Seeking a Practical Theology Religious Education Model for Transescents Through Interdisciplinary Dialogue

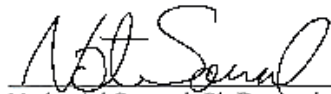**By: Bryan Allen Demeritte**

August 13, 2020

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Doctor in Philosophy in Practical Theology
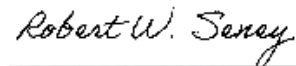
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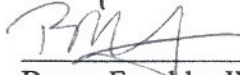
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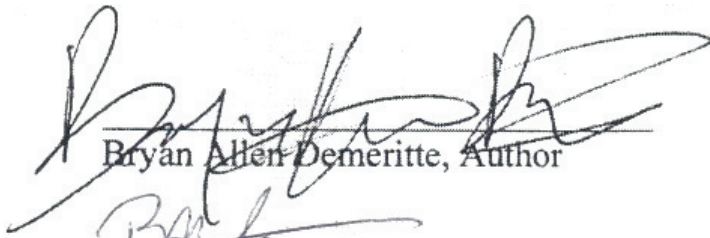
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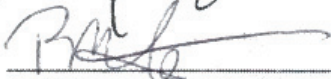
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Abstract

Transescents, young people typically in the age range from ten to fourteen, also known as middle school aged children, embody specific needs in the process of education. In the context of religious education programming within Christian congregations, traditional curriculum models have historically corresponded to the "banking model" of education, and even contemporary models used in many congregations still utilize such a delivery model. In this project, both the scholarly voices of the religious education experts, as well as the scholarly voices of the public school K12 education reform models, will be reviewed and then placed in a practical theology dialogue with one another in an attempt to listen for ways they may be drawn together. Through the method of Whitehead and Whitehead, the study attends, asserts, and pastorally responds to this engagement. In the end, a practical theology model of re-envisioning Christian religious education flows from the pastoral response.

Keywords: conation, curriculum, middle school, pedagogy, sacramentality, transescence

Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION TO THE CONVERSATION

One of my first conscious memories as a young child occurred in Sunday School when my Sunday School teacher, Ms. Pat, gazed at the six pre-kindergarten children she had in front of her with a serious expression and said, "You'll do well to remember what I'm about to tell you: I believe that each and every one of you can change the world!" What Ms. Pat suggested to my then limited intellectual framework struck me with fierce radicality. As Ms. Pat continued, she suggested that, as followers of Christ, all of us had a unique power – and responsibility – to love each other so much that all can bring a future beyond imagination, a future that could realize a fuller expression of Christian discipleship based on a foundation of hope, mercy, grace, and many other virtues that, in her opinion, were lacking in the world. She continued to teach over the course of that year how to grow as servants of God and as followers of Jesus. Her belief in her eager students as learners and as budding disciples resonated deeply within my very being, and I soaked up the knowledge of my church's teachings as well as Mrs. Pat's commitment to passing on the faith through education. My impressionable, curious, sensitive, and highly motivated soul embraced that which she gave as a challenge, and such remains in my heart to this very day. Discipleship, according to Mrs. Pat, must be embraced and taught as a way of being, a practice of everyday living, born out of both grandiose conceptual virtues alongside the tiniest of responsibilities and commitments that radiate unfailingly into the details of life's journey.

Indeed, most settings within Christianity desire to pass on the faith, its legacies and, its traditions to future generations, hoping that in the educational process, learners engage discipleship in ways that impact the future of the world for the better. The

survival of a faith depends on its ability to afford future generations the collective storehouse of knowledge not only to preserve its historicity and ancestry, but also to equip followers with certain visionary and theological skills to discern future paths in a faith's journey on the planet. Over the ages, religious educators have envisioned strategic approaches in developing educational experiences that engage contemporary and novel methods to preserve and proliferate the rites, rituals, experiences, philosophies, doctrine, and catechesis to be carried on to the next generation of church leaders and congregants. Christian religious education as a formulary set of foundational processes gears itself toward passing the faith to the living and future church and changing the world through the fruits of Christian discipleship.

Christian religious education (hereafter referred to as CRE) resides among the "sub-disciplines" of the field of practical theology as a formidable dialogue partner self-identifying as a causal foundation looking toward procuring a continuous line of faithful disciples in the church universal. CRE has a long, rich and varied history in Christianity, from meeting in secret catacombs subverting the power of the Roman Empire's occupation of the Ancient Near East circa 250 C.E., to living room Bible study in the suburbs of Midwestern America in the 21st century. Facets of CRE cater to particular age groups, genders, and to an assortment of demographics; CRE exists so that Christ be fully known even as it adapts, changes, spreads, advances and recedes throughout the world. At the very least, CRE exists so that others may come into the fold of Christianity and learn from those who already hold standing in the faith from layperson to archbishop, from a kindergartener to a wise elder within the fold of believers and followers of Jesus.

The Sunday School "movement," which dramatically affected me, was born in the 18th Century, and it was, in fact, outside the institutional Church itself. It was not until the 19th Century, along with the emergence of the American Sunday School Union, that Sunday School saw its way back into the congregational educational paradigm and partnered directly with public schools to provide education to young people for a rapidly growing and developing industrial world.[1] The Sunday School movement, as it continued to evolve, was basically an institution led by laypersons, which grew in prominence because of the wide concern for "education and moral development" in the wider churched society. From these origins, meager they may have been at times, the expectations of congregations grew and educators were sought who could offer what became to be known as one of the "major functions" of congregational ministry.[2]

By 1903, the Religious Education Association was chartered and included many very well-known education scholars such as John Dewey, and the stage seemed to be set for what came to be known as the "religious education movement," which occurred most overtly in liberal Protestant contexts.[3] This burgeoning, now 20th Century movement in religious education, created an intentional dialogue between the CRE movers and shakers and the scholars in the intellectualism of progressive education reform such as William Rainey Harper. Ultimately, this dialogue birthed what was seen as a "new academic discipline" in the academy: religious education.[4] Religious education in many Christian

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[1] James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 1999), 13.
[2] Bruce P. Powers, *Christian Education Handbook* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 3.
[3] Richard Robert Osmer and Friedrich Schweitzer. *Religious Education Between Modernization and Globalization: New Perspectives on the United States and Germany* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 80.
[4] Osmer and Schweitzer, *Religious Education,* 80.

settings became what most would see as a permanent and well-placed fixture not only in the Church, but also in the intellectual community and in society in general.

By the end of the 20th Century, large churches and parachurch organizations hired full time staff to lead religious education programs for children, youth, and adults. Emphasis began to be placed on short-term missions encouraging spirituality exploration; homeschooling for conservative believers; outreach to "unchurched" adults and youth lacking religious experience and biblical literacy; religious-based daycare; self-help Sunday school programs; and the use of small "cell" educational groupings.[5] However, at the same time, there erupted a growing chasm between the public life and the Church, and the once prolific progressive reform educational movement saw signs of demise.[6] CRE saw itself breaking off into a myriad of focused educational ministries, and the rise of educational technology affected change in pedagogical focus along with the advent of social media and the proliferation of Christian music culture. On the other side of these growing, more conservative Christian facets, an accelerated secularization took hold of Western culture that tended to absorb more of the intellectual progressives from the legacy of the religious education reform movement.[7] Among the most affected groups were older children, often in the middle school and high school years, who were also recipients of various secular public education models and methodologies which diverged from CRE into the secularization bliss of progressive education. *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, and its call for radical reform in public education, after finding ineffective the many public educational systems, focused efforts on developing secular

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[5] Michael, J. Anthony, ed., *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 25.

[6] Osmer and Schwietzer, *Religious Education,* xvi.

[7] Anthony, *Introducing Christian Education*, 25.

reform models for schools not performing to what it saw as adequate standards for a variety of reasons, including poverty and minority isolation.

This divergence between the religious education academy and the public education academy posed many issues for sustained focused energy. The message was clear that the nation's public schools were "failing" the public's expectations, and the catechetical considerations of a religious education setting took a backseat. This trend is especially true in the early pubescent ages of childhood, when children become old enough to be "left home" while the adults go to Sunday School and to church. It would seem that both the curricula and the pedagogy in congregational CRE may not be interesting, enticing or motivating enough so as to provoke substantial interest for this age group. Perhaps there is a link between the lack of employment of the strategies used in their secular academic settings and those used in Sunday School and other CRE settings and their sudden lack of attendance and interest in those contexts.

Once young people reach the age of "transescence," also known as "middle school age," roughly from age 10-14, they often find within their own pubescent "middle" struggle just enough agency to make some choice about their educational journey, for better or for worse or somewhere in between. Many transescents, for a myriad of reasons, sometimes "check out" of CRE, or if they do not directly dismiss CRE, they feel forced to participate via parent directive. They emotionally and spiritually tune out their CRE time as if it were a necessary evil and grimaced rite of passage only to please family stakeholders.

While there are a few programs which exist nationwide that show promise against attrition, theological preparation, and edification in the faith for many middle level

learners (MLLs) has proven to be a challenge. An ever increasing number of MLL children seem not to be engaged in a curriculum that adequately prepares them for confirmation nor do many of the available curricula assist these MLLs in developing their own sense of discipleship and Christian vocation. Just a few years beyond the MLL age, high school and graduation, young people seem to also "graduate" from the church. In fact, Ketcham asserts that "research indicates a general decline in religiosity as adolescents transition into a period presently being described as emerging adulthood."[8]

Interestingly enough, the ideology behind the phrase Ketcham and others used – "emerging adulthood" is itself at least partially problematic. One of the concerns some scholars have about adolescent development as a discipline is its rigid ideology that humans move from childhood essentially into young adulthood. Perhaps this particular oversight is at least partially to blame for the disconnect of MLLs from their religious education. In "secular" educational systems and institutions, an area of educational scholarship emerged in the 1970s and 1980s which moved the nation's public school systems away from the concept of a "junior high school" and towards a more unique system of organizing education for MLLs called a "middle school." The middle school model differs greatly from previous models for educating MLLs and sees its central beneficiary MLLs as transescents. Looking at MLLs as transescents allows for a "middle way" or a "middle place" between childhood and young adulthood. Furthermore, it provides a more natural segue or middle ground for MLLs so that they have their own "place" in the world – educationally, spiritually, theologically, emotionally, physically, and otherwise.

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[8] Sharon Ketcham, "Solving the Retention Problem Through Integration: A Communal Vision for Youth Ministry." *Journal of Youth Ministry* 11, no. 1 (2012): 10.

Transescents find themselves in a unique position, with a torrent of physical and emotional transitions, and their peers may be quite diverse in those transitions, since by the very nature of transescents they are asynchronous in development. Often girls become more emotionally and sexually mature before boys, but there are no hard and fast natural laws therein. Likewise, a 12-year-old boy may find himself right in the middle of transescents towering over his peers while another might yet be experiencing life more like a prepubescent 10-year-old. By making a way for transescence to be its own passageway in life's journey, separate from yet connected to both childhood and young adulthood, educators make available the permission to expect and respect the "messiness" of pubescent asynchronous development along with the tremendous transitions children face as adolescence rears its head and forces transformation in often the most awkward and uncomfortable ways.

In much the same way, as public education did for hundreds of years, our churches' religious education programs appeared to unintentionally neglect particular strategic programs for transescents in congregational settings. In addition, since transescence can be a challenging time for the children themselves, those challenges must be met by parents, caretakers, and teachers to deal with erratic behaviors, mood swings, personality conflicts, emotional internal struggles, sexual awakening and experimentation, power-authority challenges, self-doubt, and peer pressure. Not only do these respective challenges pose potential educational distractions, but they also present sometimes unpleasant behavior challenges for a primarily volunteer teaching staff in most Sunday school religious education and congregational youth programs. The messiness of transescence is what it is, and these young people are often literally and

figuratively perceived as operating within the "middle." Somewhere in between childhood and young adulthood, transescents embark on what can sometimes be considered a perilous journey of the mind, body and soul, often guided by a "wing and a prayer" more than any educational or spiritual constructs to assist them on their travels toward young adulthood.

It is also critical to point out that for both practical theology and middle school philosophy, issues related to specific contextual realities that emerge from social location, family constructs, parental involvement, race, and gender must be addressed. Parents and families provide important support structures for the journey through transescence. In the early years of the transition into puberty, these children rely heavily on the family for security and value development. Then, as transescents move more fully into adolescence proper, they become more impacted by peer groups for acceptance and feelings of security. This formative process occurs in relation to many demographic and cultural factors such as socioeconomics, race, ethnicity, gender and changing family structures; transescents work mostly unconsciously to build community where they feel like viable and instrumental members, where they feel safe, where they consider themselves as belonging and where they also feel sense of purpose.[9] Practical theology as a discipline commits itself to exploring within communities what local theologies have indeed been constructed by its members.[10] As transescents constructing construct communities, they are constructing the understandings and expressions of themselves simultaneously.[11] Furthermore, transescents who are members of Christian faith communities also work

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[9] Donald H. Eichhorn, *The Middle School* (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1966), 42.

[10] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 24.

[11] Eichhorn, *The Middle School*, 43-44.

toward forming a Christian identity, guided by the teachings of their congregations' CRE programs, along with the teachings and structures of their parents and other family members.

Socioeconomic realities of their families and communities certainly affect these processes and stages of development. Often transescents may be adversely affected by poverty, for a variety of reasons such as a lack of proper nutrition, a lack of both physical and emotional growth-stimulating opportunities, a lack of many types of enriching social and academic resources as well as a lack of contextual stability. Transescent children who hail from middle class contexts may encounter other types of impoverishing issues such as underexposure to points of diversity of the larger community, lack of parental availability, and so on, because poverty is not always simply a matter of financial matters. Overall, the many facets of societal culture shape human realities and the formative years of journeying through transescence is a significant part of the process. Socioeconomics and corresponding social locations must be considered when exploring the spiritual growth and learning of transescents.

In addition, other points of diversity in culture play major roles in the construction of self and community. Both race and gender, for example, factor dramatically into the contextual development of the realities of human lives. Young people become aware of discriminatory actions coming from peers due to their race, often at very young ages, and with often alarming reactions to such harsh and unfortunate realities. As transescents enter into a time of constructing meaning out of their cultural lives, they often explore avenues that they hope may uncover why the injustices of racism, prejudice and discrimination exist with respect to ethnicity, skin color, immigration status, native

language and more. Gender identity, too, brings its own questions to transescents. Phrases such as "girls are not supposed to act like that," often conflict with how a transescents may feel about their own growing complex identities and emerging self-concepts. Along with such cultural influences about gender expression, transescents have a wide range of physical and emotional developmental stages at play at once, with girls often reaching sexual maturity and self-awareness before boys. Such asynchronous physical and mental development adds to the already complex nature of cultural incongruences. The divergence of transescents' educational and spiritual needs must be considered when exploring this study's dialogue, with a hope that a fruitful set of discoveries may open significant opportunities for reflecting upon and developing faith education that intentionally incorporates these and points of diversity found in the transescent age group.

What public school educational reform research can offer in the quest for reforming CRE programs then is in the form of a qualified and robust dialogue partner. In terms of shedding great light on the particularities of the developmental stages of growth of transescents, public education programs are a fantastic set of resources. Of particular interest are models that focus on not only developmental stages of transescents but also on the cognitive and behavioral developments that these children experience as they make a permanent pilgrimage to young adulthood.

This study will search for possible answers from a reflexive dialogue between the CRE scholarship and the "secular" education reform model scholarship. CRE curricula delivery may be related to contemporary "secular" methodology in the scholarship and delivery of educational theories, models and frameworks for MLLs; Interestingly enough,

even though the methods and practices are pivotal for developing a Christian religious education program, there seems to be missing connections between the two conversation partners. This identifies another goal of this study: to seek a practical *theology* of MLL CRE. Initially, there seems to be fragmentation in the way the conversation partners engage. Kock states:

> Not only is youth identity development fragmented, also what local churches offer with regard to religious formation has become more and more fragmented. Churches no longer seem to be 'learning communities' but religious organisations offering a variety of disconnected activities in which both young and old can learn more about diverse religious issues.[12]

Of particular note is that the large majority of children in the church attend a type of school (public, private, and/or parochial), which employs educators trained in contemporary methods of instructional delivery (pedagogy) and curriculum development. Part of the fragmentation of which Kock speaks is due to the disconnect, or rather, the lack of conversation between, the "secular" world of educational research and the ecclesial reality of those who are in leadership in the world of CRE. Kock goes on to say that "this grand narrative regarding religious individualisation is not entirely convincing."[13]

Approaches from the social sciences, specifically from the educational academy, have inherent within their philosophical grounding and practical consideration, highly developed, well-researched and currently relevant instructional design elements and

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[12] Jos de Kock. "Promising Approaches to Catechesis in Church Communities: Towards a Research Framework." *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16, no. 2 (2012): 179.
[13] de Kock, "Promising Approaches," 186.

teaching tactics which speak to the contexts and situations in which 21st Century MLLs

find themselves. Children who attend their "secular" schools are instructed via

methodology that is grounded in the practical research of the educational academy.

When these same children enter CRE programs in the congregation, a disconnect occurs

between their pedagogical engagement, knowledge-building skills, and self- and

community-building exercises in their non-church programs and the programs within the

church. Schultz says that CRE programs have basically adapted "failed" models of

yesteryear from the world of public education, and have not kept up with the most current

theories and models available to CRE educators and leaders.[14] Therefore, a conversation

between a current well-respected model from the educational academy and the current

ecclesial academy of Christian religious education may just be in order. Such a

conversation would perhaps include discussions on how to build and deliver a core

curriculum for a catechetical MLL context, utilizing facets of a current relevant "secular"

academic methodology from the academy of gifted education called the Parallel

Curriculum Model (PCM) as well as calling on "secular" academic MLL philosophies of

both cognitive and affective learning. Then, further conversations would bring even

more facets from the PCM (1) by looking at curricular interests of congregations along

the lines of how to connect members of the learning faith community, (2) by examining

how to more fully practice faith through learning, and (3) by looking more deeply into the

Christian vocation to discipleship by engaging a curriculum of ongoing identity

formation and growth. Ultimately, what is needed in order to procure more effective

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[14] Thom Schultz and Joani Schultz, "Is Sunday School Dying?" *Children's Ministry Magazine*, July 28, 2010, 2.

MLL CRE programming is a foundational practical theology of learning at the middle level, born out of rigorous linked dialogue from research in both academic middle level educational philosophy as well as research in the practical theology academy itself with respect to formation and vocational growth and discipleship.

The goal of this study, including its research, its discussions, and its methods, is to seek a way of doing CRE through a practical theology born out of a rich interdisciplinary dialogue. An additional goal is to apply a method of theological reflection within this conversation to find appropriate pastoral ways of response. This project will review the relevant literature on both sides of the conversation – the CRE academy and the educational reform model academy – and then will facilitate an engagement that may reveal points of focus that will inform a constructive pastoral response.

