



Exploring the beliefs and practices of the hermeneutical communicative model within a Melbourne Catholic primary school

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Abstract

In response to a religiously diverse and culturally enriched Australia, this paper will discuss the instance of one Catholic primary school which has taken up the challenge of engaging in Religious Education through integrating the beliefs and practices underlying the KU Leuven's Hermeneutical Communicative Model to Religious Education. This insider reflection will provide a number of insights into the school's professional practice and practical actions that can be taken to enhance the Catholic Identity of a school, as well as the impact on both learners and educators.

Keywords Hermeneutical-communicative model · Professional learning community · Inquiry-based learning · Dialogue

1 Introduction

'Since we're a dialogue school we're open to dialogue all the time, so if anyone's got a question in our learning studios we answer and we try our hardest to help our peers to gain new knowledge as well as gain our own new knowledge. And we're always open to dialogue with others in our learning community' (Student Group Interview, 2019).

This article will explore the journey of a Catholic primary school in its work to enhance its Catholic identity. Through insider reflection, insights will be provided regarding the school's participation in the Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) research surveys and its incorporation of the beliefs and practices of the Catholic University Leuven, Belgium (KU Leuven) Hermeneutical Communicative model (HCM). Current doctoral research being undertaken by the author will provide the voice of both learners and educators, which were gleaned through individual and group interviews in 2019 with students, parents and staff.

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Patron Saint Catholic Primary School (PSCPS—a pseudonym), has been inspired and enriched by the ECSI research, a joint project between the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and KULeuven (CECV 2008). This research has had a significant impact on the School Improvement Framework and the Religious Education that currently takes place within this learning community. Through engagement with the ECSI research, PSCPS has become a Dialogue School, and more specifically a Recontextualising Dialogue school. That is, it is a Catholic school engaging in active dialogue with those of the Catholic faith and other believers. This dialogue has the potential to enrich the faith understandings of both (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2014). In particular, the Dialogue school displays beliefs and practices of the HCM which have been explored at PSCPS in light of the current pluralist and secular context. This exploration is also in response to one of the key recommendations of the ECSI research, that Victorian schools consider insights and an exploration of the HCM of Religious Education in order to enhance Catholic school identity (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2014).

2 Literature review: The hermeneutical communicative model ~ beliefs and practices

2.1 Enabling a searching for meaning

The human person has, as Pollefeyt suggests, an ‘inbuilt receptiveness to meaning (the “lustre” of life): we discover and we ascribe meaning’ (Pollefeyt 2013, p. 21). This image of the human person is further developed through the belief that the human person is capable of ideological discussion, capable of engaging in dialogue in search of greater understanding and interpretation, capable of questioning the meaning of existence and able to learn new perspectives of meaning (Pollefeyt 2011, 2013). This is not just the case for the Christian person; all people, whether holding a religious belief or not, seek to make meaning of life, to search and to discover what life is about for them (Pollefeyt 2013). In this way the human person is described as a hermeneutical being, or ‘a fragile hermeneutical space’ (Pollefeyt 2013, p. 21). To discover such a space within oneself is, for Pollefeyt, a principle objective of religious learning irrespective of what children do with this in the future (Pollefeyt 2013, p. 21).

This objective highlights one of the challenges for, and responsibilities of, educational leaders, religious educators and Catholic schools in ensuring time and opportunity is provided to nurture each individual’s hermeneutical space, enabling a search for meaning. This search for meaning requires an environment that is safe and that allows for an openness of views about life to be explored, expressed, questioned, challenged, connected with, supported, affirmed, developed, reconsidered, and reflected upon. The nurturing of this hermeneutical space is critical. Providing children with the skills and dispositions to engage within such a space involves providing the time and opportunity to engage in the process of meaning-making. It is a space that provides children with the opportunity to view the world through multiple lenses to ‘read reality with philosophical spectacles’ (Pollefeyt 2013, p. 22).

Pollefeyt proposes that the HCM is characterised by a multi-correlative approach (Pollefeyt 2008a). There are multiple interpretations or paths to be drawn when dialoguing about human experience. Human experience does not have to be immediately related to the Christian tradition. The shift from a mono-correlative model to a multi-correlative

model highlights further the concept of the human person as an interpreting being who is able to engage in interpreting and dialoguing about ideological positions, to reflect on life experiences and discover insights about this experience. Such a reality is evident within the PSCPS environment, where multiple voices are heard and explored—an exploration that enriches faith understandings and identity formation. Religious Education, therefore, is about the search for meaning. It is focused on the human person, the subject in search of meaning.

For both Dillen and Pollefeyt, the HCM is invitational, encouraging children to enter into a hermeneutical space in which they are invited to explore, to interpret, to question persistently and to engage in critical reflection (Dillen and Pollefeyt 2011; Pollefeyt 2008b). Within this space, children are able to engage in dialogue where there may not be answers to every question but instead, where they are encouraged to explore questions and challenges in an attempt to seek understanding. It is suggested by Dillen and Pollefeyt that within this model one needs to learn how to deal with questions and to search for deeper meaning (Dillen and Pollefeyt 2011). The HCM is an approach that views the Catholic tradition as an open tradition, which cannot be reduced to one view of life. Questions and discussion are encouraged and as Pollefeyt suggests, within this model the Catholic tradition is ‘learnt, discussed and recontextualised’ (Pollefeyt 2011, p. 18).

