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SYMPOSIUM: CURRICULUM/CULTURAL STUDIES

Presenter: Dr Patricia Malone

Australian Catholic University, NSW.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NSW HSC STUDIES OF RELIGION SYLLABUS: SOME  
PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS INTO RESEARCHING THE EFFICACY OF THIS COURSE.

The new Studies of Religion syllabus for Years 11-12 in New South Wales was approved in November 1991 and about 40 schools have students following this course in 1992. This paper will examine the structure of the syllabus and its underlying rationale with a focus on the attitude outcomes that the syllabus specified. As the writer chaired the syllabus committee this presentation will be from the perspective of those who developed the paper but extensive consultation took place during the development stage so the final syllabus decisions reflect many of the current issues that face religious education in Australia. This paper will also present the preliminary results of a pilot research project carried out by the writer with the assistance of Sr Rosalie O'Neill of the Institute of Religious Studies, Sydney (the writer received a small internal grant from Australian Catholic University in 1992 for this project). This project attempts to measure the attitudes of a sample of students towards the various religious traditions and the effect of studying this course on these attitudes. The Studies of Religion syllabus is based on the premise that Religion is a subject within the curriculum. Although there are many understandings of the concept of religion within the community this syllabus is not based on any one definition or any one model. The Brief stated that the syllabus would use an educational approach which was related to the overall aims of the Key Learning Area Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE), which is one of the six learning areas in the secondary curriculum in NSW. The course was designed for all students in government or other types of schools. The Brief stated that no attempt would be made in the syllabus to proselytise or to promote any one religious tradition at the expense of another.

The inclusion of religion within the school curriculum had to be argued in the original Brief because there were many groups in NSW who considered the study of religion to be irrelevant in Australian society or the responsibility of the believing groups. Indeed many Australians consider religion as a purely private matter and not one of great import to society. The Brief argued that Religion is an integral part of human experience whether recognised by the individual or not, and is an essential component of every culture. It further emphasised the difficulty today, in Australia, as in other nations, of understanding the multicultural nature of society without an adequate understanding of religion. The Brief stated:  
Studies of Religion will explore the diversity of religious expression and experience in the world and increase the awareness and acceptance of Australia's rapidly changing multicultural and multifaith society."  
(1990:4)

The Brief also proposed that the course would enable students 'to examine some issues of human meaning from various religious/non-religious points of view' (1990, 3)

The syllabus allows for a combination of approaches. The compulsory

Foundation Studies requires the use of philosophical, historical, sociological and phenomenological approaches. It allows students to gain some appreciation of the place of religion in Australian society; of Aboriginal Spirituality; of an overview of the five major religious traditions which form the basis for the other parts of the syllabus, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam and provides students with some opportunity to consider basic human questions about existence and the universe. The Depth studies draw on this same range of approaches as well as a theological emphasis in the single tradition depth study where students are given an opportunity to study a religious tradition in a holistic way so as to see the interrelationships between culture, beliefs and lifestyle of believers of that tradition in an Australian context.

It was argued that to have an understanding of religion at this level it was essential to study at least one religious tradition in depth and from the perspective of those who practise the given tradition. The Brief

described this as follows:

the students examine the origin of the chosen tradition, its history, rituals, beliefs, ethical and moral teachings, written texts and oral traditions. Where appropriate, the existence of sub-groups within the tradition are examined and one of these may be studied in greater detail in terms of the above aspects. The questions of meaning and identity considered within the Foundation study are explored within the vision and approach of the tradition being studied. (1990:9)

The possibility of studying a denomination in detail was to allow religiously affiliated schools to focus on their own expression of the tradition but also because of the desire to allow students to explore in a serious way a specific area in some depth rather than have a superficial knowledge of a range of traditions or of a range of expressions of one tradition. This was seen to be essential in Australia where approximately two thirds do not practise any religion and where religion and religious issues, except for the sensational and controversial happenings, are generally ignored in the media.

