrangements would be made for doctrinal instruction
- Teacher education would also be ‘mixed’

Problems with the system

- Each of the denominations resisted it, seeing the schooling process as ‘an extension of pastoral care’
 - ‘This conflict between state and church...the state’s retaining the concept of a de jure mixed system which became increasingly denominational in fact’ (Coolahan 1981)
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1937 Constitution

- The primary educator is the 'family'; the predominant rights of parents in the matter of their children's education
 - The subsidiary role of the state
 - Conscience clause [article 44.4]; children have the right not to attend the religious instruction
 - No such 'freedom of conscience' right for teachers
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The Crossroads

- ‘Despite different national contexts, there is one striking similarity..the identified tension nowadays in religious education between the formerly self-evident linkage to Church and confessionalism and the increasing respectfulness to democratic values of pluralism in modern society’ (Berit Askling, ‘Religious Education at the Crossroads’)
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'Confessional Patriotism' — Ninian Smart

- 'The perils of 'confessional patriotism'.. 'had all Catholics been white and all Protestants black, no modern government could have tolerated the segregation'
 - 'Much of the study of religion goes beyond or ought to beyond the absorption of one's own faith (if any)..it ought to sensitize us to the beliefs, feelings and rituals of others'
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The Irish Context of Schooling – Today

- Republic of Ireland retains this denominational tradition in schools
- 96% of primary schools being denominational, with 90% Catholic and 6% Protestant
- There are two Muslim schools and one Jewish school
- Diverse forms of confessional faith formation

Context of Schooling

- 3-4% of schools are multi-denominational
 - The multi-denominational schools are primarily Educate Together schools (also several Gaelscoileanna)
 - there are *no* nondenominational schools (often seen as a Constitutional issue although this is ambiguous)
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Teacher Education Issues of Ethos

- Student teachers are educated in separate environments for Catholic and Protestant, with 100% denominational governance (Donnelly 2011)
- Initiatives – Elective from 2008, Ethics course from 2010.
- Q: Is denominational teacher education a form of confessional religious education? Diverse examples and practices across the colleges.
- Q: Where do non-Christian or multi-d teachers go in Ireland to be educated?

Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector 2011/2012

- **New patronage in ‘divested’ schools (first phase approx. 50 schools)**
- **RE should become a discrete rather than integrated part of curriculum**
- **A comparative programme in all schools – Ethics, Religion, Beliefs ERB**
- **Teacher education should combine confessional and comparative religious/ethical education**

Divesting Patronage

- examining school patronage in 43 towns and 4 Dublin areas
 - 18 dioceses and scrutiny of approximately 250 schools, out of which approximately 50 may be divested [first phase]
 - Major issue of process – parental views, BOMs; DES; Church; majority rule?
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Stand Alone schools

- 'Stand Alone' school
 - There are approximately 1700 of these schools, which are at least 3km from their nearest neighbour
 - 'developing clear policies accessible to parents on how they manage diversity and ensure an inclusive and respectful environment for all their pupils'
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Teacher's Rights - Forum

- 'Nontheist teachers may have to engage in dissimulation practices if they are to ensure a teaching appointment'
 - 'the exemption of schools from the Employment Equality Act must be a factor in any discussion of teacher employment'
 - Likely contestation of this 'exemption' in the near future, under human rights law
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Forum Recommendations for Denominational Schools

- ‘The Advisory Group has a particular concern for those children who do not participate in religious programmes in denominational schools’
 - ‘For those children the proposed programmes in ERB and Ethics are of central importance’
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Future of Teacher Education

- St Pat's Drumcondra will amalgamate with CICE, Mater Dei, DCU education to create an Institute of Education (inter-denominational?)
 - Marino – UCD and Trinity?
 - Maynooth and Froebel – secular/Catholic?
 - Mary Immaculate and UL?
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Different Religious and Ethical Ethoi In Irish Education

- Denominational Schools: Faith Formation in school time [exception is Jewish school]
 - Multidenominational Schools: Comparative Religious and Ethical Education (religious and ethics from 'outside' tradition)
 - Multi-Faith Schools: Combining Faith Formation and Ethical Education (VEC) 20% faith/80% comparative
 - NonDenominational Schools: Secularist.no religious ed. 100% ethical education [France, USA]
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Denominational Schools: Faith Formation and A Comprehensive Moral Education

- A denominational religious ethos aims as a matter of policy to foster in young people a commitment to a particular religion
 - Religious and spirituality education ‘from the inside’ (Alexander and McLaughlin 2003)
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Problems with Denominationalism

- No provision for children of other faiths or belief systems except ad hoc. Children's rights (also sacraments/enrolment)
 - Ethical education remains grounded in the faith perspective; ethics is always based on religion
 - Teacher's rights
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Denominational Schools – Issues to think about

- Provides a strong grounding in a particular tradition with an integral ethic
 - Some regard the denominational school as pro-religion e.g. some Muslims in Catholic schools
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Multidenominational Schools: The Common School

- the truth claims of religion and other belief systems are explored as part of the school's ethos but truth is not associated with a particular view
 - Religious and ethical education from the 'outside' (Mc Loughlin)
 - Main example in Ireland is Educate Together
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Multi-denominational

- All children have equal provision for ethical and religious education
 - All religious views are explored in the same way, with respect
 - Including nonreligious belief systems such as humanism, atheism, agnosticism
 - Teacher's rights and freedom of conscience respected
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Multidenominational Schools

- Can children understand religion outside traditional initiation?
 - Is the comparative programme sufficiently robust to provide conditions for formation of citizens?
 - Gaps between rhetoric and reality?
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Multi-Faith Schools: Combining Faith Formation and Ethical Education (VEC)

- The VEC model plans to teach ethics or comparative religion together while also providing segregated religious instruction
 - No teacher education prep as yet
 - Indicated as an option on the ‘divested’ schools survey
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Multi-Faith Schools: Issues and Problems

- A courageous attempt to balance opposed perspectives?
 - 80% comparative ethics and religion, 20% faith formation
 - Catholic, Other Christian, Muslim and Humanist [4 groupings]
 - Faith formation cannot be provided by teachers, except for Catholic/Protestant
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Multi-faith schools - Problems

- A danger of succeeding in neither approach, neither faith nor citizenship?
 - Issues with the logistics and resources needed for such differentiated ethical and religious education
 - VEC still strongly influenced by Catholic management [2nd level issues with ET]
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The Swedish School System

- 1919 – it was forbidden to use the Lutheran catechism as a text in public schools
- A comparative programme introduced
- Children given a right to get a broad orientation about different views (parental rights curtailed to segregate)
- 1940s/50s – humanist/atheist and nonreligious and anti-religious views included
- (Edgar Almen ‘Religious Ed in Sweden’)

Comparative Ethics/Religion (Irwin 2013)

- 1. Republic – dominance of confessional education but also multi-d model
- 2. NI – more mixed model with strong strain of Christian education
- 3. Sweden – Development away from Lutheranism to comparative
- 4. UK – Move away from confessional ed
- 5. Russia/Eastern Bloc – move away from 'atheistic' doctrinal education



Where to Next?

‘We must cease living under the dictatorship of no alternatives’ (Roberto Unger)

‘Where to for the common school? Less a detailed blueprint and more a voyage of discovery’ (Fielding and Moss)