

SPRING 2008

The Newfoundland solution to secular schools and religious education

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador went from a school system controlled by churches, to a secular school system. The following is the text from documents supplied by, and reprinted with the permission of, the Department of Education, Newfoundland and Labrador on how the province has tackled the change. The approach serves as a model which has been praised by several jurisdictions.

Approaches to Religious Education

There are three (3) generally accepted approaches to Religious Education: Confessional, Factual and Understanding. The current curriculum design in Newfoundland and Labrador for religious education is based on the understanding approach. The Essential Graduation requirements for all students include spiritual and moral development:

"Graduates will demonstrate understanding and appreciation for the place of belief systems in shaping the development of moral values and ethical conduct. . . Being able to express one's beliefs and values while having the ability to listen to and understand other people's beliefs and values contributes to an improved society. The art of expressing and defending appropriately one's own beliefs without degrading or negating those of others is an important part of personal development." (*RE Curriculum Guide*)

The understanding approach uses an experiential and phenomenological philosophy. Brenda Watson, author of *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education* (1993), defines the phenomenological approach as

"respect for, and understanding of, religion and its significance for behaviour in such a way as to leave intact pupils' integrity - it is not educating **into** religion in any way, but educating about religion understood as more than information because [it involves] a positive and creative approach to pluralism. Sometimes the phrase 'celebration of diversity' is used to point to the affective as well as cognitive impacts which this approach would like to see in pupils." (44)

She also defines the experiential approach as one which

"tries to get pupils in communication with the depths in themselves so that they may have some idea of what that is like for other people, as well as helping them to be more truly 'present' in what they are studying. It is important to note that the intention is **de-indoctrination**. The teacher is not attempting to convert pupils to

any particular belief, but to increase their insight into other ways of seeing.¹ (Hay 1990:109)" (73-74)

Watson goes on to argue that the experiential model requires constant self-reflection in an effort to fully integrate learning in other subject areas. She examines the role of "spiritual" experience as part of the experiential pedagogy and maintains that religion simply provides the vocabulary and symbols with which we can describe the spiritual dimension.

"Religious education should give access to the great spiritual traditions - the vocabulary used, and the kind of symbolism. In so doing, any hint of attempted indoctrination, conditioning, manipulation, even influencing and persuading, is misplaced because this dimension can only be grasped in freedom, or it is not grasped at all." (83)

In Newfoundland and Labrador, our religious education curriculum offers students opportunities to develop an understanding of human nature as it is affected by spiritual experiences. "Through their study, students should come to appreciate the intrinsic worth of each religion for its adherents." (*RE Curriculum Guide*)

For information and theories on spiritual and moral development the following authors are recommended: Fritz Oser, James Fowler, Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan.

For information on spirituality and education the following authors are recommended: Andrew Wright, Jack Nelson, Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker.

Elementary Religious Education Curriculum in Newfoundland and Labrador

The elementary religious education curriculum was the first to be implemented after the amalgamation of our denominational school districts. Our elementary curriculum guide is available for download from http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/sp/rel_educ.htm. The resources were custom-developed by Breakwater Books Ltd., based here in St. John's, NL. The series is called *Faiths of Friends* and is available in French and English; teacher resources are also available (3-hole punched in binders).

Features of the Texts

- Local narratives set in Corner Brook, St. Anthony/Labrador and St. John's (provincial context with some global references and immigrants who have moved to Newfoundland and Labrador)
- Narratives are continual (September to June) and written from the first person point of view
- Grade 4 - *Journeys* explores, through narrative, Judaism, Christianity and Islam; set mainly in St. Anthony, NL and in southern Labrador
- Grade 5 - *Directions* explores, through narrative, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism; set mainly in St. John's, NL
- Grade 6 - *Horizons* explores, through narrative, Christianity, Islam, Aboriginal Spirituality and Baha'i; set mainly in Corner Brook, NL

Ordering Information for textbooks

BREAKWATER BOOKS

P.O. Box 2188 100 Water Street St. John's, Newfoundland A1C6E6 Telephone - (709) 722-6680 Fax - (709) 753-0708

Email: info@breakwater.nf.net

To place an order call toll free -1-800-563-3333

Journeys **ISBN:** 1-55081-179-7 Directions **ISBN:** 1-55081-180-0 Horizons

ISBN: 1-55081-181-9

Intermediate Religious Education

The intermediate religious education curriculum was the second to be implemented after the amalgamation of our denominational school districts. Our intermediate curriculum guide is available for download from http://www.ed.qov.nl.ca/edu/sp/rel_edu.htm. The resources were custom-developed by Thomson Nelson based in Scarborough, ON. The resource is available in French and English; teacher resources are also available (3-hole punched in binders).

Features of the Texts

Grade 7 - **Expressions of Faith**

- Providing opportunities for students to examine various faiths and their adherents
- Content is narrative and episodic (not continual) - 20 stories are told from the perspective of students from Mr. Trevey's grade 7 religious education class; students travel in a time machine to various places around the world at different points in time
- Focus of the resource is on diversity within various belief systems and the role played by missions

Grade 8 - **Who am I?**

- Providing opportunities for students to seek answers to questions about their identity
- Content is narrative, episodic (not continual) and dramatic (written from the first person point of view in dialogue) -12 students from around the world gather at Island Pond International Camp (I-PIC) with 3 counselors; characters engage in a variety of classes which challenge them to answer questions about their own beliefs and the beliefs of others
- Focus of the resource is on religious beliefs (comparative) and tolerance

Grade 9 - **My Place in the World**

- Providing opportunities for students to answer the question of what role they have in the world through an introduction to relationships, ethical decision-making and social justice
- Content is organized by topic and theme; many topics provide for discussion and debates
- Focus of the resource is on ecumenism and global community

Ordering Information for Intermediate books

NELSON EDUCATION

1120 Birchmount Road Scarborough, ON M1K 5G4

Telephone - (416) 752-9448 Monday to Friday 8:00am to 6:00pm EST Fax - (416) 752-8101 and 1-800-430-4445

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nelson.pricing@nelson.ca To place an order call toll free -1-800-268-2222

Expressions of Faith ISBN: 0-17-620107-6 *Who Am I?* ISBN: 0-17-620109-2

My Place in the World ISBN: 0-17-620112-2