CHAPTER TWO. CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LITERATURE REVIEW

The first task of this study is to review the literature from the religious education academy that provides impacts on the research goals. As the introduction pointed out, the Sunday School movement that originated in the 18th and 19th Centuries was followed by the founding of the Religious Education Association in the early 20th Century. The magisterium of expert voices from the CRE portion of the even larger assemblance of international religious education scholars is immense. Therefore, it was necessary to create criteria for selecting which of the CRE voices to highlight in this chapter. Because of the specific focus in this research on the transescent age group (generally the ten- to fourteen-year-old child), the criteria produced to assist in selecting authors and their work were born out of considering what is needed from the CRE literature to provoke a fruitful dialogue in this context.

Therefore, the first main point for selecting voices is one where theorists were chosen if they have offered contributions that focus at least in part on children living through adolescence. Even if theorists do not specifically address the particularities of transescents as a developmental stage, those selected have offered some differentiation in the ways of understanding adolescents and its varying degrees of physical, mental, and spiritual growth. From the collected works reviewed in the course of preparing this research, a handful of scholars have emerged as offering significant work in the area of adolescence. Only one CRE scholar actually mentions the particular stage of early adolescence called transescence, which is in and of itself of particular note; Gilligan takes

care to note in her research that early adolescents have distinctive needs.[15] Other examples of selected authors who discuss adolescence either with respect to stages of development or with respect to the need for specific interventions would be Fowler, Groome and Moore. In fact, these three particular voices will become the primary source of wisdom and dialogical engagement because they pay particular attention to adolescent spiritual and educational needs, even if adolescence is not a primary focus throughout their literature. The selection of voices who provide such a focus can then hopefully assist the research in this area where specifically transescents are concerned. The reason for this first possible selection criteria is one of contextual relevance to the agendas set for this in this study, which is to provoke a dialogue that puts the holistic spiritual and faith development of transescents at the heart of research.

A second criterion for possible selection of voices in literature is one of possible overlap with respect to the age group, even if adolescence itself is not a generally strong point of their contributions. Knowing the conversation partners selected to focus on transescent growth and development chosen from the reform models, the particulars of focus could exist in the work of a CRE scholar without a specific mention of relevance or focus on adolescence. Such experts provide curricular and pedagogical models that work hand in hand with the needs of transescence as identified both those who have been selected by the first criteria as well as those provided by the philosophical frameworks of the reform models that specialize in transescents. These voices have contributions that could prove fruitful in both the dialogue as well as the outcome of the goal of this study. For example, even though Freire, noted below as a contributing voice, does not

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[15] Anthony, *Introducing Christian Education*, 77.

specifically articulate a set of developmental needs for adolescents per se, he offers a contextual viewpoint that is consistent with the developmental research of transescent needs. His work to reorient the understanding of education away from the banking model helps to build a bridge to the developmental needs of the transescent to share in the ownership of the learning process. Furthermore, the second criteria helps to affirm the selections with the first criteria, since there is some overlap between their presentation of specific needs of adolescents and offering specific curriculum ideas and pedagogies for the age group.

The third criterion allows for an even wider search for voices among the authors of CRE literature. Some voices have been selected because they reflect on the stages of development posed by other scholars and set forth a foundation for staging a dialogue with other partners. These voices offer notable models for either moral development or for planning and evaluating curriculum and pedagogical activities for young people. They provide additional frameworks and insights that may become components of the outcome of the research as the dialogue moves toward specific structures and strategies. One of the points of this study is to explore the possibility of creating a new way of implementing CRE programming, and ways of planning for that outcome, inclusive of creating structure and organization become essential parts of the task. Joy and Ward are voices that provide moral stages of development which could impact this study's findings; Everist is an example of a voice chosen based on the criteria for organizing the planning of CRE programming. Again, it bears mentioning that other voices selected by earlier criteria may fit into multiple areas for selection.

The fourth and final criteria is one where contributions are considered as a result from a scholar's focus on methods of practical theology in education or for addressing specific points of diversity such as social location, gender, race, and so on. In selecting these voices, processes for organizing interdisciplinary dialogue and for recognizing cultural theologies could assist with the specific dialogue proposed by this study. Osmer is a scholar chosen for his ability to provide dialogical structures that link practical theology with CRE components. Other theorists selected from previous criteria also provide a fertile ground for developing the practical theology discussion around CRE for transescents. The most helpful of the voices selected would offer multiple dimensions from their contributions after having met more than one, if not all, of these four criteria. In accordance with the selections made, the hope is to provide intellectual and spiritual energy for a rich and thought-provoking interdisciplinary dialogue.

James Fowler

Within the CRE academy, four particular scholars' work provide a critical grounding for the theological work in developing this model for meeting the needs of MLLs in the congregational context. James Fowler was Professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University, and was director of both the Center for Research on Faith and Moral Development and the Center for Ethics until his retirement in 2005. In addition, Fowler is a minister in the United Methodist Church. His work in the book *Stages of Faith* brings to this discussion the foundational piece concerning developmental processes, in examining faith formation. His work is also seminal for this research because he engages the "secular" world of developmental psychology using a practical theological approach in which this project intends to ground itself. Fowler's

book, *Becoming Adult; Becoming Christian: Adult Development & Christian Faith*, focuses specifically on the development of Christians as faithful disciples.

As Fowler develops his "Stages of Faith," he invokes the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget. Indeed, he poses a "fictional conversation" in one of his chapters in the spirit of "playful seriousness and serious playfulness."[16] Ultimately, Fowler engages these three educational scholars by examining their hypothetical interactions in creative "conversation." First, he exposes Erikson's derivative foundations from Sigmund Freud's psychosexual stages; indeed, Erikson relies heavily on the physical changes that form necessary "crises" provoking movement into another one of his stages of development, although the adult stages are less dependent on physical changes than those of childhood and adolescence.[17] Erikson's stages of development are the following: The numerical years of life, what's at stake psychologically during those ages, and the desired virtues that result from a successful transition in parentheses:

Table 1

Fowler's Stages of Development[18]

Infancy (0-1 ½)	Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust	(Hope)
Early Childhood (2-6)	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	(Will)
	Initiative vs. Guilt	(Purpose)
Childhood (7-12)	Industry vs. Inferiority	(Competence)
Adolescence (13-21)	Identity vs. Role Confusion	(Fidelity)

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[16] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperOne, 1995), 41.

[17] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 47-48.

[18] Fowler, 52.

Young Adulthood (13-21)	Intimacy vs. Isolation	(Love)
Adulthood (35-60)	Generativity vs. Stagnation	(Care)
Maturity (60+)	Integrity vs. Despair	(Wisdom)

For the purposes of examining the particular subject of transescents in this study, it is imperative to point out the gap within Erikson's stages, with a lack of focus on MLLs in these stages. While Erikson's work is certainly groundbreaking and seminally helpful in understanding developmental needs, there is a need to look more closely at the missing pieces within his stages when it comes to transescents' needs. The question could be posed, "Is there a need for another stage of development here?" As other scholars are considered, the issue will be addressed, and the dialogue will examine the need to focus on what experts have called the "forgotten age group." More attention will be paid to this particular topic with respect to the educational academy in the next chapter, as primary focus comes to the transescent ages.

Next, Fowler engages Jean Piaget with respect to "stages." In fact, he effectively evokes Piaget's frustration with the actual concept of a "stage." Piaget sees human development more as a move toward balance out of need for assimilation into what is known about life and the environment as they accommodate and forge transformation in a way of operational patterns.[19] For Piaget, it is less about physical or psychosexual changes, and more about intellectual development, which includes such ideas as complexity, flexibility and stability. Piaget's ideology about transformation is quite useful in CRE research and development, because of its distinctly moral and theological implications. After all, as this study considers CRE literature and research, seeking

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[19] Fowler, 48-49.

modes of assisting with passing on the faith through education at the transescent levels, transformation is a formative ally and goal in shaping MLLs in discipleship.

As a point of clarity, it is important to mention Piaget's stages of human development:

Table 2

Piaget's Stages of Development[20]

Sensorimotor	Infancy (0-1 ½)
Preoperational (or Intuitive)	Early Childhood (2-6)
Concrete Operational	Childhood (7-12)
Formal Operational	Adolescence (13-21)

Piaget's "stages" (noting the absence of any adult stages) have been foundational for decades in educational settings for children. However, not unlike Erikson, there is a notable absence of focus on any specific needs or considerations for the transescent ages, apart from childhood and adolescence. As this study continues to take shape, focusing on a frame of reference for MLLs (transescents of age 11-14), becomes more and more important. Piaget brings much to the conversation and helps those interested in transescent CRE seek a new set of considerations for employing curricula and pedagogy in the congregational system of educating MLLs.

Finally, in this fictional conversation, Fowler invites Lawrence Kohlberg to the dialogue. Certainly, more than the others in this fantastical dialogue, Kohlberg offers much in the way of understanding moral development, something which most see as a "must" in the CRE world. Kohlberg is strategic in bringing rationality to the core of what

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[20] Fowler, 52.

moral judgment actually entails. Furthermore, Kohlberg transforms Piaget's stages into what could be classified as a succession of "moral logics."[21] Kohlberg sees his stages as both hierarchical and invariantly sequential as modal platforms toward a clearer path toward moral judgement. Kohlberg's stages of moral development are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Kohlberg's Stages of Development[22]

Preconventional Level	
1. Heteronomous Morality	(Childhood 7-12)
2. Instrumental Exchange	(Childhood 7-12)
Conventional Level	
3. Mutual Interpersonal Relations	(Adolescence 13-21)
4. Social System and Conscience	(Young Adulthood 21-35)
Postconventional Principled Level	
5. Social Contract, Individual Rights	(Young Adulthood 21-35, Adulthood 35-60)
6. Universal Ethical Principles[23]	(Maturity 60+)

Fowler places the age brackets in this diagram as a rough equivalent, because Kohlberg himself tends to stay away from the age categorization. For example, Kohlberg often reveals that some adults, even in maturity, do not reach the "Universal Ethical Principles" level. It is Kohlberg who may offer transescent studies in CRE some insight,

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[21] Fowler, 49.
[22] Fowler, 52.
[23] Fowler, 52.

since the "Mutual Interpersonal Relations" can be seen even as noted by Fowler in his graphic design as most likely to begin in the transescent timeline of ages. This stage is of particular note in this project; as this study continues to define the particulars of what transescent needs are, this stage of moral development will be revisited.

As Fowler continues to develop his "Stages of Faith," he stops to make a critical point that impacts the work of this project. As he begins a conversation about the "Dynamic Triad of Faith," he notes protests against utilizing the word "faith" when describing his research in the developmental process.[24] This project argues for the need to engage a practical theological dialogue between the scholarly disciplines of religious education and "secular" education. As Fowler notes, even those in the religious education academy have cited issues with his use of "faith," and the experience of the author of this project, from his years as a public education professional working bivocationally as a CRE practitioner and clergyperson, is that there is much resistance in such a crossover dialogue. Practical theology as its own unique discipline allows for us to more efficaciously and hopefully more successfully engage in the dialogue sought by this study. Even though Fowler's work in *Stages of Faith*, published almost 40 years ago, addressed the struggle to create a productive conversation between the faith world and the secular world, this issue remains real and frustrating today.

As we move to Fowler's revelation of his Stages of Faith, based in part on the creative and provocative fictional conversation among his selected scholars, it is important to visualize the stages and to understand them as the first foundation of faith

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[24] Ibid, 91.

formation and education in this review. Fowler proposes six stages of faith that are detailed below:

Table 4

Fowler's Six Stages of Faith[25]

1. Intuitive-Projective Faith:

Typically, a preschool age phase where reality and fantastical ideas are often not separated from one another. This phase is one where initial ideologies about God and faith are beginning to form.

2. Mythic Literal Faith:

Children usually begin this phase when they enter school and begin to experience reality with respect to more logic and rationality. In this stage, they accept and understand faith stories as quite literal. (Important: A few adults remain in this stage through their lives)

3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith:

Usually human beings are teenagers in this stage, after having enough experience and maturity to be in multiple social "tribes." Often, they are trying to synthesize meaning from all of these contextual realities at once, and they begin to try to adopt a type of overarching faith system. It is often difficult for those in this stage to see beyond their own realities, however, and they also typically do not envision themselves as being bound by a system they have assembled. Members of this phase place their trust in authority figures that represent and preserve their belief systems. (Important: This phase is one where many adults remain throughout their lives).

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[25] "James Fowler's Stages of Faith," Psychology Charts, accessed July 4, 2020, http://psychologycharts.com/james-fowler-stages-of-faith.html.

4. Individuative-Reflective Faith:

This stage is a difficult one which usually begins in young adulthood as members begin experiencing other people's belief systems. It is especially true during undergraduate college experiences. People in this stage begin to self-examine and sometimes lose their faith by disillusionment. Often, those in Stage 3 believe that people in Stage 4 have become failures or "backsliders."

5. Conjunctive Faith:

Most likely people enter this phase during midlife, and they begin to accept paradoxes despite the logic that has led them this far, for the most part. People in this stage start to accept mystery, sacred stories, and symbols mostly without literal theological views of these facets of faith.

6. Universalizing Faith:

Most people actually rarely enter this phase of development. It is roughly equivalent to Maslow's idea of self-actualization, but with an enhanced faith perspective. Members of this stage are often seen as complete disciples living in full service of God and others and have few worries or fears about the world or the future.

More than halfway through his book, Fowler places his ideas and theory into a practical example. He discusses the dynamics of conversion, sponsorship, and recapitulation in the process of moving from stage to stage. A key concept that Fowler borrows from Erikson for the purposes of this research is that of "sponsorship." Sponsorship in the context of the stages of faith is the way "a person or community provides affirmation, encouragement, guidance and models" with respect to a person's

growth and transformation. The concept is seminal in the world of CRE and this project

as the research will show in transescent considerations, sponsorship is one of the most

important needs. This is the point where CRE can offer such sponsorship by creating an

environment which is attractive to MLLS and that effectively engages them. In Fowler's

stages, there are areas where transescents find themselves, usually moving in and out of

(sometimes on a daily basis) Synthetic-Conventional and Individuative-Reflective faith.

Transescents as moral beings go through so much physical and emotional change in such

a short amount of time, that flexibility in understanding their worldviews is paramount by

anyone or any entity offering faithful sponsorship.

Thomas Groome

Thomas Groome is a professor in theology and religious education at Boston

College and former Roman Catholic Priest. His extensive work, furthering some of

Fowler's work on Christian vocation and discipleship is of extreme importance in this

discussion. Groome has made many contributions to lend to this project from his books

Sharing Faith and *Educating for Life*, specifically. His original research on "shared

Christian practice" is critically important for the discussions around community,

pedagogical development as well as for reflective practice, or praxis. In the discipline of

practical theology, which provides the essence of this study, the concept of praxis is

pivotal. Praxis is reflective practice, a theological engagement where faithful persons

including teachers and learners constantly reflect on their practices and engage those

practices with thoughtful conation. Conation is a word that Groome evokes to help

understand and develop the process of praxis. Groome uses *Webster's Dictionary*

definition of conation and utilizes it as the foundation of developing CRE praxis: Conation is "the conscious drive to perform volitional acts."[26] Groome adds:

> This implies consciousness, desire, will and action; it encouraged me to investigate the historical roots of the word to see if it might be reclaimed and reconstructed to help describe the learning outcome of Christian religious education….I further suggest that a pedagogy for conation in Christian faith intends to foster ongoing conversion – intellectual, moral, religious, and social as the learning outcome of Christian religious education.[27]

Groome, as he reclaims and redevelops the idea, goes on to state that conation "engages people's corporeal, mental, and volitional capacities," which includes everything from their very emotional desires to their understanding of themselves, their mindsets and understanding of the world.[28] He continues to present conation as a way of creating and sustaining "right relationship" with fellow human beings and the entire earth as well as with God. Groome's concept of conation provides a pivotal foundation for how to focus efforts on CRE programming. It also promotes dialogue with learning theory that is engaged in the secular academy and presented in Chapter Three.

Groome in his book *Will There Be Faith*, calls not only for programs of education across the life cycle, but also states a specific strategy of providing teen ministry programs with "strong adolescent catechesis."[29] He goes on to say, "Nothing is more important to the life of a parish than the ministry it offers to its youth."[30] If conation is the

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[26] Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of the Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 27.
[27] Groome, *Sharing Faith,* 27.
[28] Groome, 30.
[29] Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 197.
[30] Groome, *Will There Be Faith*, 197.

foundation of Groome's models and the "aim of praxis," then CRE programs, and for the purpose of this study, those for transescents, should involve the development of conation. The concept is challenging to grasp, though, even with the explanations offered in his works. In his ongoing effort to reclaim the concept of conation, Groome himself struggles with its use as representative of what CRE programs work to accomplish. In his research, conation is an evolving term, as he says, "For now, by conation, I mean what is realized when the whole ontic being of 'agent-subjects-in-relationship' is actively engaged to consciously know, desire, and do what is most humanizing and life-giving (i.e., 'true') for all.[31] For Groome, conation is something beyond what learning theories call "cognition;" conation is specific to what happens in CRE programs and is a "more comprehensive term" than that of cognition.[32]

What is really going on when conation is occurring? Is it a moment of liminality where the agent-subject-in-relationship is encountering God through a learning act? Could such moments be those of sacrament happenings with respect to acquiring spiritual knowledge of something for the first time? Groome contends that the nature of CRE involves "three constitutive characteristics: it is transcendent, an ontological and a political activity."[33] Transcendence involves an encounter with God, while an ontological activity is one that involves such an encounter with a person's "whole way of being." Groome's definition of political in this context is that of shared experiences in relationships, and he states that CRE is a political activity – and that political component is essential to the process.[34] If conation is the aim of CRE programs and from Groome's

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[31] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 9.
[32] Groome, 9.
[33] Groome, 11.
[34] Groome, 12.

concept of Shared Christian Praxis, then a transcendent, ontological, political journey on where multiple moments of conation are experienced with the hope for transformation is critical to understanding the process of re-visioning CRE, as this study attempts to do. That journey to critical moments of conation are focused and honed by Groome's concept of Shared Christian Praxis.

So, conation is congruently the aim of Shared Christian Praxis (hereafter, SCP). Groome asserts that SCP is an approach for doing CRE because it is not just a theory and it is not just a method; SCP is more than both. The ideology of "shared" praxis is just as critically important since it points to the faith community and its needs for participation and dialogue in partnership.[35] Groome emphasizes in his work the importance of maintaining TRUE partnership and not just lip-service to mutual dialogue. Therefore, each word in the approach Shared, Christian, and Praxis, must be satisfied to truly and successfully engage and employ SCP in developing CRE programs in a faith community or institution.