2.2 Children’s capacity to dialogue about faith

While the reflections of Dillen in relation to the HCM echo some of Pollefeyt’s thinking, her contribution provides further insights into understanding the child—particularly for those who engage in the primary school setting. Dillen challenges the belief that children, particularly young children, are not capable of engaging in dialogue about faith. Her exploration of some literature related to children highlights the common idea of a child as ‘a passive, yet to be socialised, not-yet-adult’, and the deficit notion that such terms imply (Dillen 2007, p. 40). Dillen (2007) draws upon research related to childhood studies, particularly in the area of thinking. Her exploration reveals numerous studies that indicate the structure of young children’s thinking is not dissimilar to adults, and they are in fact capable of more than we may initially consider possible. These studies also indicate children are able to interpret and identify perspectives (Dillen 2007).

The competency of children to engage in dialogue and communicate their thinking is further investigated by Dillen when she explores the idea of the child as the image of God (Dillen 2007). While theologically it is held that the human person is made in the image and likeness of God, Dillen has suggested that the Catholic tradition has not always articulated this in relation to children. She explicitly states,

‘Each person, and also each child, has the task to strive for likeness with God. Thereby it is not necessarily true that adults can be seen as more like God.’ (Dillen 2007, p. 41).

Such a belief is crucial if we are to engage authentically in the HCM with children. It further implies, as Dillen (2007, p. 43) points out:

‘Children themselves have a perspective on faith and religion. They are not ‘by nature’ incompetent concerning ‘religion’. Children can also think about religion and they experience it often in their own ways that are not necessarily less ‘good’ than the adult way. The ‘theology’ developed by children is worth taking seriously

and studying as such. Children can be a ‘source of revelation’. They can arouse and deepen spiritual insights.’

Within the HCM, we see communication and sharing of interpretations between both the child and the adult. Whilst the adult, as religious educator, is the witness, specialist and moderator who facilitates the dialogue, insights are gained by all through such communication and interpretation (Pollefeyt 2011). As Dillen (2007) rightly suggests, children can provide insights into faith and it is here that individuals express their interpretation and understanding of the richness of the Catholic tradition.

2.3 The multiplicity of Catholic voices

Considering the Catholic worldview within the context of the beliefs and practices of the HCM can be challenging. The presentation of curriculum frameworks and materials for religious education often provide a set of answers or predetermined views that are not akin to a hermeneutical approach. A preferential option for Catholicism is required as the key dialogue partner and so too is fidelity to the Catholic tradition, but not in a fixed or predetermined way. The diocesan Religious Education Framework for schools in the diocese to which the school belongs are organised under strands, content areas and standards outlining areas of content, as well as a focus on reasoning and responding, and personal and communal engagement. These three strands highlight the need for knowledge, but also an engagement with the Catholic worldview that is interpreted and expressed and responded to in a variety of ways. This Religious Education Framework is used by PSCPS and is one source for informing conceptual understandings and exploring a Catholic worldview.

Dialogue with Catholic organisations, such as Caritas Australia or St Vincent De Paul, with parishioners, parish staff and the wider Catholic community are also rich sources enhancing the dialogue. The encyclical *Laudato Si* has been explored in relation to the concept of sustainability. The exploration of multiple sources is crucial to ensure the multiplicity of voices within the Catholic faith tradition are heard. This acknowledges that children will develop their own identity in relation to the tradition and come to the dialogue with different life experience and perspectives (Pollefeyt and Richards 2020).

In keeping with an inquiry-based approach and exploring conceptual understandings of areas like diversity and community, the inclusion of multiple sources for finding out, sorting out, going further and deeper; and seeking meaning and understanding are crucial. A primary source is the biblical text, and commentaries, considered within the history of the text and from a future orientated perspective (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2014; Bieringer 2010). An understanding of the biblical text as an ongoing dialogical process of revelation enriches faith understandings and witness to the Catholic faith as it is an alternative story to other interpretative paradigms that may form part of the dialogue with children (Bieringer 2010; Ugbor 2015). As Ugbor (2015, p. 364) suggests in relation to the variety of worldviews that children bring to the dialogue (hermeneutical intersections), the teacher can bring ‘an alternative story (e.g. a biblical story) against the ruling interpretative paradigm in the class (e.g. a consumerist paradigm).’

It is important to note here the challenges that are associated with the hermeneutical presentation of scripture. Carswell (2018a), through an examination of Religious Education curriculum documents in Australia, England and Wales, highlights the problems with the two most common ways in which scripture is chosen in curriculum design, that is, as experimental or doctrinal and taught through themes (Carswell 2018a, p. 290). This approach is seen as ‘highly problematic’ as it predetermines understandings and an interpretation

through one lens (Carswell 2018a, b; Pollefeyt and Bieringer 2010). Pollefeyt and Bieringer (2010) further suggest it is like creating the biblical text as a ‘ventriloquist of a priori fixed views’ (Pollefeyt and Bieringer 2010, p. 389). Heeding these warnings is essential in adopting a hermeneutical approach to Religious Education. To overcome a predetermined theme, Carswell (2018a, p. 296) suggests, the ‘scripture needs to be placed first, before the defined content of the unit, and thus allowed to speak for itself.’

2.4 Multiplicity of voices

The beliefs and practices of the HCM are embraced in response to a multi-faith and culturally enriched environment in which multiple voices are present. This is the reality within and beyond the school context. The school profile sits within a changed Australian religious profile and provides opportunities to explore the Catholic faith within a pluralist and secular Australia and a new dynamic approach to religious education (ABS 2017). Lieven Boeve (2004) highlights that within the context of a secularised and pluralised society, the traditional forms of Religious Education that focus on the mono-correlation of faith and life experience—that is, any single human experience being directly related to the faith tradition—can no longer be an adequate pedagogical or theological approach for Religious Education. Such a position is also held by scholars such as Lombaerts; Dillen and Pollefeyt; Pollefeyt and Bouwens; and Pollefeyt and Richards in their analysis of mono-correlation as a pedagogical and theological approach (Lombaerts 2000; Dillen and Pollefeyt 2011; Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2014; Pollefeyt and Richards 2019).

