

Faith Friendly Education – religion and spirituality in the classroom.

**A lecture presented to Graduate Diploma of Education students,
Adelaide University, 15 October 2008
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“Love is all we have, the only way that each can help the other”. Euripedes

I have been asked to speak to you today about some of the implications of religious and cultural diversity for us as classroom teachers, to try to give some handles on avoiding possible conflict situations in the classroom arising from misunderstandings of unfamiliar religious-cultural traditions.

Put positively, I want to entertain with you some ideas about being a “faith-friendly” teacher in a “faith-friendly” classroom and to approach this in a generic way.

The alternative might be to take a technical approach – to list all the details of culture and religion teachers should be aware of – Hallal food, absences due to religious festivals (religious calendars), clothing issues... all the pitfalls... and put them into a big fat folder to be issued to all teachers and demand that they take note!

Rather, I am going to provide three generic models of care as possible frameworks for approaching how we might deal with encounters in the classroom that involve “difference” and their implications for how we might think about how we set up the classroom and learning opportunities. Or more precisely, three views that come at faith-friendly teaching from different directions.

I propose to:

- Tell a personal story that involves me encountering difference, and use it to illicit general principles of learning through encounter.
- Outline Nollings model of care from the literature of Care in Education.
- Suggest the metaphor of hospitality as one that might be instructive in the teacher-learner encounter involving difference.
- Briefly examine forces that are destructive of the models proposed.
- Suggest broadly what a faith-friendly environment might involve and provide a model of multifaith/multicultural cooperation which might approximate the classroom.
- Suggest that self-care in sustaining our own spiritualities is fundamental to sustaining these models.
- Give one specific case study from my teaching experience that applies some of these principles.

I want to start by asking you to take a few minutes in silence to consider and write your responses to:

Why/how did I decide to become a teacher?

Recall the circumstances when this occurred.

What has reinforced your initial decision?

As I was discussing our lecture today with my Buddhist colleague I mentioned that I was intending to start by asking you these personal questions. Thay has been a Primary School teacher, so I was interested in his response.

“Oh,” he said, “I never wanted to be a teacher! I always wanted to be a monk!”

“So why did you become a teacher?” I asked.

“ Because my mother wanted me to! I went and did four years at Teachers College and four years of teaching, and then I said to my mother, ‘there, I’ve done my teaching – now I want to become a monk!’”

Then Thay reminded me of the apocryphal story of Cinderella.

One of the “ugly sisters” tried to get her foot into the slipper by cutting off pieces of her foot!

The moral is obvious – when you don’t fit, it’s painful!

So it’s important to ask the question!

A MODEL OF ENCOUNTER AND LEARNING FROM MY PRACTICE.

(a) An encounter narrative

This last week a student in his forties came to see me. We will call him Raphael, since he is of Mediterranean origin.

Late last year Raphael had chosen me to be his mentor. He is undertaking a PhD and getting his proposal together.

I had seen Raphael a couple of times and we had established an open relationship, which, by all accounts, he valued. The understanding is that he contacts me, not me him; but I had not seen him for three or four months, at least. Furthermore, I had heard some negative remarks on the grapevine - some assignments that were unsatisfactory and he seemed to be getting a reputation as someone who could talk his way out of things, but “doesn’t deliver”.

I put this surmising to one side as Raphael knocked on my door.

He was full of apologies as I welcomed him.

“Please, do come in and sit down. Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?” (We chaplains invariably start by offering such hospitality!)

He relaxes and we talk about our comings and goings as the kettle boils... he had hoped to see me but I had been overseas ... I can be a hard man to catch...etc. I accept his apologies and offer my own.

“So,” I venture, “how’s it going?”

“Well...not so good, really...”

He tells me he has been getting headaches. So he took himself off to the Uni doctor. The problem seemed to be in his neck. When the X-Rays came back, the doctor said ‘you have a backbone of a 65 year old!’ “It’s progressive degeneration, but we have it under control at the moment.”