There was a concern that the syllabus might allow too narrow a study of religion so the other Depth Studies were issues based, Cross Religion Studies, to ensure that at least two traditions were studied. As the Brief expressed it:

The aim in this section is to obtain a clearer understanding of the nature and function of religion in society by focusing on specific aspects. (Syllabus Brief, 1990:9)

The Interest Studies were to allow both for broadening of the subject area and for further study in a specific area of interest. The syllabus could not presume any previous study in the area of studies of religion, yet it had to cater for students who may have studied some form of religious education throughout the whole of their schooling. The proposed model was to provide students with the opportunity to choose their areas of study from the major religious traditions that are present in Australia but did not make compulsory the study of any one tradition. Aboriginal

spirituality was placed within the compulsory Foundations section because of the emphasis in the course on religion in Australia.

One of the mainline Christian denominations had serious reservations about the syllabus and put forward an alternate approach which would have made study of Christianity compulsory and would have included Aboriginal studies purely as an interest elective. They questioned the basic assumption of the syllabus namely that in a multicultural society students should study the range of religions. They argued that the whole Syllabus was based on the false premise that Australia was a multi faith and multicultural society. Their position reflected the concern of a substantial group of Anglo-Celtic Australians that our society, in accepting a broad range of cultures and beliefs is being disloyal to its British and Christian heritage.

The Studies of Religion syllabus committee had to provide a defence for its basic position. The 1986 census figures did show that although 73% gave some form of Christianity as their religion and only 2% the other major traditions; there were another 25% who either recorded no religion or did not give an answer to this question on the census. Other research has showed that the majority of Australian Christians do not attend Church regularly, up to a third of those who state that they belong to a Christian denomination also state that they never attend Church. (Bentley et al, 1992:28) These same census figures were quoted with different purpose by the various traditions. The Buddhists emphasised the high rate of growth of their tradition whereas some Christian groups focused on the absolute numbers of recorded Christians.

Australians have always tended to consider themselves Christian in terms of their attitudes to others rather than in more formal terms of religious practice. Gillman (1992:100) recorded that this view had been put forward in a newspaper article in 1946 when Furphy had written: 'Religion, divested of frill, formalism, and fable is merely the science of conduct.' He also pointed out that Lawson in his 19th century writings had presented Christianity as being equivalent to 'mateship' the basic Australian myth. This emphasis upon morality as the essence of religion has remained strong in the Australian community (Gillman, 1992:102) and has increased the sense that the Churches and their perspective and thereby any formal study of

religion is seen to be irrelevant. It is also reflected in the general level of religious illiteracy in the Australian community which this course hoped to address.

Throughout our history there has been a great deal of public divisiveness between Protestants and Catholics. Much of this was related to Irish/Anglo antipathy and to various aspects of class and political antagonism whereas Bodycomb (1992:117) would suggest that the new debate may be between the "evangelical" and "ecumenical" Christians. The following reflects the conflict that the syllabus committee faced.

For the conservative evangelical Christian, dialogue means "selling out." Being prepared to listen to the other accounts to conceding that he(sic) may have something to say from which we could benefit. This is very hard to handle if one believes he(sic) has a monopoly on revealed truth.(Bodycomb, 1992:117)

Australia has responded to the range of cultures within its society in a variety of ways. In the earliest period the British Australians ignored the existence of the Aborigines and emphasised a 'white Australia' policy. Migrants were first of all to assimilate and then gradually the official policy became integration until in the past decade it has become multiculturalism. In July 1989 the then Prime Minister, R.J.Hawke, launched the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia. This program emphasised the 'right of Australians, within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including language and religion.' This syllabus is underpinned by the assumption that the development of such an attitude requires not only knowledge of the various traditions but a critical appreciation of the way believers in that tradition may approach life and its questions. The basic aim of this syllabus was 'to promote an awareness, understanding and appreciation of the nature of religion and the influence of religious traditions, beliefs and practices in societies and on the individual with an emphasis on the Australian context.'(Syllabus, 1991:7)

The NSW Board of Studies requires the syllabus to be set out as outcomes in the areas of knowledge and understanding, skills and values and attitudes. The knowledge outcomes that were specified for the 'expression of religion in Australia today' were that

the students should show that they can:

- . comprehend the influence of religion on Australian society
- . recognise the importance of Christianity in Australian society
- . recognise the many faiths and philosophies that exist in

Australia

- . recognise the distinctiveness of Aboriginal belief and spirituality

(Syllabus,1991:8).