As Groome moves forward in presenting his approach of SCP, he offers a step-by-step process that is quite useful in the research of this study, the Movements of SCP. These are, Movement 1: Naming/Expressing "Present Praxis," Movement 2: Critical Reflection on Present Action, Movement 3: Making Accessible Christian Story and Vision, Movement 4: Dialectical Hermeneutic to Appropriate Christian Story/Vision to Participants' Stories and Visions, and Movement 5: Decision/Response for Lived Christian Faith. Movement 1 occurs when SCP partners "name" what is going on with respect to the focus of the CRE discussion. Movement 2 "encourages 'critical

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[35] Groome, 133.

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reflection'" concerning what is going on now that was named in Movement 1. Then, Movement 3 brings in a reflective Christian story or commitment/vision that is useful in symbolizing what could inspire this particular reflective activity. Movement 4 engages the topic of focus with meaningful, reflective dialogue (praxis) with sincere attempts to make meaning. Finally, Movement 5, after a truly shared (partnered) dialogue (praxis) based in Christian story and vision, stakeholders make a decision about what is at hand for the development of CRE commitments and subsequent material and pedagogy.[36]

Groome offers through this project a real set of principles of how to *do* the building of CRE programming that will be the focus of the research here. SCP is a highly desirable approach to bringing stakeholders in CRE contexts to create a meaningful and engaging set of curricula for use by CRE administrators and teachers. However, what is missing in this practical theological task for the purpose of this project is the engagement with academic reform models that focus specifically on MLLs and on recognizing and utilizing the diversity of gifts and talents that learners bring to the table. While offering a commendable set of ways of doing the exploration, development, organization, and planning for CRE programming, Groome's focus tends to be more on those preparing the learning experiences for the recipients, which are the results of the decisions made in Movement 5. Even Groome himself speaks about CRE as "a total community affair." He says

> I understand total community catechesis as an intentional coalition of parish, family, and program/school that engages every member and all aspects of each

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[36] Groome, 146-148.

community, by and for people of all ages, teaching and learning together for Christian faith toward God's reign in the world.[37]

Groome's recognition that there needs to be a total community approach is certainly valuable and the research in this study agrees, but it is also important to call for a community dialogue about what is happening in the world of school reform models and subsequent curricula and pedagogical research brought to the community by the "secular" education academy. Groome's suggesting the *koinonia* ministry be nicknamed *welcome* ministry is a wonderful idea for the purposes of communal hospitality and in fostering authenticity, and to add to such ideology, CRE leaders and teachers should welcome outside experts and their ideas into the task of educating children in the congregation. Chapter Three of this study will focus on such scholarship to be considered in this practical theology dialogue between secular and sacred.

As the coming dialogue ensues, Groome's evolving idea of conation becomes a concept that is increasingly poignant in not just re-envisioning CRE, but the entirety of the process of learning. It may be completely missing in the secular literature since that body of knowledge shies away from spiritual and sacred ideologies. The questions will become the ultimate outcome of this research (to create a new way of doing CRE) centered on conative activities and teasing out more fully what conation means. Groome continues in his explication of the concept by saying

> Thus, conative activity engages people's corporeal, mental, and volitional
> capacities, their head, hearts, and overt behaviors, their cognition, desire, and will
> as they realize their own "being" in right relationship with others and the world

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[37] Groome, *Will There Be Faith?,* 163.

and contribute in ways that are life-giving for all. Conative activity is that which is most eminently "human."[38]

As this study continues the realizing of what conation means in the context of educating transescents in religious contexts, and the cognitive and physical developmental realities of these young people, CRE practitioners must not shy away from promoting a more full realization of conation as a way of manifesting what may be considered moments of sacramental liminality – God encounters on the shared journey of faith in community.

Mary Elizabeth Moore

Mary Elizabeth Moore is Dean of the School of Theology, Professor of Theology and Education, Co-Director of the Center for Practical Theology at Boston University's School of Theology; Moore is also an ordained deacon in the Methodist church. Moore's work in *Education for Continuity and Change* and in *Teaching as Sacramental Act* bring to the table a view of the sacramentality of the educational process as it impacts vocation, discipleship and identity as well as procuring the faith for future generations. By far, one of the most important facets of theological significance with respect to CRE that Moore brings to the table for the purpose of this study is the idea of seeing teaching as a sacrament. She builds her conceptual framework from the work of a scholar who will be examined later in this chapter, Paulo Freire. She invokes Freire when she makes her case that the term pedagogy, from the Greek, has its true flavor as an educational action in "walking with, acting with, remembering with, and constructing meaning with people in a learning community."[39]

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[38] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 30.
[39] Mary E. Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 12-13.

Moore asserts that CRE programming that is built on the idea of hope should

provide an encounter with God, which is central to the definition of a sacrament. In

addition, seeking learning as an act of remembrance, she says, is also sacramental.

Encountering God and remembering together in community leads to building together a

New Creation, which then gives way to a fourth root of hope in recognizing the

sacrament of teaching as a symbol of God's work in this New Creation and in all

creation. These roots of hope lead to what is already embraced as sacramental:

Communion. This leads to the understanding that learning together in hope is a

sacrament of communion. Finally, to create a lasting legacy of hope, Moore offers that

the last root of hope is efficacy, which has a lasting impact and is the foundation for

transformation.[40]

Furthermore, Moore gives CRE teachers a view of what it is like to actually teach

sacramentally. First, CRE leaders and teachers should truly "expect the unexpected"

because "God *is* present and *will* act" in the process of educating children. To teach

sacramentally, she also proposed that teachers should embrace the remembering of the

"dismembered" those who are at odds with faith or society, perhaps as a result of human

nature or of oppressive theology or marginalization, and so forth. Next, Moore calls for

teaching sacramentally to "seek reversals," by teaching discipleship as recognizing what

needs to change and then finding ways to change it together. The fourth way Moore says

teaching should be sacramental is by always giving thanks, and teaching that living

faithfully is to live in gratitude. She also teaches that sacramental teaching is teaching

that nourishes "new life," by encouraging and nurturing (even if it is brought by

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[40] Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 22-29.

conflicts) signs of newness and resurrection in the faith community. And, lastly, Moore writes of sacramental reconstruction which entails engaging learners to commit to repairing the brokenness in the world, as disciples.[41]

Moore offers so much hope and so many ways of revisioning how we can structure our CRE programs by embracing the sacramental commitments of teaching. For the purpose of this research, her contributions are significant and play a foundational role in how the methods of exploration are employed for a new way of envisioning CRE programming. One theologically "faithful" leap that may be needed, however, is to embrace not just TEACHING as a sacramental act, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, seeing the act of LEARNING as the actual sacramental encounter with God, that moment of NEW LIFE, of REMEMBERING, and experiencing a moment of liminality by COMMUNIONING with God and one another, and by RECONSTRUCTING the schema of knowledge in minds and in hearts. Such is another commitment of the research in this project.

Fowler, Groome, and Moore are the three primary scholars whose work supports this study of this practical theological dialogue with the reform models that appear in the following chapter. As their ideas have been presented here, they form a foundation for the upcoming dialogue because of their significant contributions to CRE. Fowler provides for this study a seminal presentation of stages that are fairly comprehensive and both Groome and Moore build on Fowler's work. Parker, in his article "Measuring Faith Development," presented a brief overview of other theorists who attempted to simplify and to coordinate a more attractive set of guidelines for measuring faith development. He

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[41] Moore, 31-37.

concludes that, while each of the other attempts to hone down the expertise shown by Fowler, Fowler still seems to present the most helpful framework for building a critical method for facilitating faith development.[42] Groome himself hearkens back to Fowler's work as he develops Shared Christian Praxis. In SCP, the idea of "story," and even more specifically "the Christian Story," identifies a critical component to Groome's foundational practice, and he notes Fowler as having offered a particularly poignant piece of the understanding of story. Story, of course, is a significant part of developing faith from what Fowler terms the "dynamic character of narrative."[43] Groome then clarifies his understanding and application of Fowler's ideas by stating

> By narrative here I mean a historically reflective language as compared to a metaphysical one – an existential language that describes what is, has been, will be or should be. Narrative language is a discourse that reflects how interaction among people, events, values, and ideas is historically realized; it expresses practical meaning and wisdom that arises from and has consequences for history.[44]

By referencing Fowler here, Groome suggests a new way of employing reflective practice within the framework of SCP. SCP is one of the most important ideas for developing a sincere theological practice for building CRE in congregations.

As Moore produces for the CRE community, a comprehensive ideology that develops a sacramentality for the process of teaching, then, she also builds on what Groome has provided with both SCP and his emergent ideas of the narratives of faith. As

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[42] Stephen Parker, "Measuring Faith Development." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34, no. 4 (2006): 337–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710603400404.

[43] Groome, *Shared Christian Praxis*, 139.

[44] Groome, 140.

Moore opens her discussion toward developing the sacramentality of teaching, she references Groome among the magisterial developers of the employment of "Christian practices."[45] She goes on to call for an expansion of Christian practices beyond traditional sacramental concepts in order to "push the boundaries" of Groome's (and others') work "toward a more grounded and integrated pattern of practice."[46] As she proposes such expansion of the theologies of sacramentality, she ultimately calls for the transformation of the Christian practice of doing CRE. She confesses that her work indeed "pushes the edges" of what has been done in the literature (for the purposes of this study most notably built upon both Fowler's work and on Groome's). She goes on to issue the challenge by stating

> For those who teach in schools and churches, this book poses a challenge to revere every act of teaching, and every act of living, as a sacred act. Such a view is intimidating, for it transforms the comfortable ordinariness and neat categorization of human practice. Teaching, in this view, is more than a defined body of subject matter and practices. Like worship, preaching, administration, pastoral care, and social action, it is a *holy practice in response to the Holy One who gifts the world with grace and power beyond imagination.*[47]

Moore opens the doorway to a profound opportunity, built on Groome's SCP and sacramentality, but there are some interesting limitations that this study will explore. As she has stated in this quote "every act of teaching, and every act of living," Moore allows for the possible "pushing" of more edges in theological pursuits of CRE; perhaps the

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[45] Moore, *Teaching as Sacramental Act*, 6.
[46] Moore, 6.
[47] Moore, 220.

exploration of the concept that "the act of learning and in those liminal moments of encounter with God in the learning process could be the next step in line with what Fowler, Groome and Moore have already built. The dialogue that ensues in this study will explore such possibilities.

And, finally, it is critical to revisit the concept of conation, which is, again, the aim of SCP. Conative experiences, promoted by intentionally implemented conative activities in CRE, could be seen as happening as these total encounters with God in shared realities occur. Conation, it seems, could be itself considered congruent with "moments of shared sacramental liminality." As Fowler contributes the explication of stages of faith of adolescents, Groome offers the emerging, evolving aim of CRE, and Moore presents the ideology of teaching as sacrament, a new possible outcome could emerge from the dialogue with reform models. As the information is encountered that delineates the needs of transescents along with highly engaging reform model curriculum designs and pedagogies, sacramentally conative activities specific for transescents could possibly be developed, and such has the further chance to help create a new model of envisioning, planning, implanting and evaluating CRE programming for this age group.

Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire, a lay Roman Catholic liberation theologian who held many positions of political and academic leadership, brings an additional grounding in the historical movement of critical pedagogy. His book, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, presents a seminal hermeneutic that rejected traditional pedagogy as a "banking model," meaning to "fill up" the minds of learners, similar to filling a bowl with ingredients. His counter proposal was to present a pedagogy that dedicates itself to seeing the learner as a "co-

creator" of knowledge. Freire's research suggests many possible connections with the academy of gifted education since gifted education is undergirded by critical pedagogy as well as the post-modern view of learners as co-creators.

Freire's seminal work that exposes the "banking" model of education enables the research of this project to seek new ways of doing CRE. In Moore's idea of renewal and repairing the world, she builds on Freire's ideology concerning the oppressed. This quote from Freire sets the tone for this educational theology:

> In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both. This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well.[48]

Freire continues his assertion by stating that only power that comes from the powerlessness of those who are oppressed will be strong enough to free both themselves and their oppressors. He sets the stage for creating teaching situations that dislodge power with weakness. This idea not only fuels effective modern understandings of education, but also gives life to various facets of liberation theology. Freire also suggests that real generosity means battling and eliminating the creators of "false charity." In other words, the "rejects of life" are the most likely to truly "transform the world."[49]

Freire's initial ideas deconstruct the position of those in power and reconstruct reality as in the hands of those who Jesus in the New Testament calls the "least of these."

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[48] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 39.
[49] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 40.

Freire powerfully comments on the essence of the relationship of the powerless to the powerful:

> The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his
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> guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this
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> image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by
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> conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is
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> not an ideal located outside of a man; nor it is an idea which becomes a myth. It
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> is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion.[50]

Freire articulates a "central problem:" How the oppressed, who are not unified and not their authentic selves in the truest sense, actually join together and affect a "pedagogy of liberation."[51] He develops a process of how the oppressed can be freed from their oppression, which includes a two-stage process: (1) Engaging a praxis of transformation (through education), and (2) Creating a pedagogy of freedom for all people (including the oppressors).[52] Freire dismantles the banking concept of education that process by which teachers "deposit" information into learners. His foundational work in this area empowers CRE scholars, leaders, and practitioners to create a revisioning process of how to *do* programming. Interestingly enough, many reform models of the "secular" education academy have built on Freire's foundations for at least three decades. The issue in CRE programming is that many congregations remain yoked to the banking concept of education, even given the engaging processes given to us by Groome and Moore. Freire postulates and then argues that the way to engage those who

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[50] Freire, 42.
[51] Freire, 43.
[52] Freire, 49.

would free the world from oppression (hopefully the young disciples nurtured by CRE programs in our congregations) is to employ them also in the process, not just the leaders and teachers. It is not a stretch to marry Freire's idea to that of Moore's sacramental theology of teaching, and to put that sacramental power into the hands of the learners, just as much or more than in the hands of the teachers.

Freire says, "False love, false humility, and feeble faith in others cannot create trust."[53] Likewise, an educational system that does not place the power of learning into the hands of the learners cannot establish the kind of trust and empowerment that can be created by pedagogies that allow students to drive the process. Anyone who knows children (especially the youngest ones) also recognizes that they are creatures with a rich love for themselves, for learning and for exploring faith. CRE programming could benefit from such energy from the youngest ages, and then building upon that framework to develop for MLLs a transescent-centered approach for creating a powerhouse of rich learning from the sacramental liminality occurring in the minds and hearts of these special learners.

Other Scholars

Other scholars and edited works have made contributions to the efforts of CRE demand consideration as well. In this section, these will be presented along with brief accounts of their research efforts helpful to this project's research. The first work to be examined is *Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Michael J. Anthony. Several of the contributing authors offer major points and insights that are helpful in developing a more complete picture of theological discourse in the

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[53] Freire, 84.

CRE academy and into the practical theology discussion. The diversity of the contributing community in this volume offers views and points that will aid the research of this project.

Estep and Kuest's chapter builds on the discussion of moral development that began in the section on Fowler.[54] Of particular note is their inclusion of Carol Gilligan's research. Gilligan began her life in research recognizing that historical studies on moral development tended to only include young boys and men. She found there to be an obvious bias toward males. Gilligan's definitive work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* added a much-needed "justice perspective." One of her major contributions is that "Kohlberg had greatly underplayed the importance of the care perspective in the moral development of both females and males."[55] What is interesting for the purposes of this study is that Gilligan is the first moral development scholar to recognize transescents as having a special category, although she does not use that term. Her levels or stages of moral development are as follows:

Level 1: Preconventional Morality (ages 4-10) Concern for self and survival

Level 2: Conventional Morality (ages 10-13) Concern for being responsible, caring for others

Level 3: Postconventional Morality (Ages 13+) Concern for self and others as interdependent[56]

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[54] Michael J. Anthony, ed. *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 73-82.

[55] Anthony*, Introducing Christian Education*, 77.

[56] Anthony, 75.

Even though Gilligan's Level 2 is not exactly the typically defined age of transescents (which is usually age 11-14), it appears to be the first time in educational scholarship where there is a delineation for this particular age group. As research from the reform models in the next chapter will examine, Level 2 where goodness is seen as responsibility toward others, is an intriguing facet of moral development, in terms of creating CRE programming. It bears repeating and reinforcing that her inclusion of and specific research on females is critically important as well. Since at the transescent ages there are wide gaps in development between genders, Gilligan's research helps the practical theology dialogue to affirm the gender concerns, issues, and cultures relevant to the research in this project.

The content of this particular chapter also includes Joy's concept of moral development as a "pilgrimage." His key argument includes the need for the CRE academy to take ownership of moral development because he sees the social sciences as "myopic, if not blind" to what "ought to be."[57] Whether or not his claim is the case, it is intriguing to have a moral development model that specifically invokes theological frameworks and commitments. It may provide, at the very least, a more "comprehensive view" of the entire discussion. Joy asserts,

> Moral development must be perceived through the lens of the pilgrimage-life, which consistently is dynamic, relational, aspirational, epochal, and cumulative…ethical development on the pilgrimage tends to be characterized by two features: (1) an eagerness to move ahead to better perspectives an solutions…

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[57] Anthony, 78.

and (2) a magnetic attraction for advanced ways of interpreting reality…in which

the 'vision' is embraced well before matching 'performance' is attained. [58]

Joy's model is as follows:

Table 5

Joy's Moral Development Model[59]

Level 1	Egocentric	Ex: Taboos	Response to physical consequences
Level 2	Heterocentric	Ex: Laws	Response to respect persons and their laws and rules
Level 3	Logocentric	Ex: Principles	Corporate contracts and vows voluntarily entered into and faithfully sustained.

The final scholar in this chapter is Ward whose paradigm is of note. Ward's

"Approaches to Moral Development" uses the metaphor of a bridge. The metaphorical

bridge consists of three portions:

1. Moral reasoning or cognition, leaving the "ground" of moral truth

2. (Middle of bridge) Moral will or volition which leads to

3. (Other side of bridge) Moral strength to act upon truth which leads to

    character – and to moral action on the other side of the bridge[60]

Also, of note is Chapter 10 in this volume by Yount, entitled "Learning Theory

for Christian Teachers." In this chapter, three "camps" of learning theory are presented

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[58] Anthony, 79.
[59] Anthony, 79.
[60] Anthony, 80.

by the author, and they include: 1. Cognitive (thinking), 2. Humanistic (feeling), and 3. Behavioral (doing).[61] Behavioral theorists Ivan Pavlov (Classical Conditioning), E.L. Thorndike (Connectionism), and B.F. Skinner (Operant Conditioning) are discussed. Cognitive theories and theorists are then examined: Gestalt Psychology, Jean Piaget, and Jerome Bruner. Finally, the Humanistic School is presented: Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Arthur Combs. The importance of this chapter is that it exposes CRE teachers and leaders to the seminal theorists of the different schools of education.