We share a joke – he may be in his 40’s but I’m 62, so our backbones are about the same age!

Then Raphael tells me that he went to see one of the Uni Counsellors to help him cope with the news he got from the doctor. She was very helpful.

I note that it must be pretty bad news from the doctor to then go see the counsellor. But on the other hand a visit to the Uni Counsellor is helpful to get extensions for assignments. So I ask Raphael what the implications of the doctor's report might be for his studies.

Up until now the word 'cancer' has not been mentioned, but it sneaks into his answer, perhaps unintended, or at least disguised in the verbiage about his studies. I note it without comment and attend to his explanation. Because ill health has impaired his study, his position as a student is now under threat; he could lose his status as a PhD student at the end of the year.

I sense that he wants to explore these implications. I know he is in student housing. If he is rejected as a PhD student does this mean he becomes homeless? How will he support himself?

He tells me that he is assured of income support from Centrelink for the next year – sickness benefits. He assures me he will be able to get by financially with that.

“So what about housing?”

Raphael tells me he has some mates down south with whom he plays in a band. They reckon he could easily get some Housing Trust housing down there.

I am concerned about a dis-connect between what he has told me and the rumours of him being a person who “doesn't deliver”.

I intuit that if he has been cagey about declaring his cancer with me, he may not have been candid with his supervisors and hence his reputation is being tarnished because they have no other reason than to think he is lazy. So I ask him directly, “Have you told your supervisors about your illness?” (I don't use the “c” word.)

No he hasn't.

I want him to understand why it might be important.

“Raphael, my Group Dynamics lecturer taught me that silence is always taken suspiciously. In the absence of a good reason, people invariably think the worst. Furthermore, there is no shame in being sick. Sickness happens to all of us. It's simply a fact of life. But if you don't tell them, they will make up their own reasons for your behaviour.”

He agrees with me and tells me he will tell his supervisors. I affirm his decision.

The conversation turns to music. He tells me he is playing with a regional concert band; and he is obviously excited about playing in the band down south.

The body language tells me that music may be more exciting for him than his PhD.

“Tell me about your PhD,” I ask.

“It is about statistics and population geography.”

There is less energy in his voice. I am guessing that his heart is not in it.

To test my theory, I venture a short story.

“You know, Raphael, I sometimes see people about your age who are questioning whether they have made the right decisions with their lives when they were younger. They aren't happy.

I know a person who married a nice young woman. It seemed right at the time. She was eligible and both sets of parents wanted to see their children happily married off. Her parents were rich, so he could choose his vocation untroubled by any financial concerns. It was all so convenient.

But as time went on, he found himself continually attracted to other women. Trying harder at their marriage didn't seem to stop the craving and they were growing apart. He had an affair. Eventually he couldn't bring himself even to touch her. But the thought of having to live without the financial security of her family... What should he do?..."

Raphael looked directly at me. "You know, that story...it's very interesting ... I can see myself in it..."

"The question for you, Raphael, at this moment, is: 'what is life-giving for you'?"

He beamed at me, "It is the music!"

It was a clear, emphatic response. It rang with truth.

"I think you're right, Raphael.

You've got enough to live on for the coming year. Why not 'knock on some doors' with your friends down south and see what opens. You won't have to move out of student housing here until the end of the year, so you have time.

Let's know how you get on."

This is a story about learning, as much as anything. Raphael has come to fulfil his obligations to meet with his mentor, but I am creating space for his learning. His agenda is apology and repair of our relationship; my agenda is to nurture his integrity as a person.

If we analyse this encounter we may identify progressive stages. If cues from the learner are not picked up by the teacher or the space for learning is not provided, the learning process at any one of these stages is halted.

(b) Elements Promoting Learning in a Confronting Situation

1. Awareness: the teacher is alert to the other and sets aside her own preoccupations. Stop! Look! Listen!

Raphael presents with verbal apologies. He is probably feeling guilty about letting our relationship lapse and wants to repair it. He will want to justify himself and I will want to give him space to do this. But first I want to signal to him that I hold no grudge and I want him to feel at home with me. I offer him my best coffee (I know he likes coffee from previous visits!). I am also giving him space to adjust to the room and to relax a little before he goes into his explanations.