One of the objectives for values and attitudes was 'to develop a tolerance of different religions in the Australian context' the outcomes for this were to

- . appreciate the importance of religions in giving individuals their specific identity within a culture
- . value the role of religion in the development of Australia's present social ethos
- . empathise with differing experiences and opinions

(Syllabus, 1991:11).

In order to measure whether such outcomes were being achieved by this course or by other means some initial data was needed. The aim of this pilot study was to gain some base data about the attitudes of a group of Year 11 students towards the major religious traditions at the beginning of the course and the influence of this course on these attitudes. To gather the required data from a sample group, it was decided to use a variety of methods, individual questionnaires for initial and final data, small group interviews to obtain the students' perceptions of what they were actually studying and their preferences or otherwise for both the content and processes being used and finally individual interviews of selected students to test and extend the data from the written material. The value of each of these methodologies for the proposed larger study will be evaluated as a result of the Pilot.

Seven schools were approached and asked to provide a sample group of approximately 20 students who were studying the course. Only two Government

schools had taken up the Studies of Religion Course and as they both had small classes it was decided, for the pilot, to contact only non-government schools where it also would be simpler to obtain permission to visit the school and contact the students. Six schools representing various religious traditions, not all Christian, took part in the pilot study. Up to this point in time (Sept. 1992), the first set of individual questionnaires have been administered and analysed and a group interview has taken place in each setting. Some individual interviews are planned for Term 4. The students for interview will be selected to represent some of the extremes in the range of attitudes that are identified in this first analysis of the data and will reflect the range of observed variables.

The sample totalled one hundred and thirteen respondents across the six schools with percentages fairly evenly distributed. Three schools were single sex schools and three were co-educational. The schools were given a random set of names that had no relationship with their location or religious affiliation. In the pilot study all the schools were in metropolitan Sydney. In Hocking and Lalor, the males have a slightly higher representation than that of Murphy. This distribution can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: School by Sex Percentages

	Girls N=78 %	Boys N=35 %	Total N=113 %
Fischer	17.7	-	17.7
Hocking	7.1	10.6	17.7
Lalor	3.5	14.2	17.7
Murphy	8.0	6.2	14.2
Oxley	13.3	-	13.3
Barton	19.5	-	19.5
Total	69.0	31.0	100

The questionnaire was pre-coded with the exception of Question 12 which provided opportunity to place a tick or leave the space empty in response to a question measuring the students attitude to having various groups of people as neighbours. A simple coding frame was developed whereby '1' replaced the 'tick' and '0' represented a non-response. The data file was developed from the Questionnaire and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Personal Computer Program (SPSSPC) (Marija J. Norusis/SPSS INC) was used for all the analysis of the data.

In the development of the original questionnaire some questions that had been used in a Social Attitudes Survey developed by the Department of Social Work and Social Policy of the University of Sydney for the Social Issues committee of the Anglican Archdiocese of Sydney were adapted with permission to allow for possible cross referencing with this study. One of the main aims of the pilot was to try and establish if there was any link

