Chapter 12
Christians First. The Politics of Inclusion, Interreligious Literacy, and Christian Privilege: Comparing Australian and English Education

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Abstract When Europe became the destination of millions of desperate refugees in 2015, Australia's Government leader in the Senate urged preferential resettlement for Christians. Justification for Christian privilege is present in many areas of Australian social policy, including in education. This article examines the contentious nature of religion in relation to questions of interreligious literacy. It connects the concept of cultural tolerance to a particular interpretation of religious literacy in the education environment, and examines religion-related education governance structures. I draw on examples from state-funded Australian government schools, against a backdrop of social inclusion policy. Firstly, two different, ideologically based styles of "inclusion," and their variant styles of governance, will be defined. These two styles can be described as "passive" (economically focused and inherently limited) inclusion, and "active" (socially focused, and critically, consciously broad) inclusion. The article explores the political basis of these two styles of inclusion and how they encourage or discourage minority voices within democratic processes. The article then analyzes how these styles of inclusion affect contributions from minority voices to policy development and practice in relation to religion in state schools. Inclusive policies in education in the past few decades have targeted socioeconomic (often racial and location based) and ability differentials. A lack of inclusion policies that specifically address cultural (particularly religious) barriers highlights the limitations of an economically focused social inclusion agenda.

This chapter is revised from a paper that first appeared in the *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 27, 2 (2014), published by Equinox. I wish to thank Professor Robert Jackson for his generous review of sections related to RE in the UK, and Professor Marion Maddox, who provided guidance during development.

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J. Berglund et al. (eds.), *Religious Education in a Global-Local World*,
Boundaries of Religious Freedom: Regulating Religion in Diverse Societies 4,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-32289-6_12

12.1 The English and Australian Contexts for Religion in State Schools

Both Australia and the UK have become religiously diverse societies, largely as a result of immigration, but each has dealt with state school religion in a variety of ways.[1] It is important to note that there is no single model for religious education in either the UK[2] or Australia (nor is there a parallel definition of a "state-funded"—in Australian parlance, "public"—school), and so this article does not provide a direct comparison. Rather, it reviews Australia's limited application of the 1990s English (Blair New Labour) platform of "social inclusion" and highlights major differences between these two nations' approaches to religion in state schools. England's approach to religion in state education has become more pluralist since the mid-1960s, in response to an increasingly secularized and religiously diverse society. In 1988, the English Education Reform Act officially replaced non-denominational Christian Bible-based "religious instruction" (RI) with a more inclusive approach to learning *about* religions through what it referred to as "religious education" (RE). Other English policy and curriculum initiatives have continued the trend toward an inclusive approach to teaching religion. In addition, European developments regarding the principles by which religion might be taught in the state school environment have furthered the cause in England for including non-religious worldviews in school programs. The combination of these influences has resulted in a cumulative effect, pluralizing approaches to RE in England. Denise Cush (Chap. 4, this volume) notes that this phenomenon has created "a new paradigm" for RE.

In comparison, and despite its "relatively liberal Protestant church" (see Cush, Chap. 4, this volume), Australia has largely avoided complex public discussion related to state school religion; its legislative and policy amendments since the 1950s have been minor. Rather, Australian government education agencies protect an excluding Christian privilege via nineteenth-century-style segregated RI classes for learning *into* a single tradition. All Australian states prioritize segregated RI over RE, and some states offer no inclusive RE at all. Although this segregated approach can ostensibly be seen to further multiculturalist aims (if many traditions participate, as they have done in New South Wales (NSW) since the 1990s), governance mechanisms often work against pluralist intentions. This article examines generic issues of principle about religion in education in liberal democracies, drawing on European developments and exploring the application of such principles in English and Australian contexts.

[1] Australian Government officials urged preferential treatment of Christian refugees in 2015 (Medhora 2015).

[2] More detail on the wider UK approaches can be found in Jackson 2012.

12.2 A Note on the Terms "Religious" and "Literacy"

In some jurisdictions, the term "religious" in "religious education" means education *into* religion, not education *about* religion. This term has overtones of indoctrinatory instruction (Jackson 2011a) and can exclude non-religious perspectives. The plural term "religions" is used here to reflect a plural approach—an inclusive, secular study (meaning state-devised and -delivered, not anti-religious) of many religions and non-religious ethical perspectives—Wanda Alberts' (2007) "integrative RE." From here on, RE refers to "religions education" in this sense, except when quoting from English documents, which use "religious education" in a similar sense.

The term "religious literacy" is also used variously—for example, by Diane Moore (2007), as the aim of learning about many religions and worldviews so as to "sharpen critical thinking skills and advance deep multiculturalism" (p. 33); by Wright (2007), who sees religious literacy as a way to enhance students' moral development through debate and analysis of conflicting truth claims, but within a largely Abrahamic framework (p. 108); and by those who mean a deep familiarity with their own (singular) tradition—an approach not supported or discussed here. I use the term "interreligious literacy" to make explicit the intention implied by Moore, since "inter" addresses the relationship "between" and carries responsibility for mutual, reciprocal understanding of religious concepts applied in more than one religious tradition. However, Australian education institutions often conflate RI with RE. Most Australian states refer to enfaithing, to instructional classes as "Special Religious Education" (SRE) and Australian Catholic schools run what they refer to as "RE" programs, but which can be narrow and catechetical, depending on the school. Some Catholic school programs include interfaith activities but the generally understood use of RE in that context is confessional, or at least tradition specific.