The equivalent in the classroom is for the teacher to develop the capacity to intuit what is really going on under what is presented, whether the surface be behaviour or language. If we are alert to it, little cues will alert us to much more important issues that lie underneath.

In addition, this awareness can be taught to others.

One day when I was teaching in a juvenile detention centre one of the lads 'blew a fuse' and picked up a filing cabinet and threw it across the room. In these situations you hit the red button and duty staff quickly remove the offender.

Later that day we had a chance to debrief with him about what was going on for him to do that. He needed to learn how to deal with his frustrations. As he described the build up of his feelings we were able to help him identify and give a name to the point at which he knew he

was going to explode. Together we called it the “little bell that goes off inside your head”. We asked him to practice recognizing this “bell”. Then we agreed on a strategy for the classroom. When he “heard the bell”, he was to go and stand in a certain corner of the room. This would be a signal for one of us to take him outside and call one of the duty staff to take him to a place of his choosing – perhaps the gym or the garden, to work or talk out his feelings.

Inner awareness is a precursor as we begin any new encounter.

2. Withholding Judgement

Some of the teaching staff, whom I respect, had made some judgements about Raphael based on the evidence of his non-performance. When he came to see me I needed to put those judgements aside. Confronting him with them at the outset risked closing the learning space – he was already on the defensive with his apologies!

Among people generally, differences to our own cultural or religious norms are almost inevitably met with a judgemental reaction. The ‘little bell’ goes off inside our head - “this is not right”: meaning, this is outside the boundaries of my understanding or experience. The second response that usually follows is “and I don’t like it!”

The more we practise withholding or postponing judgement the more we are able to create the space necessary for honesty which is essential in understanding the other. Judgement (and giving easy advice) puts up a roadblock to communication.

3. “Exploring” - *active listening*

No doubt in your teacher training you would have encountered and practiced “active listening”, so I will not elaborate here.

But within the recounting of my conversation with Raphael, you may have noticed some other “tools”.

- At one stage I proposed a **parallel narrative**, which allowed Raphael, in a non-threatening way, to identify elements of his own dilemma.
The arts – film, fiction, music – all help in this way. For instance, watching a film on the struggle for identity of the Inuit in modern-day Canada might be a means for indigenous students in our classroom to see their own struggles from a safe distance and gain new understandings and encouragement.
- I asked Raphael a limited number of questions, when I wanted to direct the conversation. But importantly, I asked him a **liberating question**: “What is life-giving for you?”
Framing such a key question opens up space for the student to explore their situation.

4. I **affirmed** the integrity of Raphael’s inner world, without imposing my own values.

Affirmation can be more powerful than criticism. It promotes self-confidence to continue on our way, it nurtures our inner convictions and counters the self-doubt so prevalent in our schools and in society generally.

5. I **invited** him to continue the journey with me.

It is possible to be a teaching professional and to enter into continuing positive relationships with our students, and continue them beyond the classroom. Nurturing positive relationships is not confined to 8 to 4 on weekdays, it is a way of being.

I think that the technicalities of lesson preparation and classroom management are preliminary to create space, not for *us* to fill, but for the learner to engage the subject and deal with the issues it raises. Our role is to enrich and nurture the learning environment, providing inspiration and courage as much as information.

I think of education as an aspect of human flourishing. Consider the rose bud. It will only open beautifully, and in its own time, if it is nurtured; the bud has everything it needs within it to flower yet is dependent on nurture to flourish. Those who attempt to open the flower by pulling its petals apart destroy the flower.

A MODEL FROM THE LITERATURE: PRINCIPLES OF CARE

Prof. Nel Noddings (Jacks Emeriti of Child Education at Stanford University) has contributed to the literature on care in education and proposes a model of care that may be useful as we consider how to approach “difference” in the classroom. (I am working from the article: Smith, M. K. (2004) Nel Noddings, ‘the ethics of care and education’, *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/thinkers)

Nodding describes ethical caring as a state of being in relation, characterized by receptivity, relatedness and engrossment.