Further in his analysis, Boeve talks of a shift from two dialogue partners; the Christian tradition and the modern secular context, to a dialogue with a multiplicity of religious and non-religious worldviews; that is, a multiplicity of voices (Boeve 2004, p. 241). Such a multiplicity of voices is evident and promoted within the PSCPS community and captures Boeve’s suggestion that Religious Education is, ‘a service toward identity formation of all pupils, Christian and non-Christian’ (Boeve 2004, p. 239). The reality is that there are many forms of meaning-making possible within a secularised and pluralised society, and there are many entry points possible when engaging in dialogue with children, including the validity and meaning-making possible through the Catholic faith tradition. Within the Catholic school, the Catholic faith remains the preferential or central dialogue partner, a dialogue partner open to the pluralist and secular context within which it finds itself (Boeve 2016, 2019; Pollefeyt and Richards 2020).

Catholic schools are therefore challenged to seriously consider the implications of a changed Australian religious profile, one that is religiously diverse and culturally enriched. The ECSI project invites schools to consider the theological and pedagogical implications for exploring and implementing a hermeneutical approach to enhancing the Catholic identity of the school. In and through exploring and implementing a hermeneutical approach, children are empowered to make meaning of life, to search and discover what life is about for them—in dialogue with the Catholic faith tradition (Pollefeyt 2013).

The next section outlines the data collection methods. After a brief description of the school’s ECSI data the interview data from students, parents and staff as part of doctoral research are explained. The ECSI data highlights the growth in Catholic identity that has taken place with the exploration and implementation of the beliefs and practices of the HCM, and the doctoral research provides confirmation of these survey data, and a deeper understanding of how the school has become a Recontextualising Dialogue School. The

findings from the survey and interviews are presented in the results sections that follows on from the method section.

3 Method

3.1 The school context

Located within Melbourne's northern growth corridor this Catholic primary school began in 2009 to serve the growing number of Catholic families residing in this outer northern suburb. Structurally it is reflective of buildings at the time designed with multiple flexible learning spaces. The growth of the school has seen a commitment to flexible learning spaces. The school community is made up of many cultural groups with various religious adherences represented. While the majority of families come from a Catholic background the previous Roman Catholic majority is now seen alongside Chaldean, Melkite, Maronite, Syro-Malabar and Syrian Eastern Catholic rites. Christians from a number of Orthodox groups and other Christian denominations are also represented. The richness of Christian traditions is enhanced through authentic dialogue with Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh believers who also make up the community.

3.2 An insight into the school's ECSI data

The first source of evidence to be explored here is the specific ECSI data for PSCPS. This data provides insights into the result of a strengthened resolve to work towards the implementation and development of a Recontextualising Dialogue school. The data presentation will outline the PSCPS data and Melbourne Catholic school comparisons in relation to each of the following empirical tools: The Post-Critical Belief Scale, the Melbourne Scale and the Victoria Scale.

Through participation in the ECSI research since the school began in 2009, a conscious effort has been made to consider seriously the empirical data and recommendations stemming from this research. In the first instance this included the ECSI Victorian data analysis, and its recommendations for enhancing Catholic school identity. Since 2013 PSCPS has participated in the ECSI survey on three occasions: 2013, 2014 and 2018, and subsequently, the analysis has specifically focussed on the PSCPS data; the identification of qualities and strengths; potential challenges and critical questions; and recommendations.

3.3 Opinions of students, parents and staff

The second source of evidence to be explored will be the views of students, parents and staff gathered from a PhD study currently underway that is identifying the key contributing factors that impact on leading the implementation and development of a Recontextualising Dialogue School. This study involves individual interviews with the principal, the parish priest, and teachers, as well as group interviews with students and parents. The interviews were conducted by external researchers for this doctoral work. This source of evidence will be referred to hereafter as 'doctoral research'. After the ECSI results section, the opinion evidence is used in a section which provides a discussion about some of the contributing factors to the implementation and development of this Recontextualising Dialogue school.

The full analyses of these data have not been finalised, but the quotes and observations will help inform an understanding of how the school has developed to be a Recontextualising Dialogue School.

4 Results

The results presented here capture the data gathering and analysis over a number of years with the ECSI surveys being conducted in 2013, 2014 and 2018. The survey data highlights the school community's commitment to enhancing and defining its Catholic identity through a growing understanding of a hermeneutical methodology. The survey data in both 2014 and 2018 reflect the consistency in working towards the promoted positions in each of the empirical scales: Post-critical belief position in the Post-Critical Belief Scale; Recontextualising pedagogy in the Melbourne Scale; and a Recontextualising Dialogue school in the Victoria Scale. Engaging and understanding each of the scales has an impact on nurturing the Recontextualising Dialogue school. This is particularly evident in the staff and student data.

4.1 Survey data 2014

The data and reports stemming from the school's participation in 2013 and 2014 showed little change in results. This is not surprising given the short time frame between data gathering. However, the 2014 full report containing graphs, descriptions, conclusions and recommendations indicates that the adults (staff and parents combined) in the community prioritised 'a hermeneutical methodology for re-interpreting the Christian faith' (PSCPS ECSIP 2014 research report, p. 9). This is indicated by the predominance of symbolic understanding in the Post-Critical Belief Scale, (5.07/7; 10.9% strongly agree, 63.6% agree) (PSCPS ECSIP 2014 research report, p. 9). It is also noted and considered 'remarkable' that the believing attitude of post-critical belief in the student results were predominant (6.23/7; 87.9% strongly agrees, 9.1% agrees) (PSCPS ECSIP 2014 research report, p. 10). While considered 'remarkable' the post-critical belief is also matched with a high literal believing stance (5.33/7, 84.9%) suggesting that perhaps some students may have positively responded to all religious items. While students responded positively to believing positions, a lower level for Relativism/ Awareness of Contingency (3.76/7, 30.3% agrees) indicates limited openness and awareness of the multiplicity of voices and plurality that exists today. While overall we see positive movement in the 2014 data, there were areas requiring further development. These included a focus on exploring ways to enhance the post-critical believing position as opposed to literal belief. It also required an exploration of ways to increase the learning community's awareness of the multiplicity of voices—not only present within the school but the wider community. This can also involve rich dialogue facilitated within the plurality of one religious tradition (Pollefeyt and Richards 2020).