The problem, however, is that this is the single chapter committed solely to presenting such "secular" researchers and their models. There is no mention of any reform models of the decades since *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, the pivotal moment that ushered in the age of reforms in educational scholarship for public education. It is important to know the historical development of education and educational psychology, for any teachers, but with almost all volunteer staff at the congregational level, it may be a stretch to expect this chapter to be more than a reference for practitioners. More research from the reform models, which evolve out of these differing schools of educational psychology, will be presented in Chapter Three.

Norma Cook Everist, another CRE scholar, wrote *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education.* Everist's underlying model is envisioning the entire congregation as a learning community. Her idea is important in the study of CRE at the congregational level. Several of the other theorists and scholars are publishing for different types of faith communities and institutions such as private religious or parochial schools and other contexts, but Everist focuses

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[61] Anthony, 101.

specifically on the congregation as an educational system. After an initial chapter —

helpful to congregations seeking to find out "where they are" with respect to their

educational programming — Everist bases her agenda in the ancient creeds of the church.

It is an interesting and provocative move, but it is important to note that this may be a

particular issue for some congregations that either do not center their belief structures

around ancient creeds or those who have chosen to move beyond them for whatever

reasons. However, as this study considers catechetical needs for transescents, the creeds

certainly should be considered as a rich resource for church tradition and theological

frameworks to be possibly included in curriculum design and pedagogical delivery.

 Nevertheless, Everist's approach offers helpful envisioning of what she calls "The

Eight Facets of Learning." Here is her approach:

Table 6

Everist's Eight Facets of Learning[62]

Community

      Cross-Generational Experiences, Communal Worship, Parish Celebrations

          Catechetical Guides, Roles Models, Mentors

Confrontation

      Ethical Decision-making, Managed Conflict, Skill Challenge

          Forced Choice, Testing, Debate

Study

      Skill-building Exercises, The World Wide Web, Inductive Study

          Memorization, Exploration, Research

Discussion

      Brainstorming, Informal Discussion, Congregational Forum

          Chat-Room, Conversation, Teleconference

Individual

      Style Adaptation, Self-directed Learning, Individualized Programs

          Reading, Tutorials, Distance Learning

Reflection

      Journal-keeping, Guided Meditation, Action-Reflection

          Fantasy, Shared Praxis, Correspondence

Experience

      Expeditionary Learning, Field Education, Dramatization

          Role Playing, Simulation, Case Study

Presentation

      Multi-media Presentations, Direct Instruction, Storytelling

          Art Exhibits, Concerts, Lecture

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[62] Norma Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 104.

Everist explains each of these eight facets in detail. She incorporates the research from other theorists, and much of Groome's theories are applied directly into her approach. In an effort to help leaders plan effectively, Everist offers six stages of planning on how to do all that she suggests. It is a practical application of her model, a microcosm of the approach, to implement the stages of planning. It is a process using the ideas of: Envision, Organize, Act, Review, Evaluate… then to circle back and continue through the SCP process. This process involves preliminary planning, preparatory planning, immediate planning, concurrent planning, post-event planning and planning perspective all with corresponding sets of questions to ask in each "cycle."[63]

The facets that Everist proposes are indeed helpful for leaders in congregations as they develop the planning and discussions for implementing their educational strategies. Everist incorporates other graphics to give visualizations for the process which assists the visual learner and planner. What is frustrating about her work for the purpose of this project is she spends time discussing public school education and its history, as well as its problems such as violence, but does not link any of the processes and approaches she has created to the reform models of the day. There is little direct consideration of the differing age groups in congregations especially the transescent group. She does seem concerned about pluralism but does not give it as much attention as one might hope in the 21st Century context. Overall, though, the engagement and planning process that Everist develops does assist CRE theorists by providing frameworks for creating, implementing and evaluating curriculum development for transescents, which is why her research is of use for this project.

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[63] Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 230.

Richard Osmer, author of *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, brings two major works of interest to the discussion. One is a few decades old – *A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church*. In this particular volume, Osmer responds to a "crisis" in mainline Protestant Christian churches. This crisis is explored via the lens that there needs to be a major change in the way that teaching is considered in congregations. His goal is to bring a "stronger teaching office" to bear into the Protestant mainstream by way of a "New Theological Paradigm."[64] Using his understanding of practical theology, he reflects on the teaching ministry by constructing a new way of engaging congregations in faith formation and teaching. Basically, in his model, he is discussing SCP as it is experienced through the eyes of practical theology in dialogue with the social sciences and with society as a whole. He references Fowler's stages of faith to undergird the presentation of his model.

Osmer's proposal has decent and solid weight in the world of CRE. Renewing and reclaiming, elements of his model, can be seen as a process of engagement with respect to communicating faith for next generations. Doing so with praxis in the form of practical theological dialogue is certainly giving power to the congregation as a living, breathing system of a community of learning. His ideas of transmitting the faith by changing the center of authority for teaching is of particular interest in terms of the research in this project. As Freire has taught, giving power to historically non-empowered and listening to them as well as allowing them to forge ahead with change is completely plausible and encouraged. The issue is that there is not an identified actual practical process of doing so, despite the invocation of "practical theology."

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[64] Richard Robert Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 139.

Osmer in his book entitled *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* invokes the

call from Paul in the *New Testament* to revise the way of doing CRE in congregations.

Osmer focuses his presentation on three case studies of congregations using his proposed

methodology. He proposes that Paul has identified three tasks of what it means to create

and maintain an effective teaching ministry in congregations. The first task is

"Catechesis: Handing on Israel's Scripture and Early Christian Tradition."[65] Osmer

speaks to the catechetical need to pass on the faith through scripture and tradition, just as

he says Paul did and calls others to do. Part of this task is undoubtedly deciding just what

the catechesis a congregation desires to pass down to the next generations. The second

task is "Exhortation: Moral Formation and Education."[66] Osmer reclaims exhortation in

response to the urgency of the crisis he perceives to be a reality in mainline Protestant

churches, and again cites Paul as having used exhortative rhetorical practices to teach and

to grow the first churches he founded. Within this second task is Osmer's call to moral

education, cited here due to its prolific mention by other scholars in this arena. The third

and final task is "Discernment: Learning to Interpret Everyday Life Eschatologically."[67]

A very useful metaphor that Osmer uses here is "Discernment as bifocal vision and

interweaving story lines."[68] Osmer argues that the efficacious way in which Paul

interwoven storylines of ancient Scripture along with the *kerygma* and the reality of the

First Century context within which he was building the kin-dom should become of

renewed focus in today's CRE contexts.

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[65] Richard Robert Osmer, *Teaching Ministry of Congregations* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005), 27-28.

[66] Osmer, *Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 32-33.

[67] Osmer, 43.

[68] Osmer, 44.

After Osmer presents the different narratives of the three congregations used as study models, the word "pilgrimage" emerges as a part of Osmer's framework. Joy also used this term as a part of his approach to moral development, an interesting pairing of metaphor. With this image, Osmer attempts to reconstruct the reformers' concept of vocation.[69] Vocation is certainly an important part of the study of practical theology, a discussion of which Osmer certainly has been a part. Beyond vocation, Osmer once again takes practical theology to task by asserting that there needs to be an interdisciplinary dialogue partner: sociological theory. In this case, Osmer focuses on sociology's investigative view of individualization.[70] He continues his presentation of his "Pilgrimage Frame" by dialoguing with a new understanding of the human life cycle:

> The pilgrimage frame also is enriched by new thinking about the human life cycle. Some psychologies and practical theologians have begun to raise important questions about life cycle theories that have long been central to religious education. Especially important is their critique of influential theories such as Erik Erikson's "eight stages of man" and Daniel Levinson's "seasons" of men's and women's lives. Critics argue that in highly differentiated, pluralistic social contexts, these sorts of life cycle theories have not taken into account the wide variety of paths individuals travel over the course of their lives.[71]

Osmer takes on the establishment with respect to long-held views of life cycles, and this is useful in the course of this research study because of the transformative nature of what the project is attempting. Osmer also argues his point by looking at gender

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[69] Osmer, 175.
[70] Osmer, 180.
[71] Osmer, 182.

studies, invoking not only Gilligan but also Jean Baker Miller in her work *Toward a New Psychology of Women.*[72] The psychology of gender is critical in developing new understandings of life cycle narratives. With a paradigm of pilgrimage and a revisioning of what life actually can and does look like in a 21st Century reality, Osmer's research offers an anti-establishment set of opportunities to explore new ways of doing CRE by looking back at its historical foundations. This strategy opens up a larger dialogue with the authors of the reform models reviewed in the next chapter, which are almost entirely based on anti-establishment ideologies in the educational academy.

Osmer focuses in his pilgrimage frame on the ever-important concept of "vocation." He gives six examples of "Vocation as Pilgrimage."[73] In his examples, he examines six case studies of how people encounter crises in vocation. The case studies originate from the congregations utilized in his research, and the examples of each delineate ways in which they dealt in their evolving vocational discernment by way of an ongoing spiritual pilgrimage. This idea of pilgrimage from Joy's approach to Osmer's approach may lend itself some usefulness in the course of this research. The practical and real examples that Osmer provides are provocative and there is a useful image here.

In part three of his book, Osmer focuses on "refashioning" a congregation's teaching ministry. Having given substantial practical examples and new narratives with which to work, he uses a metaphor of "inside the artist's studio" to provoke interest in his proposals and begins this section with the basic idea of human beings as being created in God's image. Osmer references Moltmann in establishing a theology of hope. Osmer then presents his idea of working through the formation of CRE based on a "theo-

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[72] Osmer, 182.
[73] Osmer, 185.

drama."[74] In this theo-drama, Moltmann's theological frameworks help to undergird theologies of hope in the unfolding drama of creation. The implications for teaching ministry are clarified by Osmer:

> Moltmann's account of continuing creation as a dynamic, evolving system in which the Holy Spirit is a participant invites us to widen the perspective we bring not only in relation to the congregation as a whole but also in terms of the congregation's relationship to God's world. The subject matter and relationships we are learning to see in the congregation in context. Sometimes the perspective we adopt views the congregation in context. Sometimes the perspective we adopt views the congregation in terms of its immediate context – the relationships and events in the local community that impact the church and its members. At other times, we look beyond the local context to broader events, trends and systems. In either case, we are learning to look at the congregation as a part of God's continuing creation, which encompasses all of life and not just the congregation in isolation.[75]

As Osmer describes his explanation of theo-drama and applies the three tasks that he had introduced earlier, he develops an extensive network of engaging his version of practical theology in a new methodology for revisioning and reworking CRE programming in congregations. Overall, there are useful insights and metaphors throughout his work, but there are some limitations. Perhaps the most important limitation is the critical urgency with which Osmer articulates his vision and theology, which is his response to an ongoing crisis he sees in mainline Protestant churches.

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[74] Osmer, 203.
[75] Osmer, 211.

Secondly, the practical theology commitments he proposes are related to his own models created in his formerly published book *Practical Theology: An Introduction.* His research would have more clout if he invoked other seminal authors in the discipline of practical theology from a wider array of contexts and points of diversity.

Reflection

Transescent needs with respect to CRE are at the core of this research study. In this chapter, the attempt has been made to provide as comprehensively as possible a review of the most important pieces of research that will help focus the research toward a dialogue with another conversation partner – the reform model educational academy presented in Chapter Three. While the theologians in this review have provided a needed foundation for this research, there are gaps in what may be needed to intervene on behalf of the transescents in congregations. CRE leaders and teachers need to continue to examine, evaluate and re-create effective CRE curricula and pedagogy for MLLs.

One focus of this study will be on seeking not only age-appropriate interventions and opportunities for differentiation and individualized instructional strategies, but to seek ongoing dialogue in creating a straightforward and more easily incorporated model for doing CRE. Another focus will be on how the act of learning and moments of liminality and "God encounters" can be re-envisioned as a significant portion of sacramental acts rather than only the teaching. Perhaps God and sacrament can be seen as part of the ongoing relationship between teacher and the taught, and that this may be re-worked as a reflexive relationship placed more into the hands of the transescents themselves as the "oppressed" beings traveling through an ominous journey in life at their age. Perhaps they could even liberate the rest of the church and the world.

CHAPTER THREE. PUBLIC SCHOOL REFORM MODELS LITERATURE

REVIEW

In May of 1983, a statistical publication with respect to teaching and learning in the United States, changed the course of K-12 education forever. *A Nation at Risk* provoked educational leaders to take a new look at the way schooling was happening all over the country. A national commission on education that published these findings stated that the nation's public schools were "being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people."[76] The indictment was intended to bring not only a reality check to those who had been administering the status quo, but also was meant to produce immediate action by all stakeholders – teachers, parents, institutions of higher education, school districts and communities. This momentous event started a wheel turning in the scholarly academy of education that remains poignant even to today. Every sector of the educational world was impacted; the educational academy saw itself as key to assembling task forces to create solutions to the many problems cited in the study.

For the purpose of this research, two arenas of focus and the two areas of reform will be brought into this practical theological dialogue both which evolved during the unfolding of these scholarly intervention movements. The first is the "middle school" reform movement, which had already emerged but was in its infancy. The middle school movement, hereafter called the MSM, focused its research, methods, interventions and models on the transescent group of young people, ages approximately from ten to

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[76] "1983: The Rising Tide of Mediocrity." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 3, 2016, A3. Gale OneFile: Business.

fourteen, which is one of the focuses of this research project. The second reform model

is the gifted education movement, which will be labeled from here on as GEM. The

GEM found itself focused on learners who had high levels of intelligence, typically called

"giftedness," but who had some of the most rampant levels of underachievement and

underservice among all sectors of public education. This study will explore the major

researchers in the GEM that bring dialogue to the conversation between reform models

and CRE models of doing education.

The Middle School Movement

The MSM effectively began in 1963, two decades before the publication of *A*

Nation at Risk. President Johnson had ushered in several "Great Society" programs, but

there were limited funding sources available for new ventures. However, under the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act, there was a call for higher standards for

schools. This act included offering more equitable access to all school children to

American education.[77] What remained in effect throughout the nation, however, was the

institution of the "junior high school." The junior high school (JHS) emerged in the late

1800s as concerns mounted over having such a large age group overlap in the high

schools. Before the emergence of the JHS, there was a recommendation that

schoolchildren receive six years of elementary education and six years of secondary

education. As the nation approached the end of the 19th Century, many school districts

had begun to join the international community in offering a new schooling paradigm of

what was called "6-3-3," otherwise known as six years of elementary school, three years

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[77] Mary Beth Schaefer, Kathleen F. Malu, and Bogum Yoon, "An Historical Overview of the
Middle School Movement, 1963–2015," *RMLE Online*, 39, no. 5 (2016): 1-27,
https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2016.1165036.

of JHS and three years of high school. Many schools in Western Europe still follow a similar model to this very day.[78]

The JHS "6-3-3" model was relatively short-lived in the United States due to what was called the "Ninth Grade Problem." Typically, the 6-3-3 model includes first through sixth grades as elementary programming, seventh grade through ninth grade as JHS programming and grades ten through twelve for high school programming. As colleges adapted to societal and world realities of the turn of the century, a system of standardization for college entrance was created, which included four years of transcripts for college applications. Adapting to this standardization, the JHS moved to a two-year program, while high school moved to a four-year program. The result was a basic standardization of a 6-2-4 model, which remained in place for a vast majority of American school districts and private school programs until the early 1980s.[79]

The junior high school, as its very name suggests, was, since its inception, a younger age accommodating version of high school programming. Classes were organized as departmentalized offerings of the basics, with JHS electives and athletics traditionally included for the purposes of training children for high school programming. Little attention was paid to age-appropriate needs, especially socially and developmentally, to the students in the JHS model. The JHS was really a two-year program of preparation and training for students to become effective high school students.[80]

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[78] Paul S. George et al., *The Middle-School - And Beyond* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1992), 3.

[79] Louis G. Romano, Nicholas P. Georgiady, and James E. Heald, *The Middle School: Selected Readings on an Emerging School Program*. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1973), 9-10.

[80] George et al., *The Middle School*, 4-5.

Recognizing the limitations of this model by the 1960s and 1970s, there was first a call for a name change, which many educational scholars and practitioners hoped might forge a path toward a new identity and a different way of programming. At first, the "middle school" name change was resisted, but over the course of time, as educators became trained and re-trained by institutions of higher education, the transition to at least the label of "middle school" was on its way to acceptance. As this process continued to evolve, School District Superintendent Donald Eichhorn of Lewisburg, PA, published a seminal book in 1966 (conceptualized in 1963 at the beginning of the MSM) called *The Middle School;* he was supported and encouraged by a large group of practitioners and scholars in his endeavor. This book became the foundation for building the transition not just of name but of actual curricular and pedagogical change over the course of the next several decades.[81]

By the mid-1970s, a host of other scholarly publications along with practical interventions came into the MSM, and included was the call for the 6-3-4 model, which included Kindergarten as a mandated component of elementary programming and which moved sixth grade to the emerging entity of the middle school. Not only has the middle school emerged as a unique identity with its own structure, but a new way of "doing" education for the transescent age group – roughly ages ten to fourteen, or grades six through eight. Special attention was now being paid to not only the physical ages of the learners, but also to their unique and complex needs as transescents, those "in between" elementary level learners and high school level learners. Thus, an entire burgeoning model for scholars and practitioners was born that continued to gain momentum

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[81] Eichhorn, *The Middle*, vii-ix.

throughout the nation. However, buy-in, especially in rural and socially conservative

areas, was less than 50% before the early 1980s and the publication of *A Nation at Risk.*[82]

After 1983, the MSM saw momentum towards its acceptance nationwide across

the majority of the country. The expansion of the economy and the suburbs during the

1980s offered stimulus to fuel the change, along with the call for reform. By the 1990s,

the MSM had advanced and had developed two major components: (1) The organization

of an extensive group of practitioners nationwide called the National Middle School

Association, as well as (2) a scholarly publication called *The Middle School Journal.*[83]

By the 1990s, the decade where reform in all sectors of K12 education was occurring, the

MSM truly came into its own, developing not only age specific academic curriculum

reform, but also affective curriculum objectives for its transescent learning community.

In addition, elective and athletic programs were created that focused on the social and

developmental needs of middle age learners. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent

Development continued to support the MSM and called for even more changes in middle

schools in its follow-up report to adolescent reforms published in 1995.[84] The MSM was

established in the United States. With its supporting organizations and communities, it

would move to become one of the central structural entities of K12 education in

American public education.