She identifies three elements in the ethical caring encounter:

1. A cares for B.
A’s consciousness is characterized by receptive attention and motivational displacement - and
2. A performs some act in accordance with the receptivity of 1. - and
3. B recognises that A cares for B and responds reciprocally.

So a caring relationship, ‘caring-for’ is established and learning takes place in the interchange.

Noddings makes a distinction between caring-about and caring-for.

One may care-about breast cancer, for example, and contribute a donation for breast cancer research as an expression of that care. But this ‘caring-about’ maintains some distance from the object/subject of care.

Caring-about, says Noddings, is dependent on the experience of being cared-for. That is, we learn to care-about by being cared-for. “Then, gradually, we learn both to care for and, by extension, to care about others” (Noddings 2002:22). This caring-about is an important foundation for a sense of justice; and is instrumental in establishing the conditions under which caring-for can flourish.

The key, central to care theory is this: caring-about (or, perhaps a sense of justice) must be seen as instrumental in establishing the conditions under which caring-for can flourish. Although the preferred form of caring is cared-for, caring-about can help in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing it. Those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in

mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs. Caring about is empty if it does not culminate in caring relations. (Noddings 2002: 23-4)

I take it that caring-about our students is a prerequisite for teaching. It is inherent in being a professional. But one of the ethical questions teachers must ask themselves is the extent to which they should care-for their students. Caring-for takes us beyond professional expectations, beyond the pay-packet, beyond the curriculum statement, beyond duty. Caring-for is to caring-about as the informal curriculum is to the formal. It cannot be mandated. But if education is about transformation, caring-for may be the most important medium.

Caring-for rightly should take place in the home. But I see no reason why caring-for should not also be the professional teachers' domain.

When it comes to conflict in the classroom arising from religious or cultural difference, caring, as Noddings describes it, promotes conditions conducive to open communication, necessary to clarify the issues which are at stake and move toward resolution.

HOSPITALITY

A third way of looking at how we might approach "difference" in classroom encounters might be found in the concept of hospitality developed by Henri Nouwen. (Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements in the Spiritual Life*. 1975 Doubleday. New York)

Nouwen thinks of hospitality as 'making space'.

Hospitality... means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbour into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opportunity to others to find their God and their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt a life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find their own. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*. Fount Paperbacks 1980, pp 68 – 9)

Nouwen suggests that hospitality is not just the offering of **physical** space, as we might open the front door of our house to invite our guests inside, but **social** space, as we introduce ourselves and acknowledge each other; and not just social space but **emotional** space, where feelings are listened to and 'heard', where intimacy can develop; and **intellectual** space, where ideas can be entertained. It is also possible, I believe, to talk of **sacred** hospitality, as we allow space for the transcendent – for example, as we might allow the sacred in nature into our lives as we walk through a rain forest or look down from the top of a mountain. For the religious, opening ourselves to the transcendent is called prayer.

Relating this to teaching, how can I make my classroom more hospitable – invitational and welcoming?

We might ask these kinds of questions:

Physical – what message are we sending our students when desks are placed in neat rows? What is conveyed by a vase of flowers on the teacher’s table? What would a hospitable classroom look like?
Social – how might I arrange spaces for students to be able to interact with each other? What changes might be made to account for such interaction – might carpeting and wall hangings help to muffle noise? What learning outcomes might be able to be achieved by structuring more social interaction among students?

Emotional – how might diverse feelings be recognized, articulated and valued in the learning situation? How might emotional hospitality be normalized among students in the classroom?

Intellectual – am I able to accept and value the unexpected answer from a student and encourage mutual exploration of it without prejudice? How might I set up learning situations that are genuinely exploratory, rather than well-worn tracks to a pre-determined destination.