4.2 Survey data comparison 2014–2018

Four years later in 2018, the PSCPS ECSI research report provided comparisons between the 2014 and 2018 data. This is significant as its comparisons clearly show the growth as a result of the work undertaken and prioritised within the school community. It is clear

that there is a decline in literal belief within the student cohort 2018 (4.65/7) and 2014 (5.53/7) and continued high levels of post-critical belief 2018 (6.03/7) and 2014 (6.23/7). In relation to Christian Values education, a decline is seen in the student data between 2014 (5.59/7) and 2018 (4.68/7). A decline is also noted in the staff data 2014 (5.06/7) and 2018 (4.92/7). It is to be noted that the 2014 staff data figure is inclusive of parent responses.

In the 2018 data, there continues to be a recognition by students of both recontextualisation and dialogue at the factual level in the Melbourne scale 5.42/7 and Victoria scale 5.65/7. There is however a slight drop in these in relation to the ideal school, evident in both the Melbourne scale 5.06/7 and Victoria scale 5.39/7. In relation to staff data, post-critical belief remains high (5.32/7) and a desire for both recontextualisation and dialogue within the top 10% of Melbourne schools.

4.3 Subpopulations

The 2018 full report also provides a subpopulations graph identifying across the three scales; the Post-Critical Belief Scale, the Melbourne Scale and the Victoria Scale, as well as the Doyle and the Profile Questionnaires four subpopulations. The four subgroups (*Secularisation, Reconfessionalising, Christian Values Education and Recontextualising*) describe how participants perceive their 'ideal school'. *Secularising*, refers to those who wish to abandon the Catholic identity. *Reconfessionalising* refers to those who wish to return to a vision for a Catholic school for and by Catholics. *Christian Values education* refers to those who wish to highlight the values of the Christian faith when in dialogue with the current culture, often taking the values and leaving faith behind. *Recontextualising* refers to those who wish to re-profile the Catholic faith in the context of the tradition and contemporary society; that is; in dialogue with the multiplicity of voices. (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2014).

The subpopulation data in the 2018 PSCPS ECSIP report indicates that the majority of both the staff 71.8% and students 58.6% are within the Recontextualising subpopulation. This result is considered to reflect above average dominance in comparison to elsewhere in Melbourne, where in relation to the Recontextualising subpopulation staff are 49.2% and students 37.6% (PSCPS ECSIP 2018 research report, p. 31). The parents, however, remain committed to Christian Values education. This is the case in both PSCPS data and the Melbourne data. It is worth noting that the PSCPS parent group has been the most challenging group to engage in the surveys with results to be viewed with caution. This is a challenge for the school community, but an educative opportunity.

The 2018 ECSI survey acknowledges the strong support from both staff and students for the Catholic school identity of PSCPS and in relation to students states; 'In fact, the student Recontextualising subpopulation has grown considerably since 2014, much as a result of a decreasing Reconfessionalising subpopulation the strong and unanimous staff support remains a good sign for the program moving forward, and for the vibrant Catholicity of the school as well' (PSCPS ECSIP 2014 research report, p. 43).

While this paper will not outline the ECSI research in further detail, insights can be gained through ECSI research publications and video material (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2014; <https://www.schoolidentity.net/introduction/>).

4.4 Beyond the ESCI data

The doctoral research indicates students are able to confidently articulate their current inquiries and how these relate to their learning for the year. They also confidently engage in religious dialogue through the use of hermeneutical prompts. Further anecdotal evidence is seen in student documentation (written work) and articulation of faith highlighting student voice.

Parents are aware and supportive of the prayer life of the school and the exploration by their children of scripture from a future orientated perspective. The parents also acknowledge the learning that occurs in relation to an awareness of otherness, specifically in reference to the multi-faith and multicultural school and the wider community. The school involves a Wurundjeri Aboriginal Elder, Murrundindi, in many learning opportunities on a regular basis and his presence and involvement is seen as being a significant part of our religious dialogue with other cultures and faiths.

In this next section, attention will be given to the incorporation of the beliefs and practices of the HCM through what our community understands as Faith and Life Inquiry. This section will explore an inquiry-based framework and inquiry processes, the incorporation of thinking routines and hermeneutical prompts. The importance of a school wide approach to this framework and processes, as well as thinking routines and hermeneutical prompts will be illustrated through student and teacher voice, gleaned through 2019 student group interviews and teacher individual interviews.

4.5 Faith and life inquiry: incorporating beliefs and practices from the hermeneutical communicative model

The learning community of PSCPS has used the term Faith and Life Inquiry to express our incorporation of beliefs and practices from the HCM. Faith and Life Inquiry was first used in the author's previous school setting in 2005, when his exploration of the HCM first began. Over time it has been acknowledged that the title is problematic, as it could be seen to imply a binary and perhaps mono-correlational approach to religious learning—this is neither the intention nor the practice. A Faith and Life Inquiry approach to learning does not advocate or promote a mono-correlational or a Christian Values Education approach. It is multi-correlational and open to the ongoing search for understanding in and through dialogue with others in keeping with and aligned to the underlying beliefs and practices of the HCM. Faith and Life Inquiry invites children to consider their current view and understanding or interpretations of the world in and through dialogue with others.