between attitudes to the various traditions and actual knowledge about them. It was decided to ask the students to rate their own knowledge about various aspects of the traditions and to indicate the source of such information. It was also considered important to ascertain the range of national and religious backgrounds within the group and the extent to which the students perceived themselves to be religious as well as the degree of religious practice. The schools that chose to do the Studies of Religion in 1992 were probably atypical in that the syllabus did not reach the schools till November 1991, although the Draft had been available earlier in the year, so these were schools whose teachers at least, were very concerned about the study of religion. In fact some of these schools made the course compulsory in Year 11 and, as later discussion will show, this caused some difficulties. The questionnaire hoped to establish the range of attitudes and backgrounds present in the sample so that there would be some indication of what would be necessary in the major study. In the pilot sample, 78 percent of the students were Australian born. The next highest category was 'Other' and an examination of the details here indicate that Northern Europe was the dominant country of origin. Six percent of the students were born in Asia and the remaining four percent represent the United Kingdom, Italy and the Middle East. Eighteen percent

speak a language other than English at home. The percentage distribution for country of birth and language other than English spoken at home is shown in Table 2A.

Table 2A: Country of Birth

Country	%
Australia	78
Asia	6
Italy	1
Middle East	1
UK/Ireland	2
Other	12
Other Language at home	18

A comparison of the Country of Birth in the different schools shows that Fischer is ethnically the most homogeneous, ninety-five percent being Australian born while Lalor has the highest percentage born overseas. The other schools range between these two extremes (90%, 80% and 75% respectively). See Table 2B

Table 2B: School by Australian Born, Language

	Australian Born		Other Language in home	Fischer
	N=88	N=20		
	%	%		
	95.0	-		

Hocking	90.0	-	
Lalor	35.0		40.0
Murphy	75.0	13.0	
Oxley	80.0		60.0
Barton	91.0	5.0	
Total	78.0		18.0

When one considers the figures related to language spoken at home, it is evident from the Table that Lalor and Oxley have a high proportion of recent immigrants or, as was found at the group interview, overseas students.

The majority of the students in the sample identify with Australia as their National group (78%). A small percentage of the students still consider their National group to be other than Australian, mainly those born in Northern Europe (other).

Table 3A: National Group Percentages

National Group Affiliation	%
Australian	78
UK/Irish	1
Italian	3
Jewish	2
Middle East	1
Spanish	2
Asian	4
Other*	8

\* Again, the main ethnic group is Northern European

When the schools are considered individually, it can be seen that Lalor and Oxley are dominantly multicultural, with fifty-five and sixty-seven percent respectively born overseas.

Table 3B: National Group Affiliation by School Percentages

	Fischer	Hocking	Lalor	Murphy	Oxley	Barton
National Group Affiliation	%	%	%	%	%	%
Australian	81	33	100	95	95	45
UK/Irish	-	-	-	-	-	6
Italian	13	-	-	5	-	-
Jewish	-	-	-	-	5	15
Middle East	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spanish	5	-	-	-	-	-
Asian	13	-	-	-	-	20
	8	-	-	-	-	6

Other - - 15 7  
33 -

The dominant religious affiliation is Catholic. Due to the sample procedure, there are three schools which are mainly Catholic. In later analysis religious denomination will be collapsed into general denominational headings. These percentages are contained in Table 4.

Detailed Religious Affiliation		Percentages	
	%	Generalised Religious Affiliation	%
Anglican	6	Catholic	50
Catholic	50	Other Christian	32
Uniting	1	Jewish	11
Baptist	7	Other Religion	1
Jewish	11	Agnostic/Atheist	6
Buddhist	1		
Other Christian	9		
Agnostic	2		
Atheist	4		
Pentecostal	9		

Hocking, Lator and Murphy have a broader religious affiliation base than the other schools. Attendance at worship and the extent to which the individual prays and the perception of the individual of themselves as religious persons were areas of data that were also obtained from the questionnaires. Eighty three percent of the student pray at least occasionally. Included here are 34 percent who claim to pray most days while 20 percent say they pray often. Table 5 gives these distributions on prayer by school. It can be seen that there is considerable variation across the categories.

Pray	Percentages						
	Fischer	Hocking	Lator	Murphy	Oxley	Barton	
Yes most days	20		60	25	56	40	14
Yes often	20		5	15	19	33	27
Occasionally	50		25	20	25	20	32
Rarely	10		10	40	-	7	27

Fifty-two percent of the students attend a religious service of some nature regularly, that is, at least once a week. A further nineteen percent attend at least every few months. Thirty-three percent are non-regular in their attendance at service but nine percent of these do attend on special occasions such as Christmas and Easter.