Religious/spiritual – how might joy or grief be acknowledged and deepened in the classroom? How might forgiveness be exercised? How are virtues like humility and peacemaking nurtured? How is faith and hope sustained?

THE ENEMY OF CARE AND HOSPITALITY

The primary enemy of care is fear. Persons who are afraid of each other avoid each other, judge each other and reject each other. There can be no hospitality. No-one is “let in”.

Teaching situations in which students as well as teachers are deeply affected by fear of rejection, by doubt and insecurity about their own abilities, and by an often-unexpressed anger toward each other are counter-educational. Nobody will show his most precious talent to those whom he fears. (Nouwen 75:80)

We live in a climate of fear.

It is no accident that the primary injunction in Jewish, Christian and Muslim scriptures is to welcome the stranger. Hospitality was a way of life for these desert and agrarian peoples. It was essential to survival. Those of us who have traveled will have experienced selfless hospitality which continues in many places in the Middle-East and the “two-thirds world” today. It continues in Australia. If you blow a tyre on an outback road, won’t the local stop and lend a hand? If someone is escaping political or religious genocide, won’t someone offer a new home?

But it suits political interests to nurture fear. Sukarno invented a war with Malaysia to unite Indonesia. Menzies in Australia and McCarthy in the USA whipped up fear of “the communists” for their own political and divisive ends. John Howard encouraged us to be “alert but not alarmed”!

We fear because we are pain avoiders.

When we open our door to the stranger there is no guarantee that there may not be a price to pay. We become vulnerable. When we listen to a story of grief, there is no guarantee that we will not feel the pain as well. When we make the first move there is no guarantee that it will not be rejected. Fear is a defense to avoid vulnerability and possible pain.

There is a great silence because we are often afraid to speak.

Many students are silent because they are afraid to speak and many teachers are silent because they are afraid to speak from the heart.

I remember how difficult I found it when, after fifteen years as a teacher, I was first asked to speak about my life experiences to an assembly of students at another school. One would have thought I would have had plenty to say! Why was I finding this so difficult?

I began to realize I was good at talking about what I *ought* to know, what I had absorbed in books, not what I really knew from my own personal experience. I realized what a technician I had become as a teacher. But this invitation confronted me about how I had been able to hide behind my role as a teacher. As I began to identify the life-changing and life-giving moments in my life and value them, this invitation set me on a liberating path.

I had been a silent student. As a child, I had come from the country to a large suburban High School and had found it hard to adapt. I was conscientious so that I might avoid criticism and I worked hard at my chosen sport to gain acknowledgement. In Year 11, a “putdown” by a teacher to my best effort to answer his question in class caused me to make the decision never to raise my hand again. Obviously, he was frustrated that I had not understood what he thought I should have learnt. But his ridicule of my effort demeaned me in front of my peers. From that moment on I isolated myself from every possible situation of criticism. Only the person who demonstrated their own vulnerability could be trusted; only the hospitable one could draw me out and open a space where I could begin again to have confidence in myself and break the silence.

I suggest that my adolescent experience was and is not isolated, that a retreat into ourselves is a common defense in a context of fear. I suggest that cultural and religious dissonance from an “Anglo” Australia exacerbates the situation for students today. There is all the more pressure for students who feel “different” to opt for silence. In the face of this, it is contingent on the teacher to open conversations, if only to check the cultural landscape for ‘mines’ – potential conflicts that might need to be defused at the outset. Adopting a caring, hospitable teaching approach that permits honest and fear-less reciprocity, I suggest, is essential in the culturally diverse context of education today.

Teaching is a vulnerable process -personal and public

It should be clear from the models of care that I have proposed that the teacher is vulnerable, both personally in relationships with students, but also publicly. Assertiveness about the boundaries of personal and corporate integrity is required in the face of attacks, often motivated by insecurity, fear and frustration.