12.3 RE, Intercultural Tolerance and Interreligious Literacy

Many Western nations are religiously diverse. That fact alone does not make them interculturally tolerant or interreligiously literate. The shift from a simple *awareness* of faith diversity in society to an understanding of how plural society might benefit from such complexity and, further, to an attempt to act on this understanding, relies on a reflective process that is ultimately enacted as policy. One obvious sector for such practical effort is state education.

The largest research project in this field, Religion Education as a factor of Dialogue or Conflict (2007), examined RE in eight nations (including England) and found that children with some education *about* different religions showed greater respect for different opinions and cultural practices than those without, and that students who participate in RE want to know about different worldviews. The

REDCo project found that children who undertake RE support democratic principles and see the classroom as a rare potential "safe space" for interreligious dialogue (Jackson 2011a). There is significant debate in England and elsewhere in Europe regarding the instrumental rationale for RE—its potential positive influence on democratic citizenship (Council of Europe 2014; Marian de Souza et al. 2006; Jackson et al. 2007). While such debate is not my focus here, it is clear that the Council of Europe views the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue as significant (Council of Europe 2014: 14). In England, Adam Dinham and Robert Jackson (2012: 280) argued that, in the context of changing social policy in areas of "community and 'race' relations, citizenship and community cohesion," the 1990s Blair era brought an interest in "promoting democratic citizenship in schools…which influenced religious education…and led to a discourse of social inclusion in place of welfare" and that government policy "promoted a multi-faith approach to social cohesion" (2012: 272). England's political rhetoric defended the connection between learning about multiple worldviews and social stability, even while that connection may be inadequately researched.

In education, as in many areas of social policy, the political limits of inclusion are often driven "top-down" rather than up from "grass roots." Education policy, pedagogy and outcomes depend on political institutions and their ideological motives and habits—often unstated or unexamined. Australian social analyst Kevin Dunn (2011a: 8) noted the importance of political leadership when considering the choice between "welcoming in" and "defending from" others, since "social norms are considerably powerful and can legitimise poor [excluding] attitudes." For this reason, it is important to examine social inclusion as a political idea—since its assumptions and ideological carriage have implications for how religious diversity might be given voice, ignored or even silenced.

12.4 Types of Inclusion

At face value, "social inclusion" appears intuitively friendly—a welcoming, nice notion. As a moral, ethical concept with political nuances, however, "inclusion" can be applied and measured in different ways. We welcome a stranger differently from how we might welcome a guest or family member (Komter 2005). A critical perspective suggests there is value in exploring this difference.

Social inclusion has two distinct (though not necessarily binary) styles (Byrne 2014). One style focuses on equal *opportunity*, passively allowing members to benefit from (and assuming they are able to benefit from) existing structures and institutions—invited participants adapt to the system. This kind of inclusion is passive since the structures and institutions do not change to better enable participation. An alternative style focuses on equitable *outcomes* and the system itself seeks to broaden access to enable maximum participation. This style involves power sharing,

to enable the systems to be remade, to reflect the needs and capabilities of the broader membership. Both styles of inclusion reflect different ideologies, which are expressed differently in democratic processes. Passive inclusion developed alongside ideals of a free-market economy, while active inclusion emerged with discourses on social equity. Both styles can be expressed in policy, so it is helpful to examine the evolution of these styles.

12.5 Passive Inclusion in a Conservative (Classical Liberal) Economy

Social *in*clusion emerged as a remedy for social *ex*clusion—a problem in Europe in the mid-1970s. British and European exclusion focused on material deprivation and its consequences. During the late 1990s, "social inclusion" became a buzz phrase for the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair. As a policy platform, New Labour's social inclusion recognized some of the broader implications of limited access to political systems, services and arenas for public comment. However, Blair retained the economic emphasis that had been established in earlier welfare programs. Political theorist Ruth Levitas (1998) argued that Blair's inclusion efforts were based on largely economic (not cultural) considerations, targeting workforce participation as a way of reducing poverty and minimizing welfare. And so "inclusion" had little impact on the cultural aspects of social policy.

Levitas noted three distinct discourses on exclusion in England and Europe. These were all focused on the commodity that was perceived as lacking in those who were excluded; money, paid work, and morals. This commodity approach anchors the idea of inclusion to financial capability in economic transactions and encourages moral judgments of those on the margins—since, under the paradigm of "opportunity," individuals are responsible for their economic situation. Levitas highlighted the limited analysis of systemic or institutional obstacles—that having and keeping a job may not necessarily lead to other important (though not simply economic) forms of inclusion. According to Levitas (2003: 4), policies of social inclusion can fruitfully take a "more comprehensive approach to the 'social' in social inclusion" by measuring inclusivity in terms of people's power to construct, and effectively contribute to, policy and practice. In this way, social inclusion may offer benefits beyond mere economic participation. However, such benefits require more flexible, open, and critical systems: "The idea of an inclusive society potentially forces onto the agenda this larger question of what kind of society we want to live in—and indeed, the question of who 'we' are" (Levitas 2003: 5).

Following Levitas, John Gray (2000) argued that the use of the term "social inclusion" by Blair's government was associated with a conservative right shift in center-left politics—partly to accommodate "powerful political movements of religious fundamentalism and…a resurgence of the radical Right" (Gray 2000: 20).