Components of Middle School Philosophy

As stated in this study, the phase of lifespan development that is the focus is

called *transescence.* This particular stage begins "prior to the onset of puberty and

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[82] Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon, "An Historical Overview."
[83] Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon.
[84] Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon.

extends through the early stages of adolescence."[85] Adolescence itself is certainly not a tidy, precise, or chronological stage of life. It differs widely from person to person, and is diverse based on gender, culture and region.[86] Transescence itself affects individuals in two basic dimensions: Forces within caused by internal physical and emotional changes, and external forces created by environmental and other physical stimuli.[87] Physical growth and changes are not uniform among peers, and emotional and intellectual growth follow the same inconsistency in transescents. Likewise, sexuality, socialization, and self-concept are typically asynchronous and difficult to predict, resulting in a challenge for transescents who must live with these combative and confusing forces. Middle School Philosophy (MSP) in both its scholarly and practical domains has encouraged the further exploration and development of transescent development and intervention.

MSP proposes that existentially, the transescent has unique needs and that educational institutions have the ethical responsibility to meet them as best as they can. MSP also provides an overview of how to best meet these needs by creating particular components in the educational opportunities provided for transescents. First, there is a need for a unified curriculum, which includes an interaction of both academic and affective domains. This process of continuity is called "vertical articulation," where predictable and recognizable patterns are presented and maintained by middle schools.[88] Then, taking its cue from Maslow's theories, MSP requires a primary emphasis on "self-

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[85] Eichhorn, *The Middle School*, 3.
[86] Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon. "An Historical Overview."
[87] Eichhorn, *The Middle School*, 7-8.
[88] Leslie W. Kindred et al., *The Middle School Curriculum: A Practitioner's Handbook* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1976), 13.

actualization" of its learners. A list of points required by MSP to emphasize, promote, and hopefully secure a trend toward self-actualization follows:

1. Pupils must select areas of learning or problems which are significant to them.

2. Pupils must learn how to think creatively and flexibly.

3. Pupils must learn to generalize from data and to group ideas in meaningful clusters if they are to solve problems.

4. Pupils must be taught to generate models and theories to explain phenomena.

5. Pupils must learn ways to test hypotheses and make critical judgements.

6. Pupils, at some point, must arrive at a decision and take a stand.[89]

The MSP component of creating a learning environment that develops self-direction follows from the existential goal that emerges from self-actualization. The first part of this component is to create a "capacity for independence" by attempting to meet one's own needs and by coping with environmental factors; the second is creating a "capacity for self-control" of one's desires, drives, impulses, thoughts and actions.[90]

MSP not only encourages but requires the "use of innovative techniques for teaching and learning." One way in which to state this venture is to "think outside the box," and to act accordingly. This component of MSP prompted thousands of pages of research and practical applications for differentiating instruction, creative problem-solving, inquiry-based instruction, and more. As this study presents the reform model information concerning gifted education, these pieces will receive more attention, since there is an overlap in these models. In addition, the MSP promotes the "cultivation of

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[89] Kindred et al., *The Middle School Curriculum*, 14.
[90] Kindred et al., 15.

individual and social skills" beyond what would have been found in a regular JHS program.[91]

On a practical level, the MSP organizes concepts and practices for implementation. One such concept, which is a major departure from a transescent's elementary years, is the changing of classes and teachers on a periodic basis throughout the day. Elementary schools typically have one main teacher, even though learners periodically visit special elective teachers for enrichment. However, the JHS model required learners to move from being with one teacher all day to having six or even seven teachers throughout the course of the day. This remains the high school model, and it is highly departmentalized where teachers of each discipline are organized in groups based upon the field they teach, such as language arts, mathematics, and science. This is a model developed from the collegiate image. However, the MSP reform model, in keeping with the requirement of unifying curriculum and facilitating vertical articulation, calls for the teaching/learning experience to result from the actions of an interdisciplinary team. In other words, middle school teachers who may still meet with their departments periodically for content typically spend much more time with teachers of other disciplines who share the same students throughout the day. It is encouraged that teachers and learners create a team name to inspire group identity and healthy competition with other teams. Only rarely would a student "cross-team," usually for scheduling needs. Likewise, teams of teachers would share a common planning time so that they can enhance the care and the effective curriculum for their learners.[92]

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[91] Kindred et al., 15-16.
[92] Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon, "An Historical Overview."

Another component required by MSP is to produce distinct, unique and signature sets of "middle school pedagogies." Such pedagogies must include "reflective practice and socio-cognitive approaches to learning."[93] These learning practices include collaboration among students and cooperative learning, both of which include social skill development. Such practices have as priorities components such as high levels of student interest and a large amount of authentic learning experiences (such as field trips, community expert guest speakers and real-life experiments). Hands on learning is of paramount importance and all curriculum delivery would consider the three modes of learning – visual, auditory and kinesthetic.[94] In order to implement these MSP requirements, teacher education and continuous training is a critical and ongoing component, creating what are called "professional development communities" of teachers teaming to facilitate middle school pedagogies.

The Gifted Education Movement

In the decade following the "Great Society" of the 1960s, there emerged an international group of scholars and practitioners who assembled in conferences and developed a scholarly journal and network of stakeholders concerned with children who were labeled by educational systems as "gifted," otherwise known as having higher than average levels of intelligence. The term "gifted," however was internationally and even domestically problematic because each nation and each state in the United States has its own definition of what gifted means in its corresponding K12 education systems. In the United States during the 1960s-1970s there was no federal mandate to serve gifted learners. In 1972, the U.S. Commissioner of Education published *Education of the Gifted*

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[93] Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon.
[94] Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon.

and Talented which was a formal report requested by the U.S. Congress in an effort to work on a federal definition for the term gifted.[95] The Report confirmed that almost 60% of schools did NOT offer gifted learners any differentiated instruction and that 21 states offered no gifted services. This report became to be known as the "*Marland Report*," after the name of its publisher, Commissioner Sidney Marland.[96]

Not unlike other reform models, the GEM found its impetus toward development in the United States after 1983. Several different national movements of organized stakeholders joined together in the late 1970s and early 1980s, encouraged by the publication and dissemination of the *Marland Report* to call for federal legislation on behalf of gifted children. In 1988, the *Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act* (*Javits Act*) was passed which revised and amended the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (passed in 1965). This act created a new federal program for gifted learners in the U.S. The funds appropriated each year by Congress are offered to states who develop their own definitions and programing services for learners. It remains an unstable funding process each year, but it currently remains in place.[97]

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRCGT) was created from federal grants appropriated through the *Javits Act* and was directed by Joseph Renzulli, a scholar and professor at the University of Connecticut. Originally it was a collaborative effort among four universities: The University of Connecticut (currently the physical location), Yale University, the University of Georgia, and the University of

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[95] S. P. Marland, Jr., *Education of the Gifted and Talented: Report to the Congress of the United States by the U.S. Commissioner of Education and Background Papers* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972).
 [96] Barbara Clark, *Growing Up Gifted: Developing the Potential of Children at Home and at School* (Upper Saddle River Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall, 2008), 12.
 [97] Clark, *Growing up Gifted*, 13-14.

Virginia. The program now maintains many collaborative partners and is considered to be the "home base" of gifted education in the United States.[98] Under the auspices of the University of Connecticut, each year a major two-week event for scholars and practitioners is held. It is seen as part conference, part fraternity and part institute. Offering the latest in gifted education programming and research, this event has been called the annual "World's Fair" for gifted education. It is from these four universities that many scholars emerged and who became major players in the diverse field of gifted education. The most notable of those for the purpose of this study is the founder and director of the NRCGT, Dr. Joseph Renzulli.

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Joseph Renzulli and the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness

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A gifted education scholar before he applied for the Javits grant to create the NRCGT, Renzulli published in 1978 one of the most famous and critical pieces of gifted education theory in the United States: "The Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness." It is upon this foundation that not only the remainder of his contributions and research rest, but also it is a conception that informs almost every aspect of gifted education in the world. Renzulli produced two other and related major contributions: "The Enrichment Triad Model" and "The Schoolwide Enrichment Model;" however, for the purposes of this study, the focus will remain on the Three-Ring Model. The Three-Ring Model is a Venn diagram of three overlapping circles that all here meet in the middle. One component is "above average ability," another is "creativity," and the final one is "task commitment." Where these three circles intersect, this is considered "gifted behavior."

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[98] Clark, *Growing up Gifted*, 14-15.

Renzulli states "The interaction among these three clusters is necessary for creative/productive accomplishment."[99]

Above average ability consists of either of two abilities: general ability and specific ability. "General ability" involves processing information and integrating that information so that both appropriate and adaptive responses, emerging in new situations, allow the learner to engage in abstract thinking. Typically, these types of abilities are broad and helpful in a variety of traditional learning contexts. They are often measured by aptitude tests. Examples would include the ability to manipulate and reason with numbers easily, showing spatial adaptation, easy recall through memory as well as spelling talents or word fluency. Specific ability involves acquiring information, skill, or performance ability in a specialized area. These abilities are not easily tested through traditional means and often include abilities like musical composition, photography, sports, dance, and so on. Both of these types of ability fall in the "above average ability" of the Three-Ring Model.[100]

Task commitment is a trait that is more easily understood. It involves a high level of energy and motivation on behalf of the learner to complete a task at hand. The central idea of task commitment is that there is an internal "energizing process that triggers" some type of "energy that is brought to bear upon a particular problem (task) or specific performance area."[101] Task commitment is that inward desire to complete a project. Other correlated vocabulary that can be used to describe this component of the Three-Ring Model include "perseverance, endurance, hard work, dedicated practice, self-confidence,

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[99] Joseph S. Renzulli and Sally M. Reis, *The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A How-to Guide for Educational Excellence* (Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press, 1997), 5.
[100] Renzulli and Reis, *Schoolwide Enrichment*, 5-6.
[101] Renzulli and Reis, 6.

and a belief in one's ability to carry out important work."[102] The human desire to see a problem solved with a dedication to commit to the final solutions and products is the embodiment of task commitment. In the Three-Ring Model, this component is required for gifted behavior.

The final circle of influence in the Three-Ring Model is the concept of creativity. Creativity can be defined as utilizing unconventional and divergent thinking.[103] The scholarly study of creativity is found in the influential research of E. Paul Torrance, Professor at the University of Minnesota and later at the University of Georgia, one of the schools involved in the first Javits Grant received, that initiated the NRCGT. The contributions made by Torrance assisted Renzulli in his gifted education research. However, Renzulli's work shied away from Torrance's formal testing and evaluation of creativity. Renzulli makes a very clear argument about the effectiveness of tests for creativity:

> Unfortunately, very few tests have been validated against real-life criteria of creative accomplishment; however, future longitudinal studies using these relatively new instruments might show promise of establishing higher levels of predictive validity. Although divergent thinking is indeed a characteristic of highly creative persons, caution should be exercised in the use and interpretation of tests designed to measure this capacity.[104]

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[102] Renzulli and Reis.
[103] Renzulli and Reis, 7.
[104] Renzulli and Reis.

Creativity, while difficult to measure, is required for gifted behavior because it works

with above average ability (general and/or specific) and task commitment resulting in

"gifted behavior." Renzulli defines gifted behavior:

> Gifted behavior consists of behaviors that reflect an interaction among three basic
>
> clusters of human traits – above average ability, high levels of task commitment
>
> and high levels of creativity. Individuals capable of developing gifted behavior
>
> are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and
>
> applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. Persons
>
> who manifest or are capable of developing an interaction among the three clusters
>
> require a wide variety of educational opportunities and services that are not
>
> ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs.[105]

The Three-Ring Model helps educational scholars and practitioners understand

the dynamic interactions among the three components, with the understanding that gifted

behaviors take place for some people, but not all, at specific times, but not at all times,

and within certain contexts, but not within all. The goal for educators, as Renzulli

understands it, is to work with learners in a wide variety of curriculum programming and

a diverse variety of pedagogies in order to nurture, encourage, and observe gifted

behaviors. The Appendix shows Renzulli's "Taxonomy of Behavioral Manifestations of

Giftedness."[106]

Renzulli's Three-Ring Model works to elicit gifted behavior and, when compared

to the research from the MSP, the adaptations and overlaps are notable. The author of

this study worked as a middle school practitioner teaching a variety of disciplines and

[105] Renzulli and Reis, 8.
[106] Renzulli and Reis, 9.

working specifically with learners who were identified either "gifted" or "talented." The term talented is used to indicate an individual who consistently shows evaluative evidence of producing gifted behaviors, but who is not technically identified by state definitions as gifted. Over the course of years of experience combining the two models along with their inclusive curriculum interventions and pedagogies produced consistent experiences supported learners in moving toward self-actualization, while embodying gifted behavior.

MSP encourages the promotion of self-actualizing behaviors by incorporating innovative, creative and "outside the box" curriculum activities and projects, and the Three-Ring Model offers the existential framework for implementing and identifying behaviors that create very similar aspects of learning. Transescents who are nurtured and supported by the MSP and its corresponding commitments are likewise also challenged and often highly motivated by what the Three-Ring Model offers. When working with transescents in areas of high interest, required by MSP, very often high levels of task commitment, ability, and creativity result. Reflective practices and socio-cognitive ideas of the MSP resound congruently with the efforts of the Three-Ring Model to promote desired behaviors, which Renzulli terms gifted behavior. A major purpose of presenting these two models is to glean useful tools from their reciprocity, and to take advantage of the decades of their implementation with the transescent age group in the K12 world.

A particular gap in both models, however, is one that is often apparent in many reform models from the education academy. Even though these two models bring scholars and practitioners to the edge of moral development, both are missing components needed for religious education: Effective philosophies and strategies for

helping to develop stages of faith. Chapter Five's method and discussion provides a

dialogue between both religious education and reform model theories in order to provide

new information and possibilities for both worlds, and specifically to assist in providing

quality CRE for transescents. This research may prove helpful for other contexts as well,

though it will maintain a focus on congregational level CRE for transescents during the

years prior to their entering confirmation age.

The Parallel Curriculum Model

Out of Renzulli's Three-Ring Model and his other contributions, and with

scholarship that evolved from the partners of the NRCGT projects came a new way of

developing and implementing reforms that promote innovation, problem-solving, self-

actualization, creativity, reflective practice, and gifted behavior: The Parallel Curriculum

Model (PCM). Joined by a wide array of scholars in the education reform conversation,

primarily from the gifted paradigm, Renzulli and colleagues created a comprehensive

philosophical framework for reforming education with an array of practical applications.

For the purpose of this theoretical study, the focus will remain on the philosophical

framework.

As these authors articulated their rationale for "yet another curriculum model,"

they illuminated realities of education in the 21st Century. They assert that learners

today have very "different characteristics" even from a decade or two ago and for many

reasons, such as technological advancement, access to information, and social media.

With this point-of-view, they clearly state that this project is based on a set of beliefs and

assumptions that draws the conversation closer to moral and faith development. In

articulating the underlying belief system of this model, concerning the development and implementation of curriculum for learners of the 21st Century, they state:

- Curriculum should guide students in mastering key information, ideas, and the fundamental skills of the disciplines.

- Curriculum should help students grapple with complex and ambiguous issues and problems.

- Curriculum should guide students in progressing from novice toward expert levels of performance in various subject areas.

- Curriculum should provide students opportunities for original, creative, and practical work in the disciplines.

- Curriculum should help students encounter, accept, and embrace challenges.

- Curriculum should help students uncover, recognize, and apply the significant and essential concepts and principles in each subject area that explain the structure and workings of the discipline, human behavior, and our physical world.

- Curriculum should help students develop a sense of themselves as well as of their possibilities in the world in which they live.

- Curriculum should be compelling and satisfying enough to encourage students to persist despite frustration and understand the importance of effort and collaboration.[107]

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[107] Carol Ann Tomlinson et al., *The Parallel Curriculum: A Design to Develop Learner Potential and Challenge Advanced Learners* (Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 2009), 3.

The second component of this rationale addresses the changing and divergent views of intellect and what it means to be a learner in this era of human history. They acknowledge that intelligence itself has become an idea which reflects (1) fluidity and imagination; (2) both nature and nurture; (3) "opportunity;" (4) a can and do attitude; all of which "affect one's intellectual capacity."[108] They continue and almost invoke the ever-evolving understanding of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Their rationale also acknowledges that intelligence (i.e., giftedness) manifests itself and is recognized as being divergent given context and "microcultures." Their conclusions, therefore, about understanding the ideologies of intelligence are fourfold. First, curriculum should be rich in opportunities and effective for a wide range of intellect. Secondly, curriculum should focus on developing higher capacities within the large range of learners. Third, curriculum should be flexible in ways of addressing all varieties of talent development (gifted behaviors), and in offering opportunities for a diverse field of learners. Finally, curriculum should plan intentionally for the development of intelligences in a way that is self-reflective among not only teachers but also among learners.[109]

The final articulation of rationale is that there is an equanimity in acknowledging the educational scholars from the past. Their contributions provide the base for an effective, ever evolving and relevant educational future for all learners across all spectrums of abilities and talents. There is a need to include the "roots of the past" in their futuristic curriculum model. At the same time, it is important to make clear that this set of frameworks is built differently for an uncertain and unpredictable environment.

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[108] Tomlinson et al., *Parallel Curriculum*, 3.
[109] Tomlinson et al., 4.

They finalize their rationale by stating the importance of flexibility in approaching their own model. They invite scholars and practitioners to continue to assist in honing, differentiating and contributing to this "alive" model of developing and implementing educational reform.[110]

What is the Parallel Curriculum Model (PCM)? There are graphic representations that show how the PCM is organized. There are four parallel curriculum components that are neither hierarchical nor progressive. These four parallels exist in a covalent relationship to one another, and curriculum planning as well as implementation flows flexibly from parallel to parallel. This overview adaptation of the PCM parallels follows:

Parallel 1: CORE What are the key knowledge and skills for learners?

Parallel 2: CONNECTIONS What are the meaningful connections across time, contexts and specific skills to be acquired?

Parallel 3: PRACTICE How do experts in the field studied apply the core knowledge in real-life circumstances?

Parallel 4: IDENTITY How do I (as learner) relate to the basic values and assertions of the particular area of skill and knowledge?[111]

Each parallel includes its own Ascending Intellectual Demand (AID) along its timeline and trajectory, which facilitates a need for a unified curriculum across learning contexts (not unlike a core idea of the MSP). Each parallel is unique to a particular discipline or skill family, such as language arts, science, mathematics, visual art, music, and other fields of study.

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[110] Tomlinson et al., 4.
[111] Tomlinson et al., 16-17.