The incorporation of the beliefs and practice of the HCM within a school community is a complex task. It requires a growing understanding of the HCM, not only its theological foundations but a consideration of the ways in which it can be practically implemented and developed with staff and children. It requires a thorough knowledge of curriculum and the capacity to facilitate and promote dialogue with children about faith understandings, and engaging with the mystery of God. Crucial to the dialogue within the Catholic school is the teacher's knowledge and confidence to skilfully engage with the Catholic message, as the key dialogue partner.

When designing learning opportunities for Faith and Life Inquiry, within the school context, a number of factors come into play. Pedagogically it relies on the learning community's knowledge and understanding of an inquiry-based approach to learning, a culture of

thinking and, theologically, an understanding of a hermeneutical approach. The language and process of inquiry and thinking must permeate all learning opportunities, supported and enhanced by hermeneutical prompts as outlined later in the paper.

Faith and Life Inquiry is co-designed with children, parents and teachers and with reference to the Victorian Curriculum. Concepts such as change, diversity, culture, community, sustainability, citizenship, relationships, adaptation and design are some examples of the concepts that have emerged in the formulation of a conceptual framework.

An inquiry-based conceptual framework is considered by Murdoch (2015) to be like a map providing the major destinations, whilst the various 'routes' to be taken depend on the needs of the traveller. The inquiry process is determined by the children's life experiences and current events in the wider community. Learners, therefore, investigate the concept but also move within and beyond this in response to their own inquiry providing flexibility, adaptability and spontaneity (Murdoch 2015). Stemming from the conceptual framework are compelling question/s and key understandings which are developed to provide a clearer picture of the conceptual understandings to be explored and deepened.

The framework design enables learners to consider multiple worldviews, to consider the views of the children and adults engaged in the dialogue through inquiry. The learning from others can inform and challenge opinions, reflective of the beliefs and practices of the HCM (Ugbor 2015). Faith and Life Inquiry seeks to engage children in dialogue with the purpose of deepening their understanding of various concepts, exposing them to the multiplicity of worldviews and presenting the richness of the Catholic tradition as a valid and preferential view. This presentation of the Catholic tradition as a valid and preferential view highlights as Boeve indicates, that the 'Christian faith has to do with peoples' lives, and can address, challenge and give meaning to people as well today' (Boeve 2016, p. 210).

4.6 The biblical text

As previously mentioned, there are challenges with the presentation of scripture in a hermeneutical approach. A crucial point in relation to scripture is an understanding that it expresses the interaction between God and God's people within a particular historical context. It contains religious language and thought. It requires interpretation and reinterpretation and an ongoing search for meaning and understanding (Pollefeyt and Richards 2020). As Bieringer (2010, p. 105) suggests:

'Texts project future worlds as alternatives to the existing worlds in which we live. Thus they are not only directed towards the past and the present, texts also have a future dimension.'

In choosing scripture, the liturgical seasons provide one way of engaging with the text. The scripture is presented through whole school prayer open to all members of the community (children, staff and parents). This reading and praying with the scriptures through the liturgical season ensures a familiarity with the Christian story (a familiarity once taken for granted). The scripture story is listened to over a period of time, not only at whole school prayer but within classroom prayer. There is a growing familiarity with the story and within the spirit of an inquiry-based approach time and opportunity to consider wonderings and to identify first thinking about the scripture. The use of biblical commentaries forms an important part of the '*finding out*' phase of inquiry where time and opportunity are provided to '*find out*' about the historical context of the text.

The doctoral research indicates the children are open to interpreting the scripture in a hermeneutical way and have an awareness of each writer's perspective:

'because each story in the Bible is written differently, one can be by Matthew, one can be by Luke, one can be like by John, 'cause they all have different perspectives of how the story is' (Student Group Interview).

And another student identifying the notion of literal and symbolic understandings states:

'We don't just look at it literally, like we look at it symbolically, so maybe that didn't just happen the way it says' (Student Group Interview).

The children have, as Bieringer (2010, p. 102) suggests, an understanding that the text does 'not tell us 'what happened' but someone's interpretation of 'what happened.' In respect to the children's capacity and ability to interpret text from a future orientated perspective, one child expressed it in this way:

'So, 'This text talks to me of a world in which...' gives us like our own perspective on like how we can ... interpret the text, what our perspective of the text is' (Student Group Interview).

Another example of engaging with the biblical text, interpreting, reinterpreting and considering the views of others, is so beautifully expressed by a Year 5/6 child in this way:

'Each time we read it it's like I gather like a new layer of thinking. So one time I read it I'll say oh alright, I think this, but then next time I read it I put another layer on, so I'm building onto my thinking until it can be the best it can be. It's just like a building, like say you build like one layer, one like floor, another floor, another floor, until it's like the best it can be. That's like our religious learning is, that's like ... 'cause we all build onto each other's thinking, we build onto our own thinking making it the best it can be, and we do that from reading the text a few times and [exploring] biblical commentaries. So, yeah, that's how I think it can be the best it can be' (Student Group Interview).

Throughout their learning children are nurtured toward a hermeneutical understanding of scripture and bring this mindset to the inquiry concepts, compelling questions and understandings with which they engage.