If we see teaching merely as knowledge transfer then teaching is about technique. One of my education lecturers at university called this the *Mug and Jug Theory* – “I’m the jug and you’re the mug!” Students are objects of teaching and the teacher’s task is to communicate knowledge content within a context of compulsion. In such a system the teacher is able to maintain a distance from the student and protect herself from any attack on her professional competence. The compliant student, as I was in my adolescence, is usually able to negotiate this environment, at the expense of their affective development. And they are rewarded for it. But increasingly students are offering resistance to being offered solutions to questions they are not asking. In my latter years of teaching, these students have offered me the greatest hope, because they are trying to communicate as best as they are able, even if sometimes destructively, rather than bowing compliantly and silently.

As cultural and religious diversity has increased assumptions about the curriculum have been called into question and the teacher has had to become more flexible and subtle in managing the learning process.

CREATING A FAITH-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

(a) Faith-Friendly Australia - contributing to the development of faith-friendly communities in Australia

Prof. Norman Habel, of the Flinders University School of Theology, and I have responded to the awakening of the importance of religious tolerance following various tragic events early in this decade by taking up the term “faith-friendly”, coined by Yale researcher, David Miller.

The Concept

Responses to an awakening of religious difference

Since the beginning of this millennium there have been numerous conferences, meetings, seminars and projects aimed at developing greater inter-faith understanding and mutual respect within the Australian community. The need for such gatherings has been provoked and underlined by international events, such as the attack on the World Trade Centre in the USA (“September 11”), the “Bali Bombings” in Indonesia and, closer to home, the “Cronulla Riots”. Refugees from various ethnic and religious backgrounds who have fled to Australia have also awakened the Australian public to the importance of faith, particularly as their stories of resilience have been presented through the media.

Many of those of us who have organised or participated in such gatherings are beginning to seek a way forward beyond “talk”, to move beyond the immediate awakening created by these events and the various forums and dialogues, to mutual understanding and respect in the warp and woof of everyday life. The arena for inter-faith understanding therefore must be enlarged beyond the meeting house to the everyday. We believe that such a movement might be nurtured by focussing concern on workplace and educational organisations.

Localisation and valuing of faith

The coining of the phrase “faith friendly” and the recognition that faith may be a bonus in the workplace has come from work being done in the USA by David Miller, in 2007, Executive Director of Yale’s *Center for Faith and Culture*. <http://www.yale.edu/faith/index.htm>

The faith-friendly concept in the public sphere is spelt out in this statement reported on *CNN Money*:

"I don't think it's appropriate for a public traded company to be faith-based because you are then privileging one religion over another," he says. "In contrast, a faith-friendly company tries to accommodate on an even playing field the spiritual dimension of people."

Ford Motor Company is a prominent example. The Ford Interfaith Network (FIN), formed in 2000, encompasses organized groups of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu employees. FIN says its mission is "to help management to increase and maintain religious diversity, attract, develop, and retain talented employees of faith, and be more aware of religious consumers' and investors' needs." Ford's interfaith group brings in speakers, organizes ecumenical events and supports the practices of each religion. For example, the group provides lists of religious holidays of many faiths for company calendars so executives can be sensitive to scheduling issues. It also has advised senior managers on touchy issues, such as whether to donate to charities with religious roots. "A company that is faith-friendly gives people permission to draw on the ethical traditions of their faith," Miller says. "The great religions have teachings on truth telling, and treating your neighbor the way you want to be treated, and being ethical."

http://money.cnn.com/2007/01/16/news/companies/faithfriendly_companies.fortune/?postversion=2007011707

Making transparent the processes which recognise the religious needs of community members

The Multifaith Chaplaincy at Flinders University knows from enquiries of overseas students hoping to study in Australia that the fear that their religious needs will not be met, or that they will be unwelcome, are allayed by providing information and encouragement. So we believe the experience of members of minority religions, who may be applying to join the workforce or engaging with Australian organisations for the first time, will be much more positive if such organisations are able to *demonstrate* a positive attitude toward people of other ethnicity or faith. The capacity of an organisation to present itself as *Faith-Friendly* by having signed up to the Charter facilitates this.