This neoliberal shift meant the traditional working class's social democratic vision of an egalitarian society was replaced with a more market-driven ideal. As Dinham and Jackson (2012: 272) put it, "market ideology came to challenge a statist one." Arguments regarding justice and fairness were, once again, unyoked from government responsibility and became more demanding of individual potential. New Labour's social inclusion did not advance "an ideal of equality…[or] of egalitarian justice" (Gray 2000: 22). Rather, New Labour's inclusion emphasized state interventions to assist individuals' access to *existing structures*: "every member of society should participate fully…no one is denied access" (Gray 2000: 23). However, not being denied is not the same as being enabled. Minority voices participate, but usually without the power to deliberate on, or affect, policy. Despite inclusion being narrowly defined, English Religious Education had already undergone significant reform and was already being tailored for a religiously diverse population (see Cush, this volume). In some respects, the rhetoric of social inclusion and community cohesion were retrofitted nicely onto a pre-existing pluralizing trend in English RE.

12.6 Passive Inclusion in a Progressive (Modern Liberal) Economy

Modern liberalism urges the state to assist in enabling capacity. In this vein, progressive, multicultural models of democracy acknowledge an un-level playing field and promote "celebrating differences" and "equal opportunity." In Canada, the term "reasonable accommodation" is part of this discourse. Along these lines, Will Kymlicka (1995: 6) argued that an individual's rights and freedoms are best protected by considering the wellbeing and capacity of the groups from which they draw their identity and by assigning "group-differentiated" rights. Such an approach, however, is still subject to majority rule. Charles Jenks et al. (2001) critique modern liberalism because it naively "pays little attention to the role of the dominant culture in preventing equality" (2001: 92). While progressive in intent, this stance "masks the conflicts and contradictions inherent in our society, ignoring…divisive identity issues revolving around race, class, and ethnicity. Moreover, insufficient consideration is given to power constructs…which stand in the way of achieving equity" (2001: 92). The approach sometimes "sidesteps, or is ignorant of, the root causes of racism and inequality" (2001: 93). In both classical and modern forms of liberal governance, participation is a notion constructed by those controlling or managing the system and social inclusion might be considered passive, paternal, and corporate.

12.7 Active Inclusion in a Critical Liberal Society

An alternative style of inclusion relies on explicitly critical governance models, which confront "the way social power is situated" (Luxton 2005: 91). By addressing unequal resources, status and capacities, active inclusion relies on the possibility that society can be reconstructed by its members. Beyond "participation" in existing systems, "active inclusion" demands and empowers transformation of the systems themselves. The policy target is not opportunity, but equity. Such egalitarian inclusion contributes to what Amy Gutmann (1999) described as "deliberative democracy." In this model, applied to education, authority is shared between parents, citizens, and professional educators, which enables "conscious social reproduction in its most inclusive form" (1999: 42). Gutmann noted that deliberation "helps secure both the basic opportunity of individuals and its collective capacity to pursue justice" (1999: xiii). Gutmann argued that limiting possibilities in education in any way (for example by limiting religious instruction to evangelical Christianity or restricting decision making to a majority religious group with token non-majority participants) consequently limits the ability for children to cultivate skills of discernment.

Active inclusion emphasizes the idea that structures should enable participative transformation without majority dictates. This idea, from feminist political theory, requires thinking first from the outside, from the margins. For example, Iris Young argued that inclusion is "a powerful means for criticizing the legitimacy of nominally democratic processes" (2002: 52). The aim is "effective" rather than "proportional" representation, with political and moral legitimacy reliant on power equity. In Young's model, outcomes are only legitimate "if those who must abide by them have had a part in their formation" (2002: 53). Where citizens (with ostensibly equal rights to participate) "have little or no real access to the fora and procedures through which they might influence decisions" (2002: 54), or where "their claims are not taken seriously" or "they are not treated with equal respect" or they feel they must show grateful deference for their mere presence in the process, this might be described as "internal exclusion" (2002: 55).

An additional perspective on inclusion has come from Amartya Sen's (2000a, b) work in human development. In Sen's model, "exclusion" acknowledges social hierarchies and systems of domination. Sen notes that proportional representation can lead to systemic exclusion due to a minority group's inability to effect change. In addition, minority groups may have insufficient assets or inadequate preparedness. Unregulated activities (such as outsourced RI without state oversight) can "allow the powerful to capitalize on their asymmetric advantage" (Sen 2000a: 33). The rhetoric of inclusion can cover "unfavorable," "inequitable" or "unacceptable" inclusion and "adverse participation" (2000a: 29). Sen's argument may reasonably be applied to the involvement of minority faith groups who have limited resources to deliver RI effectively and who are "allowed" to participate but may feel not fully enabled. The residual resources of colonial Christianity, and the financial and perceived political power of some groups, means that some Christian churches, through

faux representational groups, have significant educational access and gatekeeper influence in Australian government schools (Byrne 2012b).

12.8 Importing English Social Inclusion into Australia

When Labor's Kevin Rudd became Prime Minister of Australia, he imported both the commitment to social inclusion that had developed a significant profile in England and the economically limited ideological framework in which to apply it. Rudd established an Australian Social Inclusion Board (ASIB) in 2008 and entrusted its direction to his deputy, Julia Gillard, who also held the Education Ministry. Australia focused on economic inclusion and tended to avoid cultural factors such as religion in its policy application. Cultural inclusion, in Australian RI, has been limited to idealized commitments to "respect for diversity," but little in the way of structural analysis to determine cultural sources of inequity or barriers to effective participation.