4.7 Dialogue and discover

While the structure of a concept, compelling question/s and a set of understandings are formed in the planning stage, learners are required to construct meaning through an inquiry, facilitated strategically and in a sophisticated way by the teacher. Through an inquiry-based approach, learners are stimulated through provocations, nurturing curiosity and the development of wonderings to consider their first thinking and ideas about a given concept, compelling question and key understandings. When engaging in the process of inquiry through, '*tuning in*', '*finding out*', '*sorting out*', '*going further*' and '*reflecting and acting*', learners are able to dialogue with others to share their thinking, make connections and consider ways their thinking is extended or challenged (Murdoch 2015; Ritchhart et al. 2011). The teacher, as facilitator of learning, provides ongoing opportunities for children to '*find out*' and '*sort out*', to continue to reflect upon and deepen conceptual understandings. Opportunities to inquire into what others think about

conceptual understandings includes both religious and philosophical positions and/or worldviews. This can and ought to involve *'finding out'* through seeking dialogue with those not only within but beyond the learning community. In relation to religious and philosophical viewpoints Pollefeyt (2011, p. 31) suggests,

'This interpretive way of learning is the result of confrontation with the influxes from various sources, namely the prevailing culture, one's own life story and the existing narrative religious/ideological traditions.'

Such a view acknowledges the multiplicity of voices and their views on human experience and identity formation. More importantly this learning captures and expands on the learner's understanding of stories and rituals, and through deep learning and exploration, an understanding of religious positions such as respect and care for the earth and actions that make visible fundamental beliefs about the human person (Pollefeyt and Richards 2019).

4.8 Deep thinking within and beyond the concept

Through the scaffolds and process of an not inquiry-based approach to learning, enriched by the use of thinking routines and hermeneutical prompts, Faith and Life Inquiry supports children's capacity to make their thinking visible and to consider the thinking of others. It is here that a whole school approach strengthens and supports the learner in articulating their understandings. It is crucial when engaging in Faith and Life Inquiry that children are able to authentically make their thinking visible and their voice heard.

The formulation of concepts in this inquiry-based approach are overarching. They provide the starting point or catalyst from which learners can investigate within and beyond the concept. Personalised inquiries can move within and beyond the concept and, when nurtured and promoted, enable children to investigate areas of interest. The formulation of a concept or concepts for exploration and dialogue does not predetermine a worldview or Catholic position. However, none is devoid of personal view or perspective (Boeve 2016). As Pollefeyt (2020, p. 3) states,

'The goal of hermeneutical learning is to find and expose effective interpretations of the world, in order to achieve a better understanding of things from within, in this case religions and philosophies of life.'

The promotion and school wide adoption of thinking routines and thinking moves, developed and promoted by researchers at Harvard Project Zero, adds a critical layer to Faith and Life Inquiry. These thinking routines and thinking moves provide a scaffold and support learners in making their thinking visible. These practices are not only supporting children's capacity to make their thinking visible but provide a language for children to justify their thinking and to make connections with others' thinking. The steps within each thinking routine assists in the construction of meaning including questions such as, 'What makes you say that?' where learners express or make their thinking visible. These types of questions have been described as a 'reflective toss', as they assist in clarifying thinking and enabling the teacher to further facilitate the dialogue (Ritchhart 2012). The facilitation of such opportunities within a safe hermeneutical space enables all learners to engage authentically in dialogue.

4.9 Hermeneutical prompts

An inquiry-based approach and the nurturing of a Culture of Thinking (CoT) coupled with the use of 'hermeneutical prompts' or cues, further assists children to voice their theological insights and formulate opinions. 'Hermeneutical prompts' are a set of words, phrases and sentences, which capture an idea of learning in a hermeneutical way. The 'hermeneutical prompts' stem from a draft document of Catholic Education Melbourne which identified, from a number of readings related to the ECSI research, ways of learning hermeneutically. Examples of these include: Seeing new layers of meaning; Interpreting text and symbols; Enabling all students, Catholic as well as other believers, to discover meaning in their lives and to deepen their humanity in dialogue with the Christian story; and Openness to and learning from other religions, cultures and ways of life (Catholic Education Office Melbourne 2012).

At PSCPS we have adapted these for use within the classroom, creating small printed discs with each prompt displayed. These are reflected upon as part of any dialogue within Faith and Life Inquiry to assist learners and the teacher to highlight and focus on the depth and breadth of the dialogue. These 'hermeneutical prompts' assist learners to consider questions, such as: What have I noticed about my own thinking or how has this dialogue had an impact on my own hermeneutical space? Am I richer for the dialogue? Am I still grappling with or challenged by the dialogue in some way? The time and opportunity to reflect on ways that the learners have engaged hermeneutically, through the use of a 'hermeneutical prompt' provides insights for the teacher for further dialogue. The teacher can provide time and opportunity for learners to inquire further, to clarify their wonderings, or to sit within this hermeneutical space for a time and then have the opportunity to revisit their thinking.

4.10 Dialogue with a multiplicity of voices

Hermeneutical prompts provide a further scaffold for identifying the richness of the dialogue of both learners and teachers. They make explicit and visible the changes or movements within one's hermeneutical space through dialogue with others. Children articulate the movements: for example, a year five girl said:

'I have been considering *new layers of meaning* through dialoguing with Murundindi, Wurundjeri Elder and his Indigenous beliefs, in connection to my own faith' (Student Documentation, 2019).

Another example is that of a year five boy who was empowered to consider his own Sikh faith after engaging in dialogue with the Catholic faith. He chose to reflect on this dialogue through the hermeneutical prompt '*Enabling all students, Catholic as well as other believers, to discover meaning in their lives and to deepen their humanity in dialogue with the Christian story*'. He articulated and documented his thinking in this way:

'I chose this prompt because when we talked about the story of Zacchaeus I found out that Zacchaeus got forgiven whilst in my culture we also get forgiven, but not by Jesus, but by Waheguru who is our god. I know this because of my religious stories and it was a connection with Zacchaeus when he got forgiven. When I have

done something wrong I go to the temple to ask the leader there to pray for me and forgive me for what I have done' (Student documentation, 2018).