The Core Curriculum

The Core Curriculum (Core), while not intended to be hierarchical since creative and innovative pedagogies such as real-life problem solving may begin in another parallel, is the basic and essential set of skills that learners should acquire by the end of a given time frame. Traditionally, educational professionals have labeled this simply "curriculum," or in the CRE world, "catechesis." The information acquired in this particular parallel is often the most commonly assessed through state and national standardized tests in K12 contexts. An essential component of all parallels, the concept of Ascending Intellectual Demand (AID) within the Core Curriculum is particularly important since it helps learners experience varied levels of challenge in their achievement. Learners are exposed to differentiated curriculum resources with adjustments made to pace and levels of knowledge acquisition according to individualized needs of each learner. The AID in the Core will accommodate needs of diverse learners with respect to "depth, breadth, complexity, and/or abstractness."[112] Learners engage in innovative pedagogical methodologies even at this level of basic skill acquisition. The rule, rather than the exception with many other traditional curriculum models, includes collaborative and cooperative learning, investigative/inquiry learning, real-world problem solving; some orchestrations of such may actually begin or end up (or both) in another parallel.

The Curriculum of Connections

The Curriculum of Connections (Connections) is, as the title suggests, about connections – more specifically about the interconnectedness of information in one

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[112] Tomlinson et al., 20.

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particular discipline as well as in multiple disciplines. Key areas of skill, concepts, principles, and basic information learned from the Core may be elevated by this connection, but it could possibly go in another direction. Learners connect first with ideas that they already know, understand, and/or appreciate, and then a Connections activity leads them back to a novel Core experience. Connections offers learners opportunities to experience flexibility, fluidity, congruence, and comparative topics and to engage not just information with connection, but also each other and the entire learning community. Connections also invite discussion about different views on topics, opportunities to adjust ways of thinking, developing coping mechanisms for encountering new and challenging insights, and reinforcing skills and information they have already acquired. Connections promote interrelatedness, examining similarities and differences in a supportive and nurturing manner, making analogies between areas of knowledge, developing an appreciation of multiple perspectives, and creating new roles for learners in the midst of changes to mindsets.[113]

The Curriculum of Practice

The next parallel, the Curriculum of Practice (Practice), offers learners access to experts in fields of knowledge, to see how these field experts use the areas of skill in real-life careers in the wider world. Practice is about authenticity of learning as well as very practical ways of engaging a particular discipline of study in the world. Learners may even take on "roles" of practitioners after having engaged with them and learning hands on problem solving by directly acting in the stead of real-life experts. More traditional (secular) vocabulary might point to this parallel as one of vocational exposure. However,

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[113] Tomlinson et al., 22.

practice is much more than simply being exposed to various careers. Practice is about

learning through direct experience through contact with real experts. For example, in a

language arts class, learners may have a professional poet from the community, most

appropriately one who represents some diversity in cultural paradigms, who does not

simply come in to be a "guest speaker," but, rather, who works directly with students to

become poets themselves. Scientists, engineers, doctors, dancers, professional athletes,

history professors and so on may be helpful examples in other disciplines. A required

key component of this particular parallel is reflective practice. Learners critically

examine their own roles in the learning process and in their ongoing discernment to

explore topics that one day in which they may themselves become an expert.[114]

Curriculum of Identity

Lastly, the Curriculum of Identity (Identity) resumes where Practice left off, even

though they are not intended to be hierarchical. Identity is the area of curriculum

implementation where learners encounter thinking about how their very own lives are

shaped by knowledge, especially by a particular discipline. As learners explore their life-

long vocations in possible fields of study for career development, they engage at both

deep and abstract levels what it may mean to be an expert in an area of interest. Learners

utilize skill acquisition from other parallels reflexively to engage the depth of this

exploration. Again, experiences in learning may actually begin in this parallel. An

example is if a student is committed to becoming a professional athlete as a primary goal

for the future. Not only does identity offer opportunities to think deeply about that

reality, but it may lead that student to encounter other parallel curriculum facets, such as

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[114] Tomlinson et al., 23-24.

connecting with a real-life athlete as well as engaging practice of the reality of the possibility. Identity is an existential enterprise as well, where learners encounter how experts in a particular career or field think, work, prepare for their futures, and how they have dealt with hardships such as ethical considerations, racism, homophobia, sexism and other potential roadblocks. Learners also learn who historically are "heroes" or "villains" in particular fields and why.[115]

The PCM is an important model which has been implemented nationally, specifically in contexts where gifted learners are identified, along with other intellectually talented individuals. It is becoming the standard for gifted education in the State of Florida. For example, it is the program model where the author of this study has practiced for over 20 years in K12 gifted education. The Florida State Department of Education advocates for the use of the PCM as the most prolific and effective method for gifted and talented students in the state. With authors such as Renzulli himself, along with gifted education scholars from across the spectrum of curriculum philosophical development and design planning and evaluation, the PCM affords this study some opportunities for reflection and dialogue. In fact, the Three-Ring Model itself, seeking those liminal moments of gifted behavior is all but inherent in the manifestation of each of the parallels. This reality is not a coincidence and is one of the primary reasons why Renzulli's expertise was included in the compilation of this research.

In creating conversation with MSP, like the Three-Ring Model, the uniqueness and call for innovation of the PCM, produces a happy partnership. The author of this study practiced for over ten years in a middle school context using the PCM as the *modus*

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[115] Tomlinson et al., 26-29.

operandi. By the very nature of its commitments to the affective domain, the PCM is an appropriate partner with the MSP and with the age group of the transescent learner. High levels of interest and depth of experiences, which promote self-actualizing activities, especially in the Identity Parallel, engender the possibility of maximized potential of both the MSP and the PCM. By their very nature, transescent learners are complex creatures who seek connection and who desire to experience new and different ways of learning and doing. The PCM organizes and gives voice to a more practical way of doing MSP. In addition, the parallels may bring to this study usefulness in re-envisioning CRE is explored in the Chapter Five and Chapter Six. While the PCM does not necessarily include faith components, it does include specifically elements of moral development. For example, when students are asked to identify villains and heroes in certain disciplines and then to articulate why these may be considered as such, moral issues are involved.

The PCM as a reform model in the "secular" educational enterprise, does not address faith development. It is interesting, however, to postulate what a dialogue might be if the PCM were to be engaged in the arena. For instance, what if a transescent learner is considering a career as a religious figure, theologian, cleric, or other role in a religious context. How then could each parallel be utilized to engage that learner's exploration? The author of this study has encountered this "dilemma" as an instructor in a public school while utilizing the PCM. It is out of such an experience that motivated a dialogue between CRE and Reform models. The author encountered a 12-year-old transescent who identified as female and who had the desire to explore becoming a rabbi within her context of Conservative Judaism. After jumping through many hoops with parents and school district administration, an application of PCM allowed this young person to do just

that in her 7th grade gifted education context. Today, she is indeed a rabbi in her

tradition and a leader among her people. Certainly, it seems efficacious to at least

attempt an engagement of the PCM (based on the Three-Ring Model) and the MSP as a

dialogue partner with the scholarship of the CRE academy.

CHAPTER FOUR. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON GIFTEDNESS AND TRANSESCENCE

The Gospel of Luke describes a significant event where Jesus travels with his parents to Jerusalem for Passover. In this narrative, Jesus is a twelve-year-old transescent who makes a decision that his family did not anticipate: To stay in Jerusalem after the rest of his group had left. After having realized that he was missing, Mary and Joseph traveled back to search for their son. Much to their surprise, they found Jesus discussing faith matters with the elders of the Temple. Furthermore, one way in which this particular event is interpreted is that Jesus, even at his age, was teaching the others who were astonished at his abilities. As his mother Mary admonished him for what was happening, Jesus replies with a peculiar reaction as if there should be no surprise concerning his whereabouts; obviously, Jesus says, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" What follows in this passage of Scripture is where a search for theological insight begins: "But they did not understand what he said to them."[116]

Jesus exhibits a type of "gifted behavior," and, by virtue of a mixture of his transescent mindset and of his expression of giftedness, his mother and father were perplexed. Correcting his disobedience, Jesus left with his family this time, and Mary, even if she did not completely understand, "treasured all these things in her heart." As this particular passage and narrative concludes, it advises the reader that Jesus moves from this moment toward an increase in wisdom as he grew older and also increased in "favor" with God and with the human community. Out of his unruly transescent

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[116] Luke 2:41-52 (NRSV).

behavior, Jesus exhibited an unusual amount of giftedness, and he utilized the opportunity to correct his behavior, inspire his mother and to grow into his future legacy. Understanding these moments in Jesus' spiritual and educational journey as theological expression of gifted behavior in transescents illuminates the path toward a theology of giftedness and transescence.

Tracy uses a phrase in his work that may be useful in exegeting the nature of what is going on: "The emergence of the uncanny."[117] As Tracy explains his understanding of emergent contemporary theological reality, he writes that "Every theology lives in its own situation."[118] He goes on to say that the "creative and liberating resources of the tradition" provide a framework for understanding what Jesus is discerning, and, by working to become disciples of Jesus, we are to share in that imaginative and holistic process. In reference to what Jesus says when Mary questions him about what he is doing, another way to interpret Luke 2:49 is that Jesus is saying, "Don't you understand that I'm being about my Father's interests?" Such a rhetorical question coming from a disobedient child must have sparked Mary's desire to treasure what had happened, despite her initial fears and frustrations. Jesus had exhibited an uncanny nature first, and as Scripture corroborates, he moves on to grow wise and to change the world.

Throughout Scripture, there are few other incidences where narratives with children of the transescent age group are presented. The way in which our theological ancestors viewed transescents is, therefore, overshadowed by a lack of mention. This passage in Luke is the final time we encounter Jesus as a child, and we are joined with

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[117] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism.* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 339.
[118] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 339.

him later as he begins his ministry around the age of thirty. Even as this study has reviewed various voices in religious education scholarship, missing are the references to the detailed needs of transescents in CRE programming; it is difficult to find frameworks that directly support a theology of transescent simply because definitive examples are not widely available in Scripture nor in the traditions. However, this story in Luke describing Jesus as a transescent is one of the resources that helps us as we seek a theology of transescence.

As we reflect on what theological commitments may help us understand transescents' spiritual and educational journeys in faith, the metaphorical idea of walking with young people is useful. It could be seen as an extrapolation of de Certeau's image of "walking in the city."[119] Walking with transescents as they travel through their "city" of life, a journey fraught with a myriad of obstacles, challenges, hopes, and rewards, may help us to better encounter their realities through a mindful hermeneutical lens. Transescents encounter new experiences daily. They are confronted with their own limited experiences while they test their beliefs in superstitions, understanding of authority, assumptions of their own purposes, and accepted narratives of reality. As transescent Jesus made a conscious decision to counter the authority of his parents by staying in the Temple with the elders, he openly defied them, but that action synthesized a new reality for him as well as for his family. Taking risks and testing fate are both part of what it means to be a transescent. In the end, reconciliation comes through re-joining authority in a right relationship (coming back into obedience), but even so the egg cannot

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[119] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91-96.

be uncooked. The theological mindset of the transescent is an ever evolving one which involves risk-taking, experimentation and real-life encounters.

As we journey with transescents, story transforms reality. We can only imagine the rich conversations that came from retelling the story of Jesus not leaving with his parents and then being found in the Temple with his elders, "being about his Father's business." Such rich stories help frame theological moments of future liminal sacramentality or conation. Transescents absorb new information, ideas and experiences while connecting with their past. Traditions in our faith help to frame the past and to provide a structure within which to take theological risks. Attending Passover festivities, an important traditional practice of the Jewish culture, provided the "jumping off point" for Jesus as he found himself within the familiar but desiring and expecting more. Risk-taking in theological ventures does not occur in a vacuum, but in relationship to established traditions and previous experiences. Transescent Jesus seemed to fully expect his parents to find him, and, meanwhile, he was able to push the boundaries of his experiences. He trusted the process of reconciliation and returned to a right relationship of obedience, even though the lives of the family had been forever changed by this event of risk-taking.

The emergence of the uncanny as gifted behavior in this narrative creates another opportunity for theological reflection. As the research continues in this study, the concept of giftedness is central. As we reflect on giftedness theologically, it becomes important to consider what Scripture and tradition teach us about giftedness. Theological reflection assists us in unpacking the concept of spiritual giftedness and how that is

relevant and related to the dialogue proposed in this study. Let us consider first this passage:

> Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.
>
> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.[120]

Paul, the writer of 1 Corinthians, reassures us that in our diversity, we are called to be disciples by virtue of our different gifts. Each expression of spiritual giftedness together assists in the creation and maintenance of the faith community. While Jesus in the Luke narrative is exhibiting the spiritual gift of rhetoric and attending to God's work through teaching and learning, each member of the Body of Christ is empowered with

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[120] 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (NRSV)

giftedness to share with each other in community. Each of the gifts that are activated by the Spirit are important. Paul intentionally repeats the term "varieties" in an effort to build up the ideology of the need for diverse gifts, as well as calling for the equitable respect for all gifts in the community. The Spirit is in charge of distributing and manifesting the spiritual gifts within the members of the community.

The gifts of the Spirit allow for the diverse expression of giftedness among disciples. Transescents happen to be living in the journey of discovery of their areas of giftedness given by the Spirit, and they are actively experimenting with those gifts in the community. It is a theological enterprise to take the risks of trying out their areas of giftedness, and the faith community should be a safe place where that can occur. Jesus was taking a risk with his spiritual gifts directly within the safe boundaries of his tradition and with the leaders of the larger faith community. Spiritually gifted behavior emerges as attempts are made and skill grows. The passage from 1 Corinthians highlights, for example, the gifts of wisdom and knowledge; to discover such gifts, risks must be taken to experiment with opportunities where they may be employed. Transescents are actively developing in ways that are fertile for such experimentation and risk-taking. The theological community provides a safe foundation for testing and evaluation of these spiritual gifts.

Part of the risk-taking that helps transescents discover their areas of giftedness is an ontological venture. Groome has stated how important ontology is to the process of implementing CRE programming.[121] For transescents to experiment with possible spiritual gifts, they must be able to jump into the risks with their whole being, believing,

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[121] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 11.

at least at the beginning, that a particular spiritual gift may be one apportioned by the Spirit. Such is the emotional availability of the transescent mind. Transescents are often noted as "waking up in a new reality every single day." They desire to try new things that entice their interest, and they are typically "all in" in terms of immersing themselves in the practices of a particular spiritual gift.

For example, a transescent member of the faith community may be interested in the experience of reading Scripture during the liturgy of worship. Experimenting with the spiritual gift of reading aloud clearly takes commitment and is a risk to take in the community. Teachers and other leaders in the community can assist with the preparation, but it is the very act of reading aloud that offers the real experience and value of doing so. The event may have several outcomes, but it very often will not be a flawless engagement the first time. Careful coaching and assistance can be offered to help young people to keep trying, as long as they are willing to continue to take the opportunity to hone their skill and practice this possible spiritual gift in the life of the faith community. Another example may occur when a transescent wants to help the community by going door-to-door to solicit non-perishable food items for the church pantry so that the stock may be offered to less fortunate members of the community. They may find they are not as well-versed as they would like to be in the art of persuading people to give, but with practice, they may decide that it is one of their spiritual gifts they can contribute to the community.

After experimentation and practice, transescents become more fully aware of their theological gifts over time, and they are able to honestly communicate how they feel about participating in that enterprise. Transescents have a natural penchant for being honest as long as the situation where sharing is taking place involves a safe forum for

them emotionally and spiritually. As they reflect on their practices, some will admit that perhaps one spiritual gift may not be one with which they feel comfortable. They may continue to experiment, and, over time, they will come to conclusions. Still others may recognize there is a distinct spiritual gift that they feel is important to keep practicing, and with the right intention, they may bring that spiritual gift to a natural prominence in their expression.

So then, how are transescents to express their spiritual giftedness in the community? What is the canvas where the gifts are to be displayed? How do they come together as a whole body? 1 Corinthians 13 provides the way to see that expression: Love. As transescents learn about themselves and the world and continue to discover their spiritual gifts, they experiment and reflect along the journey. As we walk with them in love, new ways of being together emerge. Jesus and his family were transformed, not just by the moment of discovery of a spiritual gift, but as the story continued to be told and the lessons learned through its discovery were re-imagined and applied to other developing spiritual gifts. Love provides the perpetuation of spiritual giftedness. Love motivates task commitment and theological creativity. Love provides a safe avenue for self-discovery and realizing theological abilities provided by the Spirit. In fact, it could be argued that love itself is the most important spiritual gift.

Transescents who experience love as Christ teaches will be able to realize their spiritual potential by focusing their energies on serving others through the expressions of their spiritual giftedness. Recognizing and expressing spiritual gifts is only one part of the celebration of life in the faith community. Learning how to reflect on those spiritual gifts as ways of loving one another move transescents toward a fuller expression of what

it means to be a disciple of Christ. In other words, learning to read Scripture during worship is a spiritual gift, and offering to read is an expression of love within the community. Gathering food items to be distributed to the impoverished is a spiritual gift, and understanding the spiritual altruism involved is an act of love – a true expression of the most important of spiritual gifts.

Love is a challenging word in the English language, but in this context, understanding "Christlike" love for self, one another and God is the best way to approach its understanding. Jesus stayed in Jerusalem to "be about his Father's business" in the faith community. This business is the work of love. His motivation to love, in spite of his disobedience, is a major liminal moment for Jesus, his family and us reading the story today. It is one thing to experiment and learn one's spiritual gifts and to hone those skills by practice, but it is the work of love to learn more about why and how spiritual gifts are given and applied in the community. Secular understandings of discovery and skill-building limit us to cognition, while theological reflection on the sacramentality of learning, encountering God in moments of liminality, leads us to conative activities that transform individuals, communities and God's world.

If we teach transescents (and all people, for that matter) to focus on loving themselves, each other and God by learning about and employing their spiritual giftedness, then we can provide a foundation for re-envisioning how Christians are "to be" members in the Body of Christ. Love is the catalyst that transforms the work of CRE away from only learning catechetical components of history and doctrine; teaching Christlike love facilitates new opportunities for engagement and transformation through theological imaginings. As the conversation in the next chapter moves to the method and

interdisciplinary dialogue, one way to capture the theological imagination is to consider gifted behaviors as manifestations of the greatest of all spiritual gifts: love. CRE practitioners can intentionally teach love by organizing their instruction into the three categories of Christlike love: The love of God, the love of neighbor and the love of self. Within each of those categories, CRE practitioners can help transescents see how the spiritual gifts they are discovering and practicing fit into the work of love.