Echoing Blair's economically focused "equal opportunity" approach, at the 2008 launch of the ASIB, Prime Minister Rudd noted that "too many Australians remain locked out of the benefits of work, education, community engagement and access to basic services" (Rudd and Gillard 2008: 1). The economic focus continued, with the 2010 ASIB Annual Report noting that "opportunities and capabilities to participate…reduce the costs to the economy" caused by "lower productivity and workforce participation" (ASIB 2010: 3). The report lists pathways into disadvantage as the housing market; labor conditions; the cost and availability of transport and infrastructure; financial and non-financial disincentives to work—such as high effective marginal tax rates; the cost, availability and quality of child care; and low levels of computer skills (2010: 19). "Inclusion," says the report, "needs to consider a basket of services," and these "should be calculated" (2010: 25). Social inclusion sounds here like a Treasurer's budget speech—addressing market issues but avoiding sociocultural norms. Maddox (2011) noted that Australian notions of inclusion are limited: "To be included is to finish school, find and keep a job, and to know how to use social services…[but this] economic model fails to capture the full range of ways in which people may experience inclusion or exclusion" (2011: 172).

Only later (and out of office), in 2009, did Blair argue that interreligious literacy was a "vital skill," essential for English education, and establish his Faith Foundation—focused on interreligious dialogue and education. No equivalent notion or high-profile investment of time or resources for interreligious literacy has emerged in Australia. This situation echoes ongoing differences in the approaches to religion in state schools between the two nations. Australia has not followed England, which has, in recent decades, significantly reformed RE to enable a pluralist approach.[3]

[3] For details on reforms to British RE, see Jackson (2003, 2004, 2011b) and Gates (2007).

12.9 Pluralist RE Governance in England

England's RE has undergone significant changes since the mid-1960s. Jackson (2012) highlights the influence on this trend of Edwin Cox[4] and Ninian Smart.[5] The 1988 Education Reform Act (UK Parliament 1988) officially removed Christian "religious instruction" and prohibited indoctrinatory teaching. The act changed the name and pedagogical focus from RI to RE, aiming for pupils to learn *about* religion. Since then, as specified in the act, all students, from entry through to senior high school, learn about Christianity and several other religions. This shift took account of an increasingly secularized and plural society "both in terms of diversity of religions and theological and cultural diversity" within Christianity and other traditions (Jackson 2012: 41).

This pluralist trend was given further institutional legitimacy with the 1994 publication by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) of two model syllabuses (SCAA 1994). These syllabuses were produced in consultation with faith communities (given formal representation through locally based Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education—SACREs) and included material on six religions in Britain (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism). In addition, in 2004 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) produced a National Framework for Religious Education which "intended to increase public understanding of religious education" (Jackson 2012: 41) and "to ensure that all pupils' voices are heard and…that there are opportunities for all pupils to study other religious traditions such as the Baha'i faith, Jainism and Zoroastrianism and secular philosophies such as Humanism" (QCA 2004: 12). According to Brian Gates (2005), the National Framework was approved by all education professional organizations and faith communities.

England's National Framework is used by Local Education Authorities, which draw on local advisory councils and conferences. Despite the fact that this non-statutory National Framework carries no legal force, it does enable minority voices in many regions to participate in the development, review, and update of local syllabuses. This local engagement of government educators with religious community leaders to develop the curriculum is a significant differentiator of the English system (Braaten 2009). Dinham and Jackson (2012) pointed out that an Agreed Syllabus Conference includes four committees, representing teachers, the Church of England, other denominations and religions, and local politicians. These committees can further co-opt members from non-religious organizations. Today, in England, many local syllabuses cover non-religious perspectives such as Humanism.

The English framework recognized the need for "community cohesion and the combating of religious prejudice and discrimination" (Alberts 2008: 12), and includes a study of "global issues of human rights, fairness, social justice and the importance of the environment" (2008: 27). The framework notes that areas of

[4] Cox, Edwin. 1966. *Changing aims in religious education*. London: Routledge.

[5] Smart, Ninian. 1968. *Secular education and the logic of religion*. London: Faber.

study will include Christianity, at least two other principal religions, a religious community with a significant local presence, and a secular worldview (QCA 2004).[6] The National Framework recognizes a broad responsibility to "establish an entitlement" for all students "irrespective of their social background, culture, race (or) religion" to develop their "understanding and attitudes…as active and responsible citizens" (QCA 2004: 9). Moreover, it extends the reach of this type of pluralist RE by promoting "public understanding of, and confidence in, the work of schools in religious education" (2004: 9).

Alongside (though different from) RE, the Education Reform Act appears to retain a Christian focus with its obligation for attendance at a daily act of collective worship that is "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" (Education Reform Act (England) 1988, section 7). However, individual schools can apply for a change in the balance of collective worship and the local authority has the power to grant or refuse it. There is considerable latitude in the interpretation of the expression "broadly Christian." Material from other religions, or moral and ethical material from outside religion altogether, is commonly regarded as appropriate. In many secondary schools, the legislation about collective worship is flouted anyway, in light of the ethnic and religious makeup of the area. The worship obligation may be the last obstacle to an actively inclusive approach for English RE.

The onus for participation in English RE is two-way, with the ethnically diverse communities participating with local authorities, and schools encouraged to "strengthen an inclusive approach to the subject by developing links with faith communities in their local areas" (Dinham and Jackson 2012: 283). In addition, funding was provided by Blair's government for pluralist RE teacher training and research was commissioned by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families on RE teaching materials (Jackson et al. 2010). In addition, Cush (this volume) outlines work done in 2013 by the Religious Education Council to review English curricula and critique RE implementation strengths and weaknesses. This effort, undertaken without government support, highlights the commitment, cooperation and coordination capabilities of religious and non-religious groups to ensure the relevance and professionalism of RE in English schools.