Table 6A: Attendance at Religious Service Percentages

	Percentages
More than once a week	18
Once a week	34
Once a month	9
Once every 2-3 months	10
Christmas or Easter	5
Other specific holy days	4
Once or twice a year	6
Less often	14

These figures of attendance show that the sample group is atypical, which is to be expected, as all the schools in the pilot are religiously affiliated so one could assume that many families choose these schools because of their own religious affiliation. Recent figures (Bentley et al., 1992:25-27) show that 18% of under 25's are frequent attenders at worship; 24% state they have no religion and do not attend and 58% identify with a religious group but are defined as nominal because they either never attend or do so very occasionally. The results of this study do correlate with the observed higher level of attendance at worship of those who attend Church schools, these same schools also produce the greater percentage of those who claim they have no religion.

When the differences across School are observed, it can be seen that Hocking and Murphy have the highest scores of attendance at worship, eighty-five and sixty-nine percent respectively. The lowest scores for attendance are registered by Lalor, where forty percent attend less than once or twice a year.

Table 6B: Attendance at Religious Service by School Percentages

Service	Fischer	Hocking	Lalor	Murphy	Oxley	Barton	Percentages
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
More than once a week	-	35	15	50	-	9	
Once a week	30	50	10	19	53	41	
Once a month	5	5	-	6	20	18	
Once every 2-3 months	13	14	15	-	15	-	
Christmas or Easter	-	9	15	-	5	-	
Other specific holy days	-	5	-	5	-	15	-
Once or twice a year	-	-	25	-	-	6	7
Less often	7	4	5	10	40	19	

Sixty percent of the students in the sample consider themselves a religious person. This is a fairly high response and it will be important in the major study to have students who are not studying a senior religion course in order to obtain a more general base line data.

Table 7A: Considers Self Religious

Percentages
60

Religious person	60
Not a Religious person	21
Convinced Atheist	3
Don't know	16

When these scores are examined across the school categories, Oxley registers a very high eighty-seven percent. Lalor registers fifty percent either non-religious or atheist and this is high compared to the other schools.

Table 7B: Considers Self Religious by School Percentages

Self	Fischer		Hocking		Lalor		Murph		Oxley	Barton
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Religious person					60	70	30	56	87	64
Not a Religious person	15	20	40	25	7	18				
Convinced Atheist	-	-	10	-	-	5				
Don't know	25	10	20	19	6	13				

As well as establishing the religious practice of the students the questionnaire asked the students to rate their knowledge of the major traditions on a four point scale and to note the source of such knowledge. Students register that they have a considerable degree of knowledge of Christianity in terms of both its History and Development (86%) and its Beliefs and Practices (92%). Judaism is rated next: History and Development: 56%, Beliefs and Practices: 61%. They then rated their knowledge of Islam (48% and 54% respectively). Their knowledge of Buddhism and Hinduism is rather similar (Buddhism 40% and 47%, Hinduism 40% and 42%). However, in regard to the expression of these religions in Australia, they indicate that generally they are only familiar with the expression of Christianity. They are almost unanimous in stating that their knowledge of the various traditions comes from their lessons at school. The following table sets out this distribution.

Table 8A: Knowledge of Various Traditions Percentages  
Buddhism Christ'ity Hinduism Islam

Judaism	Buddhism	Christ'ity	Hinduism	Islam
Good/reasonable Knowledge	%	%	%	%
History & Development	40	86	40	48
Beliefs & Practices	47	92	42	
54	61			
Expression in Australia	15	86	18	

33	36		
Knowledge gained from School		94	96
94	95	95	

To facilitate reading the differences across schools Table 8B was developed. An average score was obtained for the Knowledge items and a score closer to 1 indicates a greater knowledge while a score closer to 10 indicates poor knowledge. Not surprisingly the Table shows that students generally perceive they have a greater knowledge of Christianity than the other religions but there are some interesting variations in perceived knowledge across the schools.