The example above further highlights the richness and insights that can be gained through respecting and valuing the contribution of all who make up the Catholic school today. It also highlights and affirms the notion of 'linguistic hospitality' where speakers of other religious or non-religious tongues are empowered and can enter into the dialogue of a 'foreign tongue' (Pollefeyt and Richards 2019). The faith understandings and the willingness of the year five Sikh boy to share his insights and faith further echoes Pollefeyt's idea that the HCM assist all children in their search for meaning:

'The hermeneutical-communicative model also accepts and appreciates that in the case of some students the hermeneutical space is structured or orientated from a different philosophical or religious tradition, such as Islam or secular humanism. From these traditions, likewise, students can also speak and live authentically, even though they do not explicitly experience the God experienced by Christians as a guiding, life giving and redemptive God' (Pollefeyt 2013, p. 28).

Through dialogue, therefore, children can gain '*new layers of meaning*', or '*discover meaning in their lives and deepen their humanity in dialogue with the Christian story*'.

The dialogue related to the year five boy's Sikh faith, outlined above, led to further inquiry and a visit to the Sikh Gurudwara instigated by the Sikh believer. Deeper understandings of Sikhism were gained as were new insights and deeper understandings of the Catholic faith, as evidenced in one year six boy's reflection on the experience:

'We made discoveries on how the two faiths are different, but we also looked at the similarities and *uncovered new layers of meaning* to our faith, as well as discoveries with his faith' (Student documentation 2018).

Such opportunities enable children to construct and reconstruct their understandings (Ugbor 2015). It is important to provide experiences, scaffolds and structures in order to assist children and teachers to express their ideas and to be pushed further in their thinking, particularly in an open hermeneutical way. This example further illustrates the capacity of students who, when enculturated within a dialogue school, open up the hermeneutical capacity of others, learning with and from them (Pollefeyt and Richards, 2019).

The example above is also an example of the growth within the school community to an awareness of contingency or multiple world views in comparison to our 2014 ECSI survey indicating 'guided improvement' was required here.

4.11 Authentic dialogue

Faith and Life Inquiry empowers children to engage in authentic dialogue. As inquirers, children are encouraged to consider their beliefs and the beliefs of others. Through engaging in dialogue with each other, children become aware of the diversity of faith positions other than their own. The reality that different worldviews exist becomes evident. Through dialogue within the classroom 'hermeneutical intersection' are evident as various interpretations come to light (Pollefeyt 2011). This may be the articulation of very different interpretations of a believing or a non-believing stance; or a broader interpretation of the same religious tradition. Within the Catholic school, the preferential option for Catholicism is clear as the key dialogue partner. However, as 'hermeneutical beings' within an environment that nurtures lifelong inquirers, children are encouraged to ask questions, to remain

curious about their own beliefs and the beliefs of others; to make connections and challenge their own thinking and the thinking of others. This notion is echoed in the words of Pollefeyt and Bouwens, when they suggest: 'If we want to authentically live out our Catholic faith from within a multicultural setting, we must hold an open, searching and interpretive attitude' (Pollefeyt 2013, p. 4).

4.12 Leading and empowering others

Significant to facilitating religious learning theologically and pedagogically, through the adoption of the beliefs and practices that underpin the HCM, is the understanding and ongoing development of teachers. In order to bring about the beliefs and practices that underpin the HCM, it is necessary to experience and understand this as a learner yourself. In relation to their respective approaches, both Ritchhart (2015) and Murdoch (2015) suggest if we want to bring about a CoT or an inquiry-based approach for our children we also must want this for teachers. Hargreaves (1995, pp. 27–28) captures the idea in this way;

'What we want for our children we should want for their teachers—that schools be places of learning for both of them and that such learning be suffused with excitement, engagement, passion, challenges, creativity and joy'.

As an educational leader within a contemporary Catholic learning community it must, therefore, be your desire or intention that staff experience opportunities to inquire; reflect; make connections; and consider their faith in a hermeneutical way—developing their own hermeneutical space. This is a deepening of faith for the individual teacher and others who engage in the dialogue and it builds teacher capacity. The approach taken recognises each individual 'fragile hermeneutical space' and the mystery of God present in the dialogue with all. Nurturing such an environment enables staff to dialogue as a group and share their own search for meaning. This, in turn, promotes such dialogue and the nurturing of our children and their hermeneutical spaces.

4.12.1 School structures and pedagogies

In conjunction with, and critical to this exploration of the ECSI research since 2009 at PSCPS, has been the development of a professional learning community (PLC) and a focus on twenty-first Century learning and teaching; including inquiry-based learning and Cultures of Thinking (CoT) (Gurr et al. 2020; Murdoch 2015; Ritchhart 2015; Ritchhart et al. 2011). International research, such as that undertaken by the OECD (2010), on using research to inspire practices, and the work of Fullan et al. (2006) in considering personalised learning, assisted the school initially, to explore and consider what a 21st Century learning environment might look like and ways this could be brought about. Such an exploration of personalised learning, as well as contemporary learning environments is helpful when considering the beliefs and practices of the HCM, recontextualisation and the Recontextualising Dialogue school (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2014, p. 313).

4.12.2 Professional learning

The allocation of time for professional learning is vital to the successful implementation of the beliefs and practices of the HCM. Professional learning time at PSCPS is devoted to Faith and Life Inquiry where staff can engage in a number of learning opportunities

including professional reading where they consider how the ECSI research has connected with, extended or challenged their thinking. The use of thinking routines, identification of thinking moves and exploration of hermeneutical prompts in the context of inquiry assists in making thinking visible and strengthens this dialogue, reflecting classroom practice.