It is fair to say, from evidence provided above, that English RE uses a mostly actively inclusive governance model. In his assessment of the pluralizing trend for English RE, Jackson concluded that "there has been agreement that the National Framework is an important tool in facilitating forms of religious education that are outward looking and inclusive of learning about the main different religions represented in Britain" (Jackson 2012: 53). Of particular note, Jackson pointed to evidence from England's Office for Standards in Education, which indicates a positive change in student attitudes to the "importance of learning about the diversity of religion and belief in contemporary society" (2012: 54). In England, the "cumulative effect of changes in educational policy toward [pluralist] religious education in

[6] I disagree with this use of the term "secular," which implies a "non-religious" worldview, rather than the secular principle of neutral governance by the state. For more on the secular principle, see Byrne (2014).

schools has been to remove the process of Christian socialisation from state-funded [education]" (Dinham and Jackson 2012: 290).

In comparison, Australia's institutional approach to public school religion is anachronistic. Some state legislation and policy dates back more than a century. Although it is very religiously diverse, Australia had no equivalent to England's "paradigm-shifting" 1960s Shap Working Party (see Cush, this volume). Australian efforts to pluralize RE in the 1970s and 1980s were limited and largely unsuccessful (Lovat 2002). Today, minimal government engagement with faith communities and non-religious groups (frequently antagonistic toward each other, or internally divided), means that minorities have little input into the curriculum and few effective channels to contribute to changing policy needs. Consequently, a colonial Christian socialization is still embedded in Australian education.

12.10 Christian-Centric RI Governance in Australia

Australian social policy suffers from a contradictory ideological position regarding multiculturalism—aiming for welcoming, egalitarian inclusion on the one hand, while protecting hierarchical, Anglo-Christian privilege on the other (Byrne 2014; Maddox 2014). The 2015 example of allowing in Syrian Christian refugees while blocking Rohingya Muslim refugees (both from equally desperate situations) is a clear example of this contradictory and discriminatory position, enacted in the immigration sphere. Some Australian states offer limited RE in social science classes, but comparative religion as a separate subject is not mandatory as it is in England. Instead, all Australian states continue to favor Christian-centric RI and Christian-dominated chaplaincy. This focus is maintained through forms of governance that might be described in policy documents as "multicultural," but can be understood in practice as being non-inclusive (Byrne 2012b).

Each Australian state manages religion differently, though most have similar policies, which prioritize RI over RE. In New South Wales, General Religious Education (GRE) is poorly supported, offered only in grades 3 and 4, and receives less than one sixth of the class time given to RI (NSWDET 2010). In contrast, RI begins at enrolment and can legally be allocated up to an hour each week. All state school children, at both primary and senior schools, are pre-enrolled in Anglican RI and parents must write to the school to opt out of the programs, though few schools provide information to parents about how the opt-out provision works. Parents must choose a faith denomination (or "no religion") for a weekly RI class, commonly called "scripture." Some schools offer a wide choice of traditions but most have limited (largely Christian) options. The New South Wales Education Act 1990 provides RI access to "approved religious persuasions." More than 90 % of New South Wales RI providers are Christian (NSWDEC 2013). Against policy, some schools do not offer a non-Christian option (Byrne 2012a).

In 1980 a review of religion in New South Wales public schools was undertaken, producing what is referred to as the Rawlinson Report.[7] The report recommended the establishment of a Consultative Committee for RI.[8] The Rawlinson Report noted that "it is important that this [Committee] should represent the major religious groups in the community" (1980, section 6.97). However, until 2009, a conservative Christian organization, ICCOREIS, dominated the Committee. Only in 2011 was a multifaith approach taken, when Committee membership was extended to include eight Christian representatives and seven from minority faiths (two Jewish and one each of Baha'i, Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu, and Indigenous representatives and a newly recognized, though at the time of writing yet to be filled, Sikh position). In addition there were six representatives from organizations of undeclared affiliation—some of which represent Christian schools. Two NSWDET representatives (of undeclared religious allegiance) had the role of Chair and Executive Officer of this neat Christian stack.

The New South Wales Department of Education and Communities NSWDEC (previously NSWDET) defended the Committee membership as reflecting the religious makeup of Australian society.[9] Using mathematics to determine religious representation is problematic. It reinforces current social inequities if used accurately, and severely reinforces cultural biases if used with prejudice. Although officially recognized as religions, and with more numbers than the 11th-ranked (and represented) Baha'i tradition, Sikhism and the nature religions, ranked ninth and tenth in size, had no representation. More stark was the lack of representation on the Committee for the non-religious perspective which, according to the 2011 census, is held by 22% of Australians (ABS 2012). In 2011, a hotly contested Education Amendment (Ethics) Bill enabled, for the first time, a non-religious ethics alternative to RI—which led to such intense public debate that a State Parliamentary Inquiry was undertaken. The inquiry supported the ethics classes using the same weekly timeslot and the same volunteer access mechanism. However, the organization that delivers the ethics program was not represented on the Committee and not allowed the same fundraising tax concessions given to religious organizations for the same function, limiting its ability to recruit and train volunteers. Another indication of inequity is that the ethics curriculum underwent significant departmental and public scrutiny, while religious curricula are not usually available for review. In addition, ethics volunteers underwent full police checks, while this obligation was put off for religious organizations until 2016. This inequity may explain the assumed right of religious groups to restrict what non-religious children were allowed to do in the RI period for the past 130 years—silent reading or homework only, nothing that could be seen to be competing with RI (Byrne 2012a). This discriminatory policy situation—where children not taking RI are not adequately supervised or not allowed to learn new or structured curriculum material—continues in the Australian

[7] Only section numbers are provided.