The more we empower transescents to take leaps of faith by way of the spiritual gifts by expressing Christlike love, the more they will continually hunger for the special abilities that only the Holy Spirit can offer. By embracing the yearning for spiritual gifts, the volition to learn ignites passion and compassion by looking to the stories of Scripture and the stories in our very own lives. Desiring to discover and employ spiritual gifts is not a mystical experience alone, but rather an act of faith that seeks how to be disciples who love like Christ teaches. The theological organizational patterns of loving God, loving neighbor and loving self-offer practical structures for teaching transescents. The Phoenix Affirmations offer some creative ways of compiling the ideas of these organizational patterns.[122]

A focus on "loving God" as Christ teaches offers the first set of spiritual gifts. Some examples follow, but these are not exhaustive lists of spiritual gifts that focus on what it means to love God. Some people are gifted with the ability to learn and teach acceptance of many ways of being faithful, while maintaining their own paths as Christian disciples. These gifts honor Scriptural narratives where even Jesus himself

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[122] Eric Elnes, *The Phoenix Affirmations: A New Vision for the Future of Christianity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 2006).

learned how to honor others' beliefs and realities, such as his encounter with the Samaritan woman. Loving God with spiritual giftedness also includes learning the traditions of liturgical practices, prayers, and Scriptural narratives of our spiritual ancestors. Individuals with such gifts express their giftedness by engaging in such practices and also teaching them. In addition, loving God involves caring for and being stewards of the Earth, to human and non-human Creation alike. There are people who just seem to have a special passion and set of abilities to heed a call to be active Earth stewards and to teach the rest of the Body of Christ what that entails and how the Church should respond.

Loving one's neighbor is the second organizational structure for outlining spiritual gifts expressed through love. Those who have a seemingly innate way of embracing all people in an equitable manner with radical hospitality and acceptance would fall under this category. Some disciples have a unique ability to recognize people as God's holy creations, no matter the points of diversity. People who have a natural spiritual gift of empathy towards the oppressed are often empowered by working for peace and justice, sometimes even doing so by engaging in risk-taking. Another example of spiritual gifts in this category focuses on those who have spiritual gifts of peace-making, helping individuals and their faith communities to build bridges of positivity, even with presumed enemies. Again, these are only some examples of what it means to love one's neighbor as Christ calls us to do.

There are also those people among us who exhibit strengths in what it means to love oneself, which includes an understanding of self-care. People with these spiritual gifts help us all to understand how radically we are loved by God and how that love is

one that we must give to ourselves, too. These individuals have unique gifts in knowing

and teaching how to live life as holy people and emphasize both spiritual practices and

physical wellness practices as ways of self-care. Even those who would doubt their own

abilities as faithful members of the community can be consoled and taught by people

expressing the spiritual gifts involving loving oneself. Those also who help envision and

teach Christian vocation fall into this particular category, understanding that seeking what

it means to be "me" as well as finding our purposes in life is an act of love and a spiritual

gift.

It bears mentioning that the ongoing discovery of spiritual gifts and their

expression is a life-long journey. Transescents, as the focus of this theological reflection,

are embarking on a developmental journey that lends itself to high levels of self-

discovery, as we have seen in Chapters Two and Three. Jesus epitomizes this truth in the

Luke narrative, even though the mention of transescent experiences throughout Scripture

is missing for the most part. While younger children are exposed to opportunities to

experiment with spiritual gifts and to reflect on those experiences, transescents are

entering into stages of abstract understanding, deepening levels of faith, and broadening

self-awareness. The organizational patterns offered through the Phoenix Affirmations are

attempts to categorize for the purposes of theological edification, and it is therefore

important to note that there are other spiritual gifts that may be gifted by the Spirit which

cannot be categorized or explained, and that is part of the holy mystery of God.

The overarching theological discovery in this reflection is about love as the

greatest of all spiritual gifts, and that is the common thread of realizing spiritual

giftedness and encouraging their development in the lives of transescents. First

Corinthians 13 informs us that "the greatest of these is love," from among faith, hope and love. All spiritual gifts are significant, as Paul instructs, but if the foundations of our theological ventures in CRE and elsewhere in the life of the faith community are out of sync with Christ's love, then there is a probability of imbalance. Therefore, the only hierarchy that exists is one where Christlike love is central to the vision, mission, planning and implementation of CRE programming for transescents and others. Love never ends. Love never fails.[123]

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[123] 1 Corinthians 13 (NRSV).

CHAPTER FIVE. METHOD, DESIGN & DIALOGUE

Method

The method chosen to facilitate the dialogue between the CRE scholarship, and the reform models presented is that of Whitehead and Whitehead. Their method for accomplishing theological reflection is threefold: Attending, Asserting and Responding.[124] In order to respond to the literature and the contemporary situation at hand, the Whiteheads' method of attending to experience, tradition and culture without judgement is exceedingly helpful in this conversation. Bringing the CRE voices together with the "secular" reform models is a considerable task, and pastorally attending amidst such a range of diversity lends itself quite well. When divergent conversation partners come together, special careful pastoral attention is all the more critical. The Whiteheads state "A necessary ingredient in effective listening to each of these sources is the ability to suspend premature judgement."[125] In the processing of attending, the pastoral way is to respect, honor and honestly engage conversation partners with dignity, openness and grace. Attending requires a set of intentionally employed disciplined skills of actively seeking mutuality. This task is the first part of the method in this study.

Assertion is the second component of the Whiteheads' model for pastoral reflection. Each of the components in the method act together "in an assertive relationship of challenge and confirmation."[126] The conviction inherent in assertion is two-fold: The holy is present in all three of these methodological components and the data that is available in each is incomplete in and of itself. Therefore, "assertive

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124 Whitehead, and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 13.
125 Whitehead and Whitehead, 14.
126 Whitehead and Whitehead, 15.

engagement" enables differing and even conflicting voices into fruitful dialogue. This second component of pastoral reflection is one of careful, intentional and disciplined engagement occurring on "both a theological and an interpersonal level."[127] Asserting is realizing there is a significant contribution from all partners in the conversation and a pastoral expectation for genuine and unique testimony created as a result of dialogue.

The last component of the Whiteheads' method is that of pastoral response. After attending and employing assertion, the intent is to gain insight in order to produce an effective response by working toward a communal solution or ideology owned by all conversation partners involved. This component involves decision making as a response as well. Questions such as "what do we do now?" inform the beginning of pastoral response. Such response brings a considerable hope for "courageous action" and/or "significant transformation" as a result of the method of doing theological reflection.[128] It is equally important to be aware that dialogue and reflection can come to an impasse when the communities involved in the conversation are either ignored or favored in some sort of imbalance. An effective and just pastoral response comes out of sincere strategic analysis and group decision-making. The Whiteheads' observation of their method is of paramount relevance to the tasks of this study's dialogue:

> A goal of Christian ministry is the formation of reflective communities alive to the presence of God. The model we suggest here can serve as a tool, inviting believers to develop skills enabling them to discern religiously significant information in three important sources. Such a community is attentive to the normative heritage of the tradition and sensitive to its cultural milieu and to its

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[127] Whitehead and Whitehead, 16.
[128] Whitehead and Whitehead, 16.

own experience of faith. Aware that, as a single group, it is not the sole arbiter of faith, the community is yet confident as it shares its convictions within the church. These convictions will be expressed in pastoral decisions that are at once practical and open to revision, as the community continues to attend to convictions that arise in other faith communities.[129]

One of the most important considerations in this dialogue is to understand and embrace that one side of the conversation comes from mainly a "secular" perspective, especially since national reform models for educational programming in the United States have been historically created with the concept inherent in the United States Constitution: The separation of church and state. However, it is equally pertinent to recognize and emphasize that learners in "secular" contexts, in the case of this study, transescents, come from diverse cultures, including their backgrounds in faith. Significant to pastoral reflection is to not lose sight that at such formative ages of development, these young people struggle with many concurrent issues, not the least of which is an understanding of faith. Despite the secular context, the relevance of the conversation to stages of faith development, including morality and ethics formation, is central to this conversation.

Methodology and Design

To facilitate the practical theological dialogue in this study, the pastoral reflection method will organize the facets of the conversation. Each component of the method will provide the springboard for conversive interaction and engagement from both sides of the emerging scholarly practical theology partnership. Special attention will be paid to several points made by the Whiteheads in their discussion of the method. First, the

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[129] Whitehead and Whitehead, 17.

"authority of experience" will be considered. This point is relevant for both the scholarly

dialogue of expert voices in the literature reviews as well as the practical experience of

the author of this study. In the ongoing engagement, special attention must also be paid

to the act of "befriending" and what that experience intentionally entails. In this context,

befriending means to meet and become acquainted with a conversation partner, building a

collegial relationship based on kindness and virtue. Next, the hermeneutical lenses

employed during the pastoral reflection will seek out the "missing voices." In other

words, questions like "who is missing in this conversation" deserve direct attention. In

similar fashion, the process of reflection must also name and discuss what experiences

are those of "privilege," and what that means in the dialogue as well as its applications.

Lastly, another commitment is to the "sense of the faithful." The Whiteheads invoke

throughout their method the "elusive image" of its Latin phrase *sensus fidelium,* a

catechetical image of the community of faith. In other words, this commitment is about a

holy and reverent respect for the experiences of the members of the faith – as people

made in God's image and likeness as well as the people gathered as the Body of Christ,

with respect, grace and love from any pastoral response resulting from the study.[130]

Therefore, as the pastoral reflection method is utilized, the dialogue will be

organized in this chapter into the first two components of the paradigm attending and

asserting. The final chapter, the unique contribution of this study, will entail the genuine

and hopefully helpful pastoral response, the last of the three components of the method.

Methodologically, the design of the study requires a total engagement and incorporation

of each part of the pastoral reflection cycle, concluding with an original pastoral response

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[130] Whitehead and Whitehead, 44-51.

resulting from the dialogue. In each of the parts of the reflection cycle, the intent is to produce a praxis that provides a foundation for a unique pastoral response that will be hopeful and assistive to the entirety of the community conversation partners involved. The pastoral response, however, in the spirit of the Whiteheads' commitments articulated in their method, will be open for critique, ongoing evaluation and evolutionary restructuring as needed and desired by the stakeholders of the communities.

Attending and Asserting

The focus of this conversation results from observations that there is a need to differentiate the way in which we offer CRE programming for young people of the transescent age group – also called middle level learners (MLLs). The MSP introduced in the third chapter focuses on this particular age group and that capitalizes on the stages of human development articulated within the discussion on Fowler in Chapter Two. While Fowler cites the work of Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg, Fowler discusses the needs and developmental nature of adolescents in one stage, rather than separating out transecents. Fowler's Synthetic-Conventional stage, for instance, is presented as "usually" beginning to develop during teenage groups, and there is no separation of consideration of the transescent age group as a part of the larger picture of adolescence. The MSP, in its historical development and emergence into prominence in education culture, is intentionally preoccupied with transescents' needs academically, socially, and psychologically. These two conversation partners in this dialogue could be engaged in a way so as to seek a way of understanding the faith development of MLLs within Fowler's overarching stages of faith.

Recognizing that there is a specific need here, the question to engage is: How, then, can CRE professionals use aspects of MSP in accordance with Fowler's stages so as to produce curriculum and pedagogy that can be applied to working with transescents in the CRE contexts. Another point of assertion here is that perhaps in the dialogue, it will be recognized that the needs of transescents to encounter their own faith journeys are not being met by the MSP. As mutual dialogue unfolds, both sides of the discussion can learn much from each other. There are gaps in how transescents are approached in both the CRE context as well as in the middle school reality. Unfortunately, this part of the dialogue may meet with very direct challenges from the MSP group because of the separation of church and state issue. Interestingly enough, an impasse seems to loom, unless employed in a parochial school context, which could result in another study such as this, but with a different focus. These assertions provoke thought for further development, despite the limitations.

Groome brings to this discussion the important concept of shared Christian practice – reflective practice, otherwise known as praxis. Groome takes great care in articulating and proving his point that praxis-practicing communities of faith can and do build CRE programs that emerge to serve the needs of the learners in those contexts. Specifics that focus on transescents are somewhat missing in his articulation, but, when his argument is put into conversation with the MSP partners, a notable correlation emerges. According to the literature presented in Chapter Three, transescents benefit from reflective practice. Reflective practice is synonymous, or nearly so, with praxis, and the sharing of such praxis is omnipresent in almost all aspects of the MSP. Creation and maintenance of unified curriculum programming, innovative and engaging pedagogy,

and pathways for independence and self-actualizing activities provide a rich foundation for the MSP's requirement for praxis. In this case, the jump to see the confluence of possibilities between SCP and the needs for a shared communal praxis to support transescent development and learning is not a huge one.

It is not difficult to assert that these two conversation partners have something to share with each other. MSP can inform the process of doing SCP and vice-versa. Avoiding a repeat of the possible impasse due to the "secular" nature of MSP as a national reform model, it is important to note this reflexive dialogue could potentially produce a new way of envisioning specifically the way of doing CRE for MLLs in congregational programming. Again, the MSP voices could also potentially identify key points for producing curricular components that coincide with faith formation and the moral development of transescents. It could be said that SCP and the praxis of MSP are two sides of the same coin, one side acknowledges faith directly, while the other side at least welcomes the exploration of diverse transescent individuals' faith formation. Ultimately, praxis in the contexts where transescents are being engaged is not only a useful tool, but a primary form of doing curriculum and pedagogy in their respective contexts.

Reflective practice (praxis) is required by another reform model: The Parallel Curriculum Model. In every parallel presented by the PCM group, praxis is central, and increases in importance in each parallel as the AID of each is considered. As learners make connections, reflectively practice, and explore identity forming activities praxis is pivotal. The PCM was created for all age groups from Kindergarten through high school, and it lends itself well to the ideologies of the MSP.

Groome provides a way of engaging the conversation from a faith perspective, and both the PCM and MSP provide potential frameworks to reflexively develop a pastoral response to what could actually happen in the CRE for MLLs in congregations. Employing engaging, innovative, and high interest activities by combining SCP with MSP and the PCM could prove fruitful for the endeavors of engaging transescent learners as explorers of faith, disciples in formation and future leaders of faith communities. Groome's important concept of conation becomes a poignant and helpful climax to the understanding of how CRE is focused on learning in different ways from the reform models. In proposing that conative activities may involve moments of liminal sacramentality, possibilities for overlap occur with Renzulli's proposals of how gifted behavior occurs and how the actual liminal moments of conation also occur. These possibilities are intriguing, especially as further understandings of the sacramentality of learning are discussed and presented.

The next point for this discussion involves the sacramentality of the learning process, inspired by Moore's work. Both the MSP and PCM involve high levels of engagement for learners at the middle level. They both require specialized features delivered by instructors, which involves training in their respective philosophical commitments and in practical delivery strategies. Moore concludes in her work that teaching is, in fact, a sacramental act in and of itself. These moments of conatively encountering God (in part due to SCP) deliver what religious educators call "liminal" moments of discovery. The most common illustration of such liminal moments is the appearance of a lightbulb appearing or lighting up above the head of a person in comics or other graphic representations of someone learning new information. Moore's

argument and Groome's concepts of conation and Christian Share Praxis, partnered with the systems put into place by the MSP and the PCM focus on creating more and more opportunities for such liminal moments. The PCM articulates this in its parallels with AID components in each: Liminal moments are created by connecting, practicing, and creating identity. What a rich grounding for possibility!

What is important is to advance the idea of sacramentality to include and coincide with those liminal moments, creating conative discoveries. If sacramental theology is truly engaged, moments of encounter with God happen around and/or inside the one who is practicing a sacrament. To extend Moore's ideology, this assertion of advancement opens up the possibility of seeing the actual act of learning moments of liminal conative action and corresponding activities that promote connection, evoke praxis and offer fertile ground for identity formation as where the sacramentality occurs. Those metaphorical depictions of the liminal lightbulb could be seen as moments of sacramentality encountering self and God in new, imaginative, life-changing, and world-changing ways. Perhaps this is one way to express what conation is or can be. Even if the experts of the MSP and the PCM would not use the vocabulary of sacramentality, teachers know that these transformative moments of liminality are what move the education process forward, academically, and developmentally. Those moments cannot be taken away or unlearned. It appears that liminality and sacramentality are two sides of a similar experience and the combined experience of both could be synonymous with conation. Both conversation partners could benefit from such an assertive reality through reflection and response.

In reference to Renzulli, the moments of liminality and sacramentality could be interpreted as "gifted behavior." When a learner employs strengths to engage in the creation of something new, or solving a real-world problem, or discovering a completely different way of seeing are moments of transformation or conversion – or conative activities. The point is that moments of liminality and sacramentality provide unimaginable opportunities for transformation and change. Once experienced, not only can the new reality experienced not be taken away (one cannot un-cook an egg), but also engagement from that point in a learner's (disciple's) life is forever changed. New behaviors emerge in the form of employing a certain giftedness after having experienced moments of transformative action (grace, conversion, salvation). Understanding the possibility of such an imaginative reworking of ideas of learning as sacrament and of ongoing acts of conversion and building discipleship as gifted behavior is one way of seeing the results of this new dialogue.

Another strand of dialogue is how Freire's work interacts with the philosophical commitments of both the MSP and the PCM. Freire is certainly against the traditional "banking model" of education, and the reform models presented here in the discussion do not disappoint. Created as reactions against what was not working in a nation that was seen to be at risk with respect to its educational programs, both the MSP and the PCM do not even hint at a traditional banking model. Rather, they focus on novel and innovative teaching and learning practices based on the praxis of the entire learning community, empowering learners to actively seek with high levels of interest moments of liminality/sacramentality/conation and gifted behaviors. Freire, by opposing false concepts that create mistrust, supports the efforts of the reform models to facilitate the

creation of safe, genuine and intentional learning centers where the power of learning is placed in the hands of the learners themselves, with careful and exquisite expert guidance. These historically less powerful actors on the educational stage are empowered by the implementation of reform models, and specifically transescent learners benefit.

In terms of the other components of this dialogue, there is a need to seek missing voices. Freire might ask "where are the oppressed voices in this conversation" and "who are the privileged in this scenario?" Gilligan could ask how all genders are impacted by the nature of these mutual considerations. The voice of Osmer in this conversation may be heard as, "What is really going on?" The Whiteheads may ask "How are we engaging the conversation with a sense of faithfulness and as we see each in the image of God?" The commitments of both the MSP and the PCM groups involve a commitment toward inclusivity and a celebration of diversity. But these blanket statements are not enough without practical applications of curricular activities that incorporate such commitments. It is helpful to point to the intent of the PCM to include diversity in its basic structure. As the authors continue to articulate each parallel in their model, they point to differentiated processes, products and resources that engage the diversity of learners, including such points of diversity such as socioeconomic status, gender, learning style, exceptionality, ethnicity, and native language.[131] The PCM as a method of enticing gifted behaviors from a diverse body of learners, works with the MSP to encourage unified communal learning by intentionally teaching effective respect and acceptance of each other as valuable members of the learning community.[132]

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[131] Tomlinson et al., *Parallel Curriculum*, 132-140.
[132] Kindred et al., *The Middle School Curriculum*, 105.