Our proposal is to provide an opportunity for workplaces and organisations to sign up to a charter of principles and to become recognised as *Faith-Friendly*. The outworking of these principles would be undertaken at the local level, within the workplace/company/organisation.

Flinders Multifaith Chaplaincy might be prepared to enter into partnerships with bodies who sign on to the charter, to act as a supportive consultative body.

A Charter for developing *Faith-Friendly* Communities

The Vision

That Australians work towards creating faith friendly communities in which peoples of all faiths are open to each other, support each other and respect each other.

The Context

This charter recognises the character of the current Australian context:

1. Many faiths

Australia is considered itself a multicultural nation. Within Australian society there are many diverse faiths, variously designated religions, denominations, spiritualities, values and traditions.

2. Faith as Private

It has been typical of Australian culture that Australians are expected to keep their faith private and not to 'wear their faith on their sleeve.'

3. Faiths in Tension

Nevertheless, tensions and conflicts have arisen between faiths both within the faith communities themselves, within the wider community and within the work place.

4. Faith Awareness

More recently, there has been a growing awareness of the need to understand and publicly support the faith needs of all groups in the work place and the community at large.

The Principles

This charter is grounded in the following principles:

1. Principle of Mutual Recognition

A faith friendly community recognises the right of all faiths to meet the needs of their respective members in any given community.

2. Principle of Mutual Concern

A faith friendly community intends to meet the religious and spiritual needs of its members of various faiths.

3. Principle of Mutual Understanding

A faith friendly community seeks to understand the values and beliefs of each faith in a given community rather than to pass judgement on them.

4. Principle of Mutual Respect

A faith friendly community seeks to respect the differences between the values and beliefs of its members.

The Agenda

To achieve the vision of this charter it is recommended that

1. Exploration

A range of representative bodies from the work place, education, institutions, politics and society at large meet to explore this charter and its implications for Australia today.

2. Endorsement

That businesses, companies, educational bodies and other institutions endorse this charter and explore appropriate ways of developing policies within their respective contexts that would enable faith-friendly communities to emerge.

3. Implementation

That these same bodies introduce specific vehicles to enable each faith community to celebrate its respective rites and practices within the relevant work, educational or social contexts.

4. Support Services

That the necessary support services needed to implement these policies and practices be the responsibility of the company, educational institution or other relevant community rather than the individual faith communities as such.

Norman Habel nhabel@esc.net.au and Geoff Boyce geoff.boyce@flinders.edu.au , 30 March, 2007

(b) Principles of Faith-friendly Teaching

The above declaration , developed for communities, might be reformulated for the classroom.

Faith-friendly teaching might be informed by the following principles:

1. Principle of Mutual Recognition

Faith-friendly teaching recognises the right of students of all faiths to have their religious needs respected.

2. Principle of Mutual Understanding

Faith-friendly teaching seeks to understand the values and beliefs of each student rather than to pass judgement on or change them.

3. Principle of Mutual Support

Faith-friendly teaching is committed to supporting the spiritual and personal needs of each member of each faith tradition in the school and community.

4. Principle of Mutual Advocacy

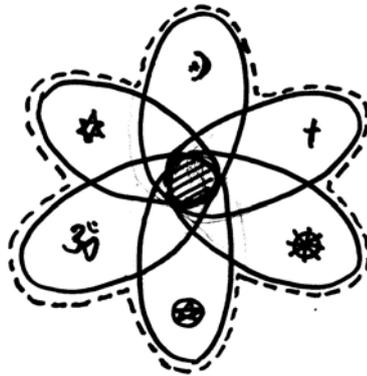
Faith-friendly teaching is committed to advocacy for people of other faith traditions in terms of what is known to be in the best spirit of each tradition.

5. Principle of Mutual Deference

Faith-friendly teaching encourages direct contact with authentic sources of information rather than mediating in any investigation of one faith tradition by a member of another.

(c) Faith Friendly Dynamics in the Classroom

At Flinders we have been experimenting with a way of engaging in a secular context while remaining connected to religion.