[8] Referred to in New South Wales as "Special Religious Education" but understood to be indoctrinatory-style RI.

[9] Notes from author meeting with NSWDEC Officers, Strathfield, October, 2011.

State of Queensland, and in New South Wales schools where ethics volunteers are not available.

Each state education agency determines who can deliver RI. The New South Wales Education Act 1990 provides RI access to "approved religious persuasions." Approval processes and requirements are not defined in legislation and the criteria for approval are not available on the Department of Education website. So, "approval" is left to the interpretation of policy. In New South Wales, interpretation and implementation advice for the Education Minister is provided by a policy contact officer—who may or may not have particular religious leanings. The approval process considers a checklist for applicants, which requires "a statement of your church's doctrine or beliefs, details regarding the appointment of clergy and the role they perform, and details of the places at which your church conducts its business and services" (ICCOREIS 2011: 28). The language is distinctly Christian and, in this way, among others, excluding.

The claim that RI access supports multiculturalism assumes that all traditions are given the same opportunity. This is not the case. The New South Wales Humanist organization has been denied RI access because it is "not a religion." In Victoria, (along with Queensland) the Humanist Society was blocked from offering an ethics course because the organization "cannot be defined as a religion" (Bachelard 2010, np). The term "religion" is not defined in Australian legislation, but limiting interpretations have effectively blocked non-religious access applications. In most Australian states, non-religious groups are excluded. Also currently denied access are Pagan groups, despite these groups being officially listed as religions in the Australian census.

For those applicants deemed acceptable to "participate" in RI, there are other hurdles. Equal opportunity does not demand that all those "approved" are "able." While some non-Christian organizations in some states make use of RI access, lack of resources can limit their possibilities. The approval process does not consider the capacity of approved groups to sustain a state-wide volunteer network. By mid-2012, after a highly debated preliminary trial, a positive review and 18 months of operations, Primary Ethics (the organization established to deliver the philosophical ethics RI alternative) was delivering classes to only 1 % of NSW children.[10] The voluntary New South Wales Buddhist Council had 60 schools on a waiting list for Buddhist RI but has limited ability to deliver in some regions (NSW Buddhist Council 2012). By way of contrast, many Christian groups have access to established church networks and government paid chaplains who are able, through loopholes in chaplaincy legislation, to deliver RI classes. Additionally, in Queensland, Christian Bible classes and Christian RI can be delivered by the school principal. If a state-paid teacher were to offer Islamic instruction, there would be public outcry, but Christian privilege remains largely uncontested.

In Victoria, three parents of children at three public primary schools brought proceedings in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, arguing that the state-funded, exclusively Christian, RI program directly discriminated against their

[10] Primary Ethics Teachers Survey, results sent to author, June, 2012.

children due to their being "identified as different and separated from their class mates" and also due to the lack of regular curriculum instruction during this time (Aitkin and Ors 2012). Their claim, that the RI program is in breach of the Equal Opportunity Acts of 1995 and 2010, was not successful. A similar claim of discrimination in Queensland, by a mother whose child was allegedly shown violent crucifixion material and told he would "burn in hell" (Hurst 2014), which resulted in nightmares, and who is calling for an alternative program in world religions and ethics, was "unresolved"[11] by the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission and is yet to be taken up at the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal. At the time of writing (July 2014), another parent, in a different Brisbane school, is submitting a similar claim of discrimination.

The inconsistencies in Australian RI access indicate that the process is not transparent. Decisions appear to be made on criteria that are not publicly stated. A clear definition of who ought (or ought not) to be approved to deliver RI, and why (or why not), is unavailable. State policies are ostensibly multicultural but the exclusion of some minority religions or non-religious belief systems is discriminatory. The focus on access "opportunity" instead of "equity" avoids an analysis of the structural obstacles and cultural prejudices, which may restrict, create or sustain inequitable outcomes. As Terry Wotherspoon (2002: 11) noted:

> Children's interests may be selectively served when parents and community members from minority backgrounds feel ill-equipped, lack confidence, or encounter language, social, class, fiscal, or cultural barriers in approaching teachers and school officials. Patterns of political representation on school boards, legislative assemblies, and other key educational decision making bodies also reveal significant under-representation, and therefore absence of effective voice.

The New South Wales Rawlinson Report found that most earlier studies into religion in Australian public schooling "recommended that General Religious Education, given by public school teachers, should progressively replace the traditional church-oriented [RI] programs" (1980, section 5.68). Despite these recommendations (made by similar reports in each state), no such iterative reform (as has happened in England) has been undertaken in Australia. In fact, in 2011, the then head of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) reported that there was "no problem" with the operation of Special Religious Instruction (Bachelard 2011: np). Hopes of religious educators were further "dashed" when a secular Studies of Religion component included in a newly devised Civics and Citizenship course was allocated only 20 h a year (Zwartz 2012). ACARA has suggested that religions might be taught as part of the cross-curriculum priorities of "engagement with Asia, sustainability, and indigenous histories and cultures" or via the general capabilities of "ethical understanding" and "intercultural understanding" rather than the English approach of a dedicated curriculum time slot.

