

Pause for Thought

“I think it may often be misleading to speak of the various religions as revelations of God, for that suggests God has disclosed part of himself to one people and a different part to others. Is that how a compassionate father loves the different children of his family? It is surely truer to believe that God’s self-revelation and self-giving is consistent for all, but that different peoples have responded differently.”

*Bishop John V. Taylor, Interfaith Lecture
The Theological Basis of Inter-Faith Dialogue*

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How Did We Get Where We Are?

1992

Williams' Royal Commission

Recommended government administer system

Process delayed because of a court challenge

1995

Government announced it would be seeking the approval of the people to amend Term 17

1997

Process continued and on July 31, 1997 the Premier announced that government was seeking a mandate from the people to do the following:

- end separation of children
- end the denominational school system
- eliminate Term 17 as it was currently drafted
- create a new single school system where all children, regardless of their religion, attend the same schools

The New System

This new system would include provision for religious education and observances. The new term 17 would clearly reflect and conform with the position presented in the referendum question. Term 17 reads as follows:

17.(1) In lieu of section ninety-three of the Constitution Act, 1867, this term shall apply in respect of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

(2) In and for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Legislature shall have exclusive authority to make laws in relation to education, but shall provide for courses in religion that are not specific to a religious denomination.

(3) Religious observances shall be permitted in a school where requested by parents.

The Question and the Vote

The question put to the people on September 2, 1997 was as follows:

“Do you support a single school system where all children, regardless of their religious affiliation, attend the same schools where opportunities for religious education and observances are provided?”

On September 2, 1997, 73% of those who voted in the referendum chose “Yes” in answer to the question and 27% chose “No”.

Resolution to Amend

On September 4, 1997, the resolution to amend Term 17 was introduced in the House of Assembly and on September 5, 1997 the resolution was passed unanimously in the House of Assembly.

As part of the new school system government promised that all schools would be required to offer the religious education courses that are part of the provincial curriculum.

Curriculum Development

Religious Education

October 1997

Work began on the new Framework Document for Religious Education which would be used when developing new curriculum

November/December 1997

Work continued on the Framework Document as well as an examination of existing resources being used in the denominational system and other religious education resources

January 1998

Curriculum working committees were set up to design the interim religious education program. These committees consisted of teachers and board personnel from the three former denominational systems (Integrated, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic). The mandate of these committees was to develop an interim curriculum and through examining the existing resources from the Integrated, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic systems determine those resources which were the “best fit” with the outcomes as stated in the Framework document.

February 1998

Focus sessions were held around the province (Corner Brook, Goose Bay, Gander, and St. John's) to discuss the draft of the Framework document and to receive suggestions and reactions to the proposed new religious education program. The focus sessions were by invitation with representatives from the various faith communities, educational institutions, and others with a vested interest in religious education being invited.

March 1998

The Department of Justice became involved in the process. This Department examined the Framework document as well as the recommended resources as presented by the curriculum working committees.

New curriculum guides were produced giving clear direction on what sections of any given resource would be included in the interim program. Included as well were statements of methodology and appropriate activities.

April 1998

Work and consultations continued with the Department of Justice and the curriculum committees and work began on the development of new curriculum guides for each grade level.

Upon completion of the curriculum guides, which include outcomes to support the new program, the development of resources began. This is an ongoing process.

Introduction

Religious Education

“It is extremely important that we all extend our understanding of each other’s spiritual practices and traditions, because to do so increases our opportunities for mutual respect. Sometimes, too, we encounter something in another tradition that helps us better appreciate something in our own.”

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

“Teachers, like students, bring their faith through the school house door each morning”.

Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum

Warren A. Nord and Charles C. Haynes

“I like diversity. I should no more want a world with one religion than I should want only one coloured rose in my garden.”

Rabbi Israel Mattuck

“There will be no world peace without peace between the world’s religions: there will be no peace between the world’s religions without dialogue between the world’s religions.”

Hans Küng

“The God you perceive is the only God you can experience. Whether this is God or not is not the point. For the individual the perception is reality.”

John Westerhoff

“Like the bee gathering honey from different flowers, the wise person sees only the good in all religions.”

Srimad Bhagavatam

“All good teaching blends the cognitive and the non-cognitive. Those who say stick to the facts are merely being blind to their own selectivity.”

Dr. M. Langford

“When we no longer know what to do we have come to our real work and when we no longer know which way to go we have begun our real journey. The mind that is not baffled is not employed. The impeded stream is the one that sings.”

Wendell Berry

Vision

The Newfoundland and Labrador religious education curriculum is shaped by a vision of enabling and encouraging students to grow religiously, spiritually and morally into informed, caring and contributing members of society, who appreciate their own beliefs and values, and the beliefs and values of others, and who understand the contribution that Christianity and other religions make to human life.

Religious Education Rationale

- From a very young age children set out on a quest for answers!
 - Where we fit into the scheme of things?
 - What is the ultimate mystery which embraces our entire existence?
 - What makes us different from other living things?
 - What is the source of suffering?
 - How can happiness be found?
 - What happens after death?
 - Other fundamental questions

Religious Education Rationale

- In their search for meaning, students should develop an awareness of what it means to be human and the inherent responsibilities which come with this.
- In their personal search for meaning, it is important that students acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to interpret religious ideas.

Religious Education Rationale

- The religious education curriculum should help students explore their role in the natural order.
- In a world that is truly multi-cultural and multi-faith, it is important that each person can value and celebrate his/her own faith (religious heritage or commitment).
- In addition to becoming familiar with the teachings of the Bible and Christian values, ethics, and morals, students should come to the realization that most religions have sacred writings and all teach values, ethics and morals.

Religious Education Rationale

- Religion is too important a part of history, culture, and current experience of humankind to be left to believers alone. There is a role for the school in preparing pupils to take an informed and thoughtful part in a pluralistic society. When the society contains not one but several religions, the need for a thoughtful study of religion becomes greater, not less. (John M. Hull, *Religious Education in a Pluralistic Society*)

Religious Education Rationale

- Religion has been a determining factor in history and in our cultural heritage.
- An effective religious education program will enable the student to appreciate the relationship between religion and history.
- Religion is a large contributing factor in current national and international events.

Religious Education Rationale

- Consideration and recognition should be given to the impact and contributions made by religion in the areas of literature, architecture, art, music, film, and theatre.
- Young people develop intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. It is important to have a religious education component in the school because the school addresses the development and education of the whole child.

Religious Education

Key Principles Underlying the Religious Education Curriculum

- A non-confessional approach is required, there will be no attempt to indoctrinate, proselytize or present a biased view. All faith, beliefs, doctrines and practices of Christianity and other selected religions will be given sensitivity and respect.
- The religious education program will give emphasis to Christianity reflecting the heritage and contemporary society of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Religious Education

Key Principles Underlying the Religious Education Curriculum

- Students should be informed: on the influence of religion locally and globally; on the founders, beliefs, main practices, symbols and festival of various religions; and on the similarities and differences among the religions studied.
- This religious education curriculum acknowledges and supports the following:
 - The notion that young people have a spiritual dimension and grow spiritually as well as physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually.

Religious Education

Key Principles Underlying the Religious Education Curriculum

- The essence of all ecumenical dialogue is the awareness that human beings share essential truths and experiences that are much more important than those which divide them.
- Family and faith communities are primary influences on the faith lives of young people.

Religious Education Instructional Strategies

- The two page spreads in the four curriculum guides provide practical suggestions for activities and teaching strategies.
- Students' learning activities in religious education should avoid the “artificial” task of covering content and centre on the “authentic” task of engaging students in age appropriate issues that foster complex, creative, critical, and ethical thought.