Table 8B: Knowledge of Various Traditions by School

	Fischer	Hocking	Lalor	Murphy	Oxley	Barton	Total
Good/reasonable Knowledge							
Mean Score							
Buddhism		5.0		6.6	5.8	8.4	6.5
6.0	6.3						
Christianity	3.1		3.3	4.8	3.8	3.5	
2.7	3.5						
Hinduism	5.1		6.9	6.8	8.1	6.3	
6.3	6.5						
Islam	4.7		6.8	5.7	8.7	6.0	
3.2	5.7						
Judaism	4.7		6.3	4.0	8.3	5.2	
4.9	5.5						

In order to obtain some data about the students attitudes to the major religious traditions students were asked to rate their degree of approval of various groups. The list below shows that Christians, Pop Singers and Police are rated with a high degree of approval, these all registering above ninety percent. The lowest approval scores are given to various controversial groups in society such as homosexuals and particular races and religious groups. If the responses for the religious groups are compared with the question following: 'People not preferred as a Neighbour' it can be seen that the results are somewhat similar and thus would seem to give some indication of the attitudes of the students to the various groups.

Table 9: Approval of Various Groups

Group	%	Rank
Christians	97	1
Pop Singers	95	2
Police	93	3
Aborigines	89	4
New Zealanders	88	5
Footballers	88	5
Jews	87	7
Americans	87	7
Conservationists	86	9

Peace Workers	86	9
Buddhists	73	11
Feminists	71	12
Greek Immigrants	70	13
Hindus	69	14
Unemployed	64	15
Muslims	62	16
Asian Immigrants	58	17
Homosexuals	46	18

The intensity of the students' reactions to some of these groups was shown by the number of ticks placed in the fourth box, the disapprove strongly category, in several cases and the student who extended the continuum to about ten boxes before recording his negative judgment.

The final question asked students to indicate various people or groups they would not like as neighbours. Table 10 gives the Rank Order of the Student responses. Not unexpectedly perhaps, people with a criminal record ranked highest; this group was followed by the same minority groups as in Question 9.

Table 10: Not preferred as a Neighbour

	Not preferred	Rank
People with a criminal record	67	1
Homosexuals/Lesbians	47	2
Muslims	31	3
Buddhists	23	4
Hindus	22	5
People with a Mental Disability	21	6
Asians	20	7
Conservationists	14	8
People with Large Families	13	9
Aborigines	11	10
Peace Workers	9	11
Elderly people	8	12
Protestants	5	13
Jews	5	13
Unemployed	5	13
Catholics	4	16
People of different race	3	17
Single parent Families	1	18
Students	0	19

Of particular interest in this study is the relationship between Religion and prejudice. To explore this relationship, a factor composed of the prejudice items was developed. A scale was developed from the items of

Question 12 to provide a more powerful measure of students' prejudice toward various minority groups. A Reliability Test was conducted and the results were satisfactory (Cronbach Alpha = .85). Scores on this scale were then related to a standard measure of commitment - religious attendance. There are high levels of prejudice in the extreme categories of attendance; that is frequent attenders and rare attenders are more likely to have higher prejudice scores than the middle groups (see Table 11).

Table 11 Attendance at Religious Service and Prejudice Scores

Attendance at Religious Service	Prejudice Scores
More than once a week	69
Once a week	120
Once a month	26
Once every 2-3 months	28
Christmas or Easter	17
Other specific holy days	27
Once/twice a year	14
Less often	46

There has been considerable research in the area of prejudice (Spilka et al, 1986) and although other studies that compare church attendance with prejudice have shown a similar pattern, studies that compare internal religious attitudes and prejudice have shown an inverse relationship. The major study will need to measure internal aspects of religion and to compare these with prejudice scores; the individual interviews in the pilot will provide some information as part of the interview schedule will draw on research into faith development( Leavey et al., 1992).