A 2014 review of ACARA's national curriculum by two right-wing religious educators noted that, although the curriculum might teach "the major forms of

[11] From parent interview—author's post-doctoral research project, August, 2012.

religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society…Christianity has had a far greater positive influence on Western Society than any other religion" (Donnelly and Wiltshire 2014: 157). One reviewer had already commented that Christianity should not be treated "as one religion among many, alongside Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam" (Donnelly 2013: 1). Rather, Donnelly suggested Australia's Christian heritage should be more strongly emphasized (Greene 2014), and the Bible should be included "for an appreciation of Western literature" (Donnelly and Wiltshire 2014: 159). Aside from the Christian privileging (reminiscent of Australia's twentieth-century racist immigration policy), ACARA's aim to embed inclusive teaching of religions, without ensuring curriculum time, is not feasible. The cross-curriculum priorities are not useful for all subjects and the general capabilities need only be taught where appropriate, and by teachers who are trained to develop their own resources. In any case, by September 2015, the Civics and Citizenship curriculum had still not been endorsed for use.

A critically democratic and actively inclusive approach might, at the very least, seek further information on the issues, problems and possible solutions to balance RI with RE and entail broad consultation with minority groups about what form of religion Australians want in schools—without being swayed by powerful vocal minorities.

12.11 Australian Interreligious Intolerance and Illiteracy

According to the 2014 Mapping Social Cohesion report (Markus 2014), religious racism is still prevalent in Australia. Earlier, this national survey found a majority (53 %) of Australians felt it was "important that the main religion in Australia continues to be Christianity" (Markus 2010: 35). After several years, the survey still finds Australian levels of intolerance and rejection of cultural diversity at 25–30 % of the population, compared with 4 % in the USA and 3 % in Sweden (Markus 2014: 58). The 2014 survey found 18 % of Australians were discriminated against because of their skin color, ethnic origin or religious beliefs—9 % higher than levels recorded in 2007. The 2014 survey also found more than 40 % of people from Asia suffered from racism—especially Malaysians, Indians and Sri Lankans—and that Australians are most likely to be prejudiced against people they believe to be from the Middle East. Hindus and Muslims experience discrimination significantly more than Christians.

Earlier research painted a more nuanced picture. For example, Challenging Racism, a research project of the University of Western Sydney, found that although 41 % of Australians have a "narrow view of who belongs in Australia" (Dunn 2008: 2), only one in ten outwardly express racist views, as opposed to one in three in Europe (Dunn 2011a). Dunn claimed that results were "promising but contradictory…one-third of Australians supported (both) multiculturalism and assimilation at the same time" (Dunn 2011b: 4). Dunn argued that although "separatists and supremacists are a destructive vocal minority…the silent majority of Australians are

open-minded and accepting" of diversity (Dunn 2011a: 8). This comment raises the questions: Why do Australian education systems[12] continue to pre-enroll students in Anglican RI? What responsibility does a secular system have to uphold anti-discrimination policies? Do all Christian families want the same type of evangelical RI that is currently provided?

In mid-2015, an anti-Muslim political party held rallies in Australian capital cities and drew attention to the support of mainstream political figures, including Australia's Attorney General, who had declared their "right to be bigots" (Brandis 2014). At the same time, lawyers in the State of Victoria released a statement claiming that the practice of religious instruction in that state breached the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and the state's own Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic). The statement noted that the RI program contravenes international law by "ignoring the rights of parents and guardians," "offering religious dogma," and segregating and discriminating against particular groups of children" (Victorian Council for Civil Liberties 2015: 2).

Bucking an international trend toward efforts to improve interreligious literacy, Australian educational institutions remain Christian-centric and Australian students are religiously and interreligiously illiterate (Rymarz 2007; Cahill et al. 2004). Pat Loria (2006) pointed out that the average Australian public school student cannot distinguish between the Buddha and an ayatollah, that "Jesus Christ" is known mostly as a profanity (citing Zwartz 2003), and that most teenagers are generally unaware of the story or significance of Good Friday (citing Atkinson 2005). Stereotypical views, often developed through media misrepresentation, negatively construct the "Muslim other" for many young people as "un-Australian" (Maher 2009).

Increasing intercultural and interreligious difference is part of an international dynamic born of global mobility. This social reality will only intensify; it will not go away. For Australia to respond adequately to this dynamic, it may benefit from a more international outlook on RE policy.

12.12 International RE Principles

The Toledo Guiding Principles is a framework for the teaching of religions and beliefs, developed in 2007 by a panel of RE experts "to contribute to an improved understanding of the world's increasing religious diversity and the growing presence of religion in the public sphere" (Jackson 2008: 163). The basic human right of respecting "freedom of religion or belief" is central to the document, which was acknowledged publicly by the 56 European foreign ministers represented in the Office for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Jackson 2011a: 17). The

[12]Victoria switched to an opt-in system in 2014 (the only Australian state to do so). This initiated the removal of the RI program in 50 schools, religious group outrage and political back-pedalling (see Cohen 2014; Bouma 2014).

already-occurring pluralist trend in English RE was supported by the release of these principles. In addition, the engagement of government agencies, scholars, and public personalities who discussed and debated these principles extended the public discourse on pluralist RE, particularly on the inclusion of non-religious worldviews. In contrast, in Australia, debate about school religion generally leads to divisive debate and is often avoided (Byrne 2009).