The readings undertaken related to the ECSI research survey instruments, such as the Post-Critical Belief Scale, the Melbourne Scale and the Victoria Scale, have provided insights into the school's current Catholic identity and have assisted in strengthening our Catholic identity (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2014). Further readings linked to our yearly foci have included the research of scholars such as Reimund Bieringer, Lieven Boeve, Didier Pollefeyt and Annemie Dillen. Each one has provided further insights into the beliefs and practices of the HCM and our theological and pedagogical understandings.

At other times, the reading of a biblical text is undertaken with staff identifying their own thinking through the use of both thinking routines and 'hermeneutical prompts'. Further exploration of the biblical text includes reference to biblical commentaries and a consideration of the text from a future orientated perspective (Bieringer 2010). The value of reflecting and unpacking biblical text or religious learning and teaching opportunities as a staff prior to staff engaging with children cannot be understated. As one staff member in the doctoral research noted about her experience:

'I remember at the start of the year as a staff we did a learning of a scripture story and it just blew my mind and I had never thought of the text that way, I'd never thought of this picture that we'd viewed in that way and I think it really hit me ... Like it makes you question your understanding about not just the scripture because I didn't have much of an understanding of scripture, but the world around you as well, and I think that's why it's so important' (TL3 Interview).

And the impact of dialogue related to faith is further evidenced in this teacher's response:

'...I'm thinking about how I was teaching faith at the start of the year to how I'm teaching faith now and I can already see a massive shift in how I approach it through our dialogue as a staff through our Professional Learning' (T4 Interview).

The sharing of experiences within the school context relies on the presence of a particular school culture—a safe hermeneutical space, a space that must be intentionally and strategically nurtured, one that has 'mutual trust, respect and support' as key to relationships and interactions (Stoll et al. 2006). Mutual trust, respect and support enables staff to consider their own hermeneutical space, to share their own faith and connections to the faith of others; this includes their own doubts and challenges. Such a space is evident at PSCPS through the open dialogue and sharing of faith that occurs among staff. Staff articulate the value of opportunities to engage in dialogue about faith. Staff also value the time and opportunity to consider their role as witness, specialist and moderator through opportunities to engage in planning for learning and teaching as part of the professional learning times.

As one teacher leader in the doctoral research articulated:

'I think one really strong [factor] is that as a staff we're engaged in this, my faith and my thinking is changing all the time and I'm hearing from different staff who may not be brought up Catholic, may have another religion or maybe another part of the Catholic faith as well, so I see their ideas and I kind of try and think about that per-

spective in my own life, and that just makes me a different teacher I suppose in how I approach my kids' (TL4 Interview).

Further expressing learning and faith development as ongoing this teacher stated it in this way:

'You know, you're reinterpreting. I think the importance of dialogue is that it's something that is ongoing and it's continuous, you don't just stop and think oh yeah I've got it now, you're always challenging yourself' (TL7 Interview).

4.12.3 Professional practice and practical actions

At PSCPS the beliefs and practices of the HCM approach have been facilitated by the school's professional practice and practical actions that include:

- Professional learning opportunities focused on inquiry-based learning, CoT and learning hermeneutically;
- An acknowledgement of and dialogue with the multiplicity of voices within and beyond our learning community;
- The presence and development of an open Catholic tradition, recognising the plurality that exists within our own Catholic tradition;
- A future orientated perspective acknowledging the ongoing nature of revelation and the belief that the mystery of God continues to be revealed to us;
- A belief that the human person, adult and child, is made in the image and likeness of God and is capable of engaging in theological dialogue;
- The creation of a hermeneutical space or supportive environment in which learners (children and staff) can engage in authentic dialogue;
- The active participation of learners through the development of wonderings, questions, points of view that are explored, challenged, affirmed and supported;
- The acknowledgement of learning as lifelong and life wide promoting the ongoing search and articulation of faith or non-faith positions; and
- The role of the religious educator teacher as curriculum designer, co-inquirer, witness, specialist and moderator.

These professional practices and practical actions have assisted in creating a culture of openness to the views and faith understandings of others. They have contributed to building the capacity of teachers to facilitate dialogue about faith within a supportive school community.

5 Conclusion

The adoption of the beliefs and practices of the HCM is providing a richness of dialogue among children and teachers at PSCPS. It is enabling children to articulate their religious thinking and to gain further insights in their faith understandings. The culture of expressing religious understandings, within the context of a Recontextualising Dialogue school, is evident to those who are a part of it each day and those who visit us. Our Recontextualising Dialogue school through its adoption of the beliefs and principles of the HCM, is

enabling students to gain greater insights into themselves and those around them. As Dillen suggests:

‘The basic position in the hermeneutical-communicative model is that people, both parents and children, achieve [their] own appropriation of the Christian tradition by speaking about their interpretations of reality. This broad concept, the ‘interpretation of reality’, refers to interpreting one’s own life, the world and one’s social context, as well as one’s religious traditions—particularly the Christian tradition when speaking about Christian religious education’ (Dillen 2007).

The religious thinking made visible through student documentation provides insights into the pedagogy of hermeneutics and the dialogue that has occurred among the learners, guided by the teachers as co-inquirers, specialists, witnesses and moderators (Pollefeyt 2011). The documentation, while making the learning visible, also provides opportunities for further dialogue and ongoing interpretations and interaction with the learners. This is so powerful expressed by a Year 5/6 student:

‘Being a dialogue school means you can share your ideas with others so they can gain more ideas and you can share your thinking with each other. And when you do that you can find out what they’re thinking and they can find out what you’re thinking. So it’s just making a new layer of meaning for both of you’. (Student Group Interview).

It is hoped that the insights related to PSCPS’s exploration of the HCM has provided an awareness of the crucial role that the school’s professional practices and practical actions play in enabling this learning and teaching practice to be enacted. Each aspect of this work promotes and keeps alive a vibrant and developing twenty-first century Recontextualising Dialogue school.

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