Scores in Tables 9 and 10 indicate that the three Religious Traditions, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, attract a degree of prejudice from the students in the sample. In Table 12 a profile of those indicating a level of prejudice is listed.

Table 12: High Prejudice Scores on Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism by Selected Variables

	Islam %	Buddhism %	Hinduism %	
Fischer	6	8	8	
Hocking	29	35	40	
Lalor	37	27	24	
Murphy	17	27	20	
Oxley	6	-	-	
Barton	6	4	8	
Boys	63	69	64	
Girls	37	31	36	
Australian born	66		78	80
Overseas born	34		23	20
Catholic	14	11	12	
Jewish	23	19	20	
Other Christian	54		70	68

Atheist	9	-	-
Pray frequently	54	62	64
Regular Worship	51	61	64
Consider Self Rel	77	54	56
Good knowledge of Other Traditions	6	-	-

In the group interview students were asked if there was any discussion of other religions among those doing the subject. Most agreed that this had happened to varying degrees and one commented on the effect of knowing something about other traditions in terms of attitudes. Islam was mentioned in each case as being one that they had tended to stereotype although one student commented that she still felt strongly against many Islamic practices. There would seem to be some evidence that knowledge of a tradition can affect the level of prejudice and the effect of studying the various traditions will be considered in the major study as students choose the tradition that is studied at depth. In the group interviews the students doing the one unit course, which only allows for one tradition to be studied at depth were concerned because the school, in each case, was only offering the tradition to which the school belonged. They stated that they had not been able to study the other traditions in any depth, indeed the Foundation Studies which they had completed only provides them with an overview of the major traditions. They were very aware that even the introductory study they had done had helped them appreciate the reason why other traditions were different from their own, although, as several added, they did not necessarily agree with the other point of view. All maintained that it was important to obtain a critical understanding of other approaches to life.

The evidence in this sample would indicate that prejudiced students are likely to be from a Christian Tradition, consider themselves to be a religious person and adhere to the practices of their own tradition but have little knowledge of other traditions. The student is also likely to be Australian born, male and rather like a student from Lalor.

In these results there is at least some form of minor prejudice against Islam in all groups but that for Oxley, the Atheists and those claiming knowledge of other Traditions, there is no prejudice recorded against Buddhism and Hinduism. This finding raises a number of questions. What actually is the dynamic behind the figures? Are the Muslims more visible than the Hindus and Buddhists and therefore more likely to provoke unfavourable attention, or do they receive more media coverage or are they equated with particular ethnic groups? Has the project sample unduly influenced the results? Would we expect the same results in a random sample of students.

The sample for the major study will include students who are at Government schools and will also include students who choose not to study religion at Years 11 and 12. At three of the schools in the sample the Studies of

Religion course was compulsory in Year 11 and the group interview revealed a high level of negativity to the course in these schools, it will be important to note if this affects any changes in attitudes that may be detectable in this same group at the end of the course. In two schools some students felt that their teachers were biased towards their own tradition and this is another variable that will need to be considered in the major study before any statements can be made about the effects on student attitudes of a formal study of religion at this level. The need to establish such data may require some interviews in the final study or it may be obtained by some open ended questions about what the students have experienced in the course.

The results of this Pilot Study indicate that

- \*it is possible to differentiate students on prejudice scores.
- \*there is some evidence to indicate that Knowledge of Other Traditions is a significant factor in the level of prejudice students are likely to hold toward these minority Traditions.
- \*students who gain high scores in knowledge of minority religious Traditions are likely to be low on Prejudice scores.
- \*students tend to gain their knowledge of such Traditions from their School Courses.
- \*students who hold strong prejudice against minority Traditions are likely to claim to be high on religious commitment.
- \*the school students attend and their sex are tied to their level of prejudice.
- \*Australian born students are more likely to exhibit prejudice than other students.

These results need to be considered within the limits of this pilot research but they suggest areas that will need to be explored in the major study.

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