

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO DIALOGUE (Review of the article "Dialogue as the Future")

"Dialogue as the Future" was originally written by Professor Didier Pollefeyt & drs Jan Bouwens in 2013 to illuminate trends they observed in the Victoria Scale based on data from Flemish schools. This version of the article has been written for the Victorian context with commentary and data from the years 2011 – 2019 included (note the graphs at the end of the article).

Remember that the typologies in the Victoria Scale are Monologue School, Colourless School, Colourful School and Dialogue School (the preferred position).

The two sets of data (Flanders and Victoria) show that:

Adults universally see and desire the Dialogue School above all else.

Unlike Flemish adults in 2013, a majority of Victorian adults (almost half; 44%) resist the Colourful School; at the same time there is significant minority support (roughly a quarter; 24.5%) of adults who prefer the Colourful School while approximately one third (31.3%) are not sure.

Combining primary and secondary Victorian student data, the great majority both see and desire the Dialogue School.

Unlike Flemish students in 2013, amongst Victorian students there is slightly more resistance to the Colourful School (33.4%) than to the Dialogue School (19%). That said, desire for the Colourful School increases as students get older until it is preferred over Dialogue by Year 11&12 students.

At the end of the article Pollefeyt and Bouwens offer some wisdom for graduate teachers which is in fact pertinent to all teachers and leaders in Catholic schools. They clearly state that in our schools and classrooms educators should:

1. learn to recognise and understand the difference between a Dialogue School and a Colourful School
2. find their own place within the Dialogue
3. save room for respect, openness, diversity, free choice and growth
4. develop and maintain strong learning environments
5. bring all students - both believers and non-believers - into dialogue with each other and with the Catholic tradition

In arguing for Dialogue Schools Pollefeyt & Bouwens state that: (i) "it is important for school leadership figures to learn the language with which they can reflect on and become conscious of the quiet transitions taking place in their schools, as well as to make certain choices out of this consciousness" and (ii) that "the decision to work on building up a Dialogue School ... asks for a continuous renewal and re-profiling of the school as the context shifts." There are no particular techniques or tricks which can be applied to create a Dialogue School. The process is very much dependent on context and the attitudes of leadership who must commit for the long haul; however a strong understanding of what constitutes a Dialogue School is presumed.

Pollefeyt & Bouwens lay out two conditions from which the Dialogue School should arise: (writing in the plural) (i) "when members of the school staff choose to live, behave and witness as the best Catholics they can possibly be, out of a personally lived spirituality", and (ii) "when school staff ... meet their students as they truly are, put their interests first and walk side by side with them." All schools would hope to do this but it is a constant challenge

and based upon meeting the first condition (ie grounded in a sense of personal faith lived out).

On the other hand Pollefeyt & Bouwens warn that “schools that opt for a Colourful model should know that Colourlessness (in which religious faith is privatized and not up for discussion or comparison) lurks around the corner as a secondary connected pattern”; there is much evidence for this very undesirable outcome.

In conducting their research in Victoria over years, Pollefeyt and Bouwens have also identified different versions of the Dialogue School, particularly the **kerygmatic** and **recontextualising** types.

“The **kerygmatic** type of Dialogue School is primarily concerned with the search for a new ‘public relations strategy’ and not so much with recontextualisation or new, fundamental theological developments ... the ‘Catholic package’ of faith convictions and truth claims, in other words the traditional Catholic way of life, is more or less fixed and unchangeable.” In this type of Dialogue School, “everything comes down to proclaiming the plausibility, greater value and truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ in an honest way within an open dialogue with all who are prepared to enter into the discussion.” Unlike the Monologue School, however, the kerygmatic type of Dialogue School does not go as far as to expect that all of the students are or will become Catholic.

On the other hand, staff in the **recontextualising** type of Dialogue School clearly understand that “the truth of Catholicism is not fixed and cannot a priori be known with certainty. The truth must rather be discovered and made true in lives actually lived through a continual process of interpretation.” They appreciate that they stand with one foot in the Catholic tradition and the other in an unwritten future. This is Recontextualisation in a nutshell and shows how Dialogue is a necessary prerequisite for it to come about.

For further information see “Subtypes of the Dialogue School”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkknAcj7a4A&feature=youtu.be> (2:15 – 6:30)

In order to bring about a Recontextualising Dialogue School (particularly in our current strongly pluralised context), Pollefeyt & Bouwens maintain that “it is crucial to have active dialogue with people of other convictions and lifestyles (and so) many different philosophical and religious visions, practices and lifestyles can (and should) exist side-by-side in a Catholic school.” Some of our schools appear to be less diverse than others however a wide range of views and behaviours will usually exist and that is a good thing. “Through recognising, respecting and truly valuing the differences between people the school can (continue to) rediscover its Catholic identity.”

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