Following on from Toledo, in 2008 a Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation regarding the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education. The recommendation (CM 2008/2012) states that:

> Education for democratic citizenship is a factor for social cohesion, mutual understanding, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and solidarity…[which] requires recognising and accepting differences, and developing a critical approach to…philosophical, religious, social, political and cultural concepts…[and that] member states should…pursue initiatives in the field of intercultural education relating to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions in order to promote tolerance and the development of a culture of "living together". (Council of Europe 2008a: np)[13]

The recommendation highlights the state's responsibility to provide spaces for intercultural dialogue and to deliver combined religions and ethics teaching "in order to prevent religious or cultural divides" (Council of Europe 2008a: np).

In further developments, a 2009 Council of Europe exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue noted the challenge for education regarding "how to prepare young people to live together in a diverse sociocultural context and to actively participate in creating a mutually supportive society" (Schreiner 2009: 2). The exchange noted that for social inclusion, national and international stability and security, "religions should be studied in all nation states as part of intercultural education" (Jackson 2011a: 9). In Europe, "knowledge about religions, as a matter of democratic citizenship, has become a priority in the field of education" (Council of Europe 2009: 38). The Council noted that inclusion in education is associated with principles of "equity and social justice, democrative [sic] values and participation and a balance between community and diversity" (2009: 44). It argued that "an inclusive culture insists upon valuing diversity…by actively mixing students of different cultures, social backgrounds, gender and abilities" (2009: 43).

In its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (Council of Europe 2008b), the Council noted that inclusion "requires the protection of the weak, as well as the right to differ, to create and to innovate" and that democracy thrives because it helps individuals not only "to identify with the society of which they are members" but also because it "provides for their legitimacy in decision-making and in the exercise of power" (2008b: 20). This disposition "requires a democratic architecture characterised by the respect of the individual as a human being, reciprocal recognition of equal worth, and impartial treatment" (2008b: 20). The Council of Europe urged governance models that "reconcile majority rule [alongside] the rights of persons belonging to minorities" (2008b: 25). The White Paper noted that inclusive societies,

[13] Accessed online. No page numbers.

and thus education, must take a critical approach to governance as well as participation. It also noted that the rules of a—real or imagined—"dominant culture" cannot be used to justify discrimination and that inclusive societies cannot operate by a majority ethos. This position emphasizes the role of proactive state interventions to address structural obstacles to cultural and religious equity.

Building on this work, the Council released *Signposts—Policies and Practices for Teaching about Religions and Non-religious World Views in Intercultural Education* (Council of Europe 2014), addressing the challenges of citizenship in religiously plural democracies. *Signposts* aims to stimulate community and school-based action to "promote dialogue, learning from one another, deepening understanding of one's own and others' background and traditions" (2014: 99). *Signposts* provides analyses of research findings and pedagogical frameworks, principle-based policy guidance, implementation recommendations and prompts for discussion. The document shows how the Council of Europe sees inclusive education about religions and non-religious worldviews as a "crucially sensitive area for the political, social and educational future of Europe" (2014: 8), producing "greater empathetic understanding" and "nurturing of democratic culture" through the development of "civic competencies" (2014: 9). *Signposts* makes specific requests for Council of Europe member states' education policies. The governance position presented is one of active inclusion to support diverse engagement.

12.13 Conclusions

Social inclusion provides a platform for policy to encourage interreligious literacy and intercultural understanding through school Studies of Religion programs. However, consideration must be given to the ideological motives for two differing styles of "inclusion"—active and passive. These different styles result in varying governance mechanisms and varying degrees of involvement by minority groups. Passive inclusion, which promotes opportunity, is enacted in either classical or progressive liberal democratic models. It appears incapable of addressing structural inequity and barriers to participation that arise through the cultural dominance of particular faith groups. Active inclusion, which aims for equity, is inherently suspicious of majority rule. As a result, active inclusion policy mechanisms incorporate socioeconomic, cultural, religious, and political diversity, and the procedures for participation are regularly reformed. This allows the spaces for institutional and public conversation (which previously may have contributed to marginalizing, or "tokenizing," minority voices) to be opened and reshaped, to encourage critique and checks and balances.

In England, social inclusion policy initially emphasized limited economic state intervention but developed a multifaith agenda with the aim of "community cohesion." However, inclusive pluralist reform of RE had been underway in England and Wales since the mid-1960s. This reform was given further impetus by government initiatives in policy and curriculum development and by public attention (including

government funded research) on issues of religious diversity and international principles in RE. Although "social inclusion" was dropped by the post-Blair UK Coalition government, an inclusive approach to RE governance and implementation was already well established. This actively inclusive approach continues in England, partly due to a broader European agenda.

In stark contrast, Australian school religion operates under excluding or, at best, passively including governance models. Passive inclusion does not generate transformative power. The difficulty of mounting any argument to defend against vocal conservative Christian minorities appears to be compounded in Australia by the position of education agencies, which tend to run with the idea that "majority justifies privilege" and by the disorganization of splintered stakeholder groups. If taken seriously in Australia, the application of active inclusion to RE (such as the adoption or adaptation of internationally recognized principles) might see an end to unnecessary and limiting Christian privileging in public schooling. The benefits of addressing Australia's conflicted position on multiculturalism and its resultant interreligious illiteracy—through an active, critically inclusive religions education policy—are yet to be explored.

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