The essence of the Flinders model, which relates to the diagram above, is that participating chaplains of different faiths commit to each other, as a “community of colleagues” with a common vision to “nurture spirit, build community”.

In the diagram:

- the outer dotted ‘amoeba’ represents the front presented to persons in the university – our common humanity – our human spirituality.¹
- At the centre, we share what is common – a concern for justice, mercy, compassion, love, hope, faith...the religious roots of spirituality.
- Other overlaps indicate common concerns among particular chaplains.²
- Yet each chaplain retains their religious integrity, while all are enriched by different perspectives within the common core.

Implications for the Classroom

Suppose that students in a class are represented by ellipses intersecting to form a common space. The common space might be an agreed set of values that facilitate the mission of the school and the

¹ How ‘spirituality’ works in this model could be illustrated by a recent comment to me by a Student Support Officer. He brings students to me in my office and introduces them to me. But when he introduces me he doesn’t introduce me either as “the chaplain” or “the Christian chaplain” or “the Uniting Church Chaplain” but simply as “Geoff”. His point is that we first meet at a human level, we share firstly what we have in common, not what we may hold differently. We recognise our differences, but ‘on the ground’ we work first with what we have in common.

Contributing from our *differences* is important, but secondary. Difference may best be mutually explored only when trusting relationships and enjoyable friendships have been established. But what we share together with the university at large, what we have in common, is our spirituality, grounded at the common core and nurtured by our various religious practices and experiences.

² For example, Jew, Christian and Muslim may have more in common being Abrahamic compared to Hindu or Buddhist. Or practical issues may bring particular chaplains together such as working with a couple who are of different religions who want to marry.

classroom. Each student is different but together they are committed to the common values espoused in the classroom. Out of commitment to a common learning vision, genuine respect between participants and open communication can be built. Trusting, respectful relationships can be established to support the common mission of the classroom as a learning environment. Yet the integrity of each student may be maintained.

NURTURING OUR OWN SPIRITUALITY

The models I have suggested for dealing with differences in culture and religion in the classroom presuppose a spiritual stability in the life of the teacher, an ability, in the first instance, to detach from one's own immediate life issues to give space to the other.

Ideally the role of religion is to inform and nourish human spirituality and to support such maturity. Religion should be a means of human flourishing, with its wisdom gathered through history and its rituals that allow participants to confront and deal with their own egos, fears, successes, grief and mistakes.

However, there are practices the everyday teacher might adopt:

Centering – pausing from activity and focusing the mind.

Think time – deliberately disengaging from expected activity for a period to collect one's thoughts.

Recreation – more extended periods of alternative activity that one finds therapeutic: playing a musical instrument, gardening, art, reading – any creative activity.

Sleep

Good coffee and good conversation

A CASE STUDY

I was teaching in an eastern suburbs High School in Adelaide and I was taking a lesson for a teacher who was away sick. I had written his instructions on the blackboard and soon the class had opened their books and begun work. It was one of the lower ability science classes and was smaller than most. I recognised Mario, sitting toward the back. He was wearing a plain black T-shirt. He wasn't settling down so I made my way up the aisle toward him.

The school had a strict uniform code. So I was wondering – was this black T-shirt a demonstration of resistance? Or was his uniform in the wash? Or what?

The Deputy Principal made no secret that he ruled the school by fear and punishment. Had Mario already had a run-in with him? Was that why he was unsettled?

As I drew near I noticed a black band on his wrist.

I greeted him and ventured an open question like, was he having a bad day?

There was a pause as he looked down at the desk. Then he looked up at me. "My grandmother died last week..." He could see what I had been thinking. "All the family have to wear black for a year..." Whether they do or not was beside the point. I could see the sincerity in his eyes. He was in mourning.

We had a brief exchange about his grandmother and the funeral.

"OK, Mario, so how can I help you with this work for today..."

We came away from it with greater respect for each other and I had learnt something more about Italian culture in Australia.

"Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living."

John Dewey