Groome, too, makes many points where diversity should be considered in the process of learning and engaging in SCP. One key phrase out of many that indicates that the commitment to SCP toward diversity and inclusion is exemplified by the following passage:

> Jesus' style of ministry empowered people as agent-subjects in history, to be free to live their truth in response to their awareness of God's will and presence. He repudiated the social mores that objectified and discriminated against people on any basis, and invited all to "fullness of life." (John 10:10) His way of treating the poor, the hungry, the sick, the oppressed, the sinners, the excluded, welcoming them into his community of disciples, reflects a radical commitment that all people might live as subjects in right relationship…He empowered people to see and hear for themselves, to reflect on their lives in the world, and to make decisions to live as if God reigns.[133]

Moore is committed to engaging from within the diversity of the Body of Christ, as she spends time articulating how to "remember the dismembered," thereby liberating the oppressed and celebrating the uniqueness of all members of the faith community's learners.[134] The overwhelming assertion concerning the missing voices is that there is a mutual commonality from among the conversation partners to not exclude but rather to radically include all in the richness of their diversity and giftedness. The gifts and talents of the whole body of learners as the faithful people gathered before Christ empowers the entire community's diverse ways of being disciples in God's world.

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[133] Groome, *Sharing Faith,* 304.
[134] Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 65-67.

Focusing on the PCM specifically as conversation partner with the CRE community of voices has led to an interest in how there may be congruence with the commitments of the CRE partners and the four strands of the PCM, and particularly for transescent learners in congregational education programs. As Fowler points out, it is adolescents who typically begin to engage his Stage 3, a Synthetic-Conventional Faith. Existing at the beginnings of or immediately before the onset of puberty, transescents have a very special relationship with themselves (cognitively, psychologically, and physically), each other, the world and God. Fowler writes:

> Puberty brings with it a revolution in physical and emotional life. The adolescent needs mirrors – mirrors to keep tabs on this week's growth, to become accustomed to the new angularity of a face and to the new curves or reach of a body. But in a qualitatively new way the young person also looks for mirrors of another sort. He or she needs the eyes and ears of a few trusted others in which to the see the image of *person*-ality emerging and to get a hearing for the new feelings, insights, anxieties and commitments that are forming and seeking expression.[135]

With the MSP, the PCM offers developmental opportunities, and, in line with the arguments of this study, opportunities for faith development. This concept will be developed as the pastoral response and presented in the final chapter. Each of the parallels in the PCM are opportunities for rich engagement, appropriate development and formation for transescent learners, in accordance with their stages of faith development.

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[135] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 151.

Therefore, emerging from this dialogue is a proposal to organize the conversation into specifics by linking the world of the CRE with the patterns of the PCM.

The Core Curriculum parallel presents the key information to be learned in the particular time period given, and in CRE this information is typically referred to as the catechesis – what is to be learned at the very least so that learners know the basics of the religious commitments of their particular strands of faith. The Core of the PCM provides a useful organizational tool that educators can use to assemble lists of goals and specific objectives that are to be accomplished in the designated time period. It also offers a way of organizing the innovative pedagogical activities that can be used in order to "transmit" the objectives to learners. In the PCM, the pedagogical methods are of equal importance to the curriculum objectives, thereby making it quite unique from among the family of reform models.[136] In the CRE context, special attention should be paid in this respect, since, even though this could be seen as reinforcing Freire's viewpoint directly, it is a departure from most understandings and implementations of curriculum. The assertion, then, is that in this dialogical organizational component, CRE can benefit from not only the practical features of the Core parallel, but also from its foundational philosophy of implementation.

The Connections parallel offers yet another unique organizational feature for this dialogue. Connections is about engaging in linking together ideas, concepts, resources, and knowledge within and across the various areas of curriculum. Again, pedagogical strategies remain *as* important as the planning of the curriculum design. In this parallel, it could be argued that the pedagogical nature of planning is more important than the

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[136] Tomlinson et al., *Parallel Curriculum Model*, 80-81.

actual curriculum objectives.[137] Connections provides opportunities for relational

thinking and for dialogical and analogical thinking and performances. One way of

thinking about the Connections parallel is to see the learners as detectives, actively

searching with high levels of interest for meaning and new ways of understanding. CRE

can utilize the potential of this parallel to frame key questions from transescents

disciples-in-formation, helping them to be empowered and "allowed" to ask questions, to

record those questions as valid, and then to seek answers within the faith community and

from provided resources. A significant portion of what it means to be a disciple is

connecting what is known to what is unknown, as well as recognizing areas that may

remain unknown. Connections is where transescents begin to meet and interview

different stakeholders of their faith communities.

Inherent in the PCM is a commitment to reflective practice, which is similar to

praxis. The Practice parallel affords the opportunity to plan for the intentionality of

praxis, with the intent that it does not occur only within this parallel component, but also

across all the components for a life of faith. The pedagogical practices in this parallel are

critical, as are those in the other parallels. CRE stakeholders can utilize the Practice

parallel to engage transescent learners as burgeoning practitioners of their own faith. As

they engage in SCP across the learning process, they have a place in Practice to be

introduced to, to try and to hone the process over time. These young practitioners of their

own faith can engage real life problems and spend time engaging directly with elders and

more experienced practitioners such as lay leaders, pastoral staff, and others in an effort

to learn with them the emerging tenets and commitments of what it means to be a

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[137] Tomlinson et al., 117-118.

member of the faith community and a disciple. Faith formation at this level is helpful in creating reflective and contributing members of the faith community by way of self-discovery and engagement.

Identity is crucial for transescent learners since they are at a developmental age where they are exploring and seeking ways of understanding their own identities. The PCM stops short of calling this a curriculum component that encourages moral development, but the crossover to the CRE provides options for developing morality and ethics in light of faith and in light of simply being a responsible human being. Identity in the PCM is partly about career exploration from a real-world investigation perspective, and with respect to the CRE conjunction, this is where there are opportunities for young faith practitioners to explore and begin to solidify their vocations as disciples in the body of Christ. Vocational discernment is a resonating piece of what SCP is about, and it happens, as Groome suggests it, in community. Providing an intentional place and time where SCP can lead to ongoing vocational discernment as members of a faith community could prove fruitful not only for the learners and specific congregations themselves, but also for procuring the future of faith communities in the world of tomorrow.

As the conversation moves from attending to asserting, this is a partial dialogue, but it directs this study toward a faithful pastoral response that benefits the communities of faith who engage in CRE, and the wider community. There are strategic challenges with the separation of church and state, but in an ever-evolving world of academic interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, responses will be appropriately formed to benefit the context of all stakeholders. Challenges will continue to emerge, and this research will evolve to meet the needs of those stakeholders. The focus of this study is

on transescent learners; however, the hope is that the emerging creative pastoral response will benefit other levels of religious education beyond transescent learners and beyond congregational CRE programs. The conversation will continue, and the future of the faith will be impacted by stakeholders committed to formulating a reality that does not yet exist. This study is one step toward the effort to keep changing the world and to make it a better place since it is and as all Creation is God's.

CHAPTER SIX. PASTORAL RESPONSE & ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

The third and final stage of the Whiteheads' method for accomplishing theological reflection is that of pastoral response. In this stage, the practitioner(s) utilizing the model attempts to move from the insight gained through attending and asserting to an action or a proposed action. The Whiteheads write:

> The reflective process leads us to a deeper appreciation of the religious heritage and the ambiguous power of its symbols in the faith community today. The deeper appreciation is a "traditional awareness" out of which faithful action can flow. So, the critical test of reflection *in ministry* is not simply the quality of the insight to which it leads but the quality of the pastoral response which is its fruit.[138]

This reality creates a daunting internal intellectual challenge that can be difficult to meet. The efforts of this study were to engage in divergent arenas of scholarly research and literature to bring those voices together in conversation in order to provide a helpful process for its stakeholders. The following pastoral response benefits the CRE programs in congregational communities of faith where transescents are members of its learning programs, but the intent is that both sides of the dialogue benefit, as well as the broader educational community.

This project has attempted to create a framework from a unique educational reform model called the Parallel Curriculum Model in order to facilitate a new way of envisioning CRE programs in congregations. By borrowing the organizational framework and transforming it through dialogical interaction, a philosophical paradigm

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[138] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 86.

emerged as pastoral response. It is important to note that this particular pastoral response is a theological and philosophical one upon which further input and criticism for development will be welcome and from which practical implementation strategies will emerge as the research continues. By no means is this meant to be a perfect, static, or hard and fast model. In the spirit of engagement and transformation, this research is meant to spawn further work, dialogue, action, and further methodological design production.

The theological reflections on transescence and on giftedness have helped to inform the pastoral response here by offering a framework of love. The lone example of Jesus as transescent offers a critical view of how little Scripture addresses the spiritual needs of this particular age group. Jesus acted in accordance with the corresponding life stages of development as an early adolescent, and a spiritual gifted behavior of engagement emerged from an experience of disobedience and later reconciliation. The spiritually gifted behavior that Jesus showed in the Luke narrative referenced in Chapter Four resulted from a combination of his transescent behavioral characteristics along with theological creativity, religious volition, and high levels of spiritual capability. This theological approach reframes Renzulli's Three-Ring Model and fashions in a way that assists us in re-envisioning CRE design and planning.

Spiritual giftedness results from an overlap of high levels of spiritual ability, employment of theological creativity and religious volition. The graphic representation of this refashioning of the gifted model helps CRE stakeholders consider the pieces of engagement as they work to create more effective curriculum and pedagogy for the education programs within congregations. Another result from the theological

engagement of Chapter Four is to understand spiritual giftedness as a process of discovery, experimentation and practice. Transescents who are offered spiritually safe learning environments in faith communities can engage in the exploration of possible spiritual gifts. Just as Jesus experimented with his spiritual gift of engagement, he was able to transform his learning experience into life-altering possibilities for himself as well as his mother and family. Even though he was admonished by his mother for his disobedience, that predictable structure of discipline allowed for a safe avenue toward reconciliation, and his transformative experience was not impeded. Safe places for engaging in theological discovery allow for disciplinary structures while also offering the grace of reconciliation.

Even though Paul's lessons in 1 Corinthians elicit an equitable respect for all forms of spiritual gifts, there is one spiritual gift that rises above. This gift of love permeates and connects all other theological expressions of giftedness. The theological reflection of spiritual giftedness led to a conclusion that teaching for discovery, experimentation and practice of spiritual gifts must be grounded in Christlike love at all levels – brainstorming, designing, planning, implementation, and evaluation. In an effort to facilitate the organization and categorization of spiritual gifts under the auspice of Christlike love, the research of Chapter Four led to the utilization of the Phoenix Affirmations three categories: (1) The Love of God, (2) The Love of Neighbor, and (3) the Love of Self. While perhaps not all expressions of spiritual giftedness may fit neatly into these three organizational structures, recognizing that the mystery of God manifested in the Holy Spirits apportionment of spiritual gifts, the structure does lend itself to use for

planning curricular and pedagogical activities that focus on love as the common connection among divergent expressions of spiritual giftedness.

Another discovery in the research is one that partners well with the second organizational structure: The Love of Neighbor. CRE programs must not ignore the diversifying factors of all of its stakeholders. Using the spiritual gifts of the community, it is important to constantly ask questions like "Whose voices are missing in our curriculum planning?" or "Have we made appropriate accommodations for the various needs of differing genders? Likewise, we must intentionally work as much as possible to remember the voices of seminal authors such as Freire who instructs us to identify those being oppressed and work to empower them. We live in a global reality in which points of diversity in the Body of Christ are omnipresent, though sometimes ignored, often unintentionally. Technology and mass media are realities that bring people closer together in one but separate us in others. As we re-envision Christian religious education programs, we should consider the present reality and respond pastorally. It is often not helpful to deny or to negate global movements and transitions in culture, but rather to engage them out of love for God, neighbor, and self.

Finally, the ongoing discussion about conation must be considered when planning for spiritually educational contexts. By putting into dialogue the major voices in CRE who address religious learning and the voices from gifted education, the research brings new opportunities for consideration and dialogue concerning the concept of conation. There seems to be a possible link between conation and spiritually gifted behavior. Where theological creativity, religious volition and spiritual capability meet, there emerges a high probably for conation. These conative moments or activities are also

complemented by a sacramental liminality. If these discoveries are considered and discussed in the re-envisioning of CRE design and planning, then learning can claim a sacramental status from its moments of encounter with God through acts of loving discovery, experimentation, and practice. Embracing spiritual giftedness expressed by acts of Christlike love brings a new mindset to the CRE process.

The rationale for this response and resulting original contribution to the field of CRE is to provide an example of an opening dialogue between the CRE academy and the educational reform model academy. The author of this study remains bi-vocational both as clergy and pastor as well as educational practitioner in the public-school arena. From over 27 years of experience in education and 15 years of ordained ministry, the intent was to combine diverse areas into a dialogue based on a need for confluence, especially for the re-envisioning of how CRE is done in congregations. The future of the Christian faith remains a concern in the hearts and conversations of religious leaders. This pastoral response is a faithful attempt to provide practical options for consideration and potential use as well as for further development. What follows is a theoretical framework that is a culminating set of ideas from the limited dialogue provided in Chapter Five.

A Congregational Model of Christian Religious Education for Transescents

The Parallel Curriculum Model, presented in Chapter Three as one of the most important reform movements in the K12 educational world in the United States, offers the unifying paradigm for re-envisioning CRE programs. This model focuses on incorporating theological frameworks in an effort to offer a more transformative framework of use for congregational programs, in this case specifically for transescents children from ages ten to fourteen. Aspects of ideologies from the CRE conversation

partners presented in Chapter Two are incorporated, according to their appropriate usefulness in this venture of practical theology for the religious education movement. As the future unfolds in the world of faith, this new model and corresponding frameworks will provoke ongoing and efficacious dialogue, even including other reform models and CRE scholars. The underlying commitment for the development of this model is to provide new, different, fresh, and open ways of providing religious education programming.

Considering the organizational structures of the PCM in light of the theological discoveries in this research enhances the creation of a new model for envisioning how to implement CRE in the 21st Century. While the PCM does not directly address moral development, it does offer promise in that area with its commitment to differentiation. It aims to provide opportunities for learners of different socioeconomic and cultural realities as well as those speakers of varying native languages, ethnicity, race, gender and other diversifying characteristics. By seeing spiritual giftedness as a work of love, then it is key to remember that all spiritual gifts, including those gifts originating from all points of diversity, are equitably valuable to the whole membership of the Body of Christ.

The Reflexive Religious Education Model at a Glance

This new model, entitled the Reflexive Religious Education Model (RREM), consists of four parallels adapted from the dialogue between Christian religious education literature and reform models, and specifically an originating framework from the Parallel Curriculum Model. There are the four parallels: (1) Building a Catechetical Core (BCC), (2) Connecting the Faith Community (CFC), (3) Engaging in a Pedagogy of Praxis (EPP), and (4) Developing Christian Identity (DCI). In the discussion below, each of

these parallels will be articulated in further detail. It is important to note that, similar to the philosophical and practical concepts of the Parallel Curriculum Model, these organizational features are intended to be parallels, and not presented as a hierarchy. Further research outside of this study will hopefully support the concept that, in planning and designing Christian religious education curriculum, there is an equal importance of written curriculum objectives and pedagogical activities. Through the conversation presented in Chapter Five, both the commitment to the fluidity, overlap and continuity of the parallels and the importance of the pedagogical activities are critical in implementing this theoretical framework. As a pastoral response, this original contribution is shared in the spirit of hope for the future of the faith to inspire educational ingenuity in teaching and learning in religious contexts.

Building a Catechetical Core (BCC)

Based on what the Parallel Curriculum Model (PCM) terms the "core" or base curriculum, BCC is a collection of traditions, history, creeds, core principles, knowledge and skills that a particular CRE program creates (or sustains) as its basic tenets that their faith tradition desires to pass on to future generations. This process is one of building a catechetical core. By regarding *learning* as an actual sacramental act (taking this concept from Moore and extending it), CRE teachers must build knowledge and experience around what a sacrament and the resulting sacramentality are. The sacramentality of those moments of liminal "God encounters" inform not only the development of curriculum objectives in this parallel, but also the creation and implementation of innovative pedagogical activities. As CRE practitioners work to develop curriculum

plans for the BCC, catechetical components such as critical doctrines and affirmations provide the basis.

It is imperative that this parallel not fall into a pattern of dispensing a "banking model" that Freire has argued against in the literature. Reform models in education, dating back to the MSP and the Three-Ring Model, among others not listed in this study, moved away from the banking model decades ago. A central component of the practical theology of teaching and learning catechesis in this new framework is to provide unique learning activities that are rich in engagement, so as to promote "gifted behavior" out of moments of sacramental liminality. Real-world problem-solving, investigative learning, collaboration/cooperative learning, role-playing and other activities must be part of the pedagogy of not only this parallel, but of all parallels. The temptation in this first parallel, is that the BCC could be seen as what is to be taught and learned in totality, but that is not the case. Innovative pedagogical practices for this parallel may actually begin, continue or end (or all) in other parallels. The fluidity of the parallels is one of its key features.

Stakeholders in congregations who are implementing this model should plan together and identify the basic knowledge, and then develop ways to connect to other parallels. Furthermore, the developmental needs of particular age groups, transescents for example in this study, must also be considered during planning. Vertical planning, as presented in the MSP portion of the dialogue in this study is instrumental in creating a learning-centered congregational model. Unification of the curriculum is part of the process of creating and planning each parallel and its components. The RREM is committed to flexibility and vertical planning throughout the model.

Examples of how CRE practitioners may organize the planning of BCC include the outlining and mapping of catechetical knowledge and then planning for conative activities pedagogically. It is important to consider all parallels and to not get mired into focusing solely on the basic knowledge. For instance, a Sunday School teacher may desire her 4th grade students to acquire a particular piece of knowledge about the Apostle's Creed. Instead of reading through the creed itself as the gathering activity and then hoping for a beneficial discussion by the students, teachers may look to a professor at a local seminary or university who specializes in the area of creeds and have that person present about it in class first, which would be looking to another parallel for inception of the activity, and then students can engage it more by having lived the experience of interacting with an actual practitioner. New learning relationships holistically affect the way learners approach the process of learning.

Connecting the Faith Community (CFC)

This strand of the RREM model is adapted from the PCM's "Curriculum of Connections." Educators speak of building a community in a classroom, and connecting learners to each other, experts, concepts, disciplines, and themes. CFC takes those foundations and allows CRE practitioners, scholars and leaders to build community by way of connecting to not only a core catechesis (history/tradition) but also to culture and experience (moving between individual and communal experience). This parallel is focused on learners making connections not only with new information and ideas, but also on making connections with each other, with God, the community of faith and the world itself. Educational research has shown that moments of liminal sacramentality occur when high levels of energy and interest elicit task commitment for learning. The

CFC provides support and nurture not just from the teacher, but also from the small and large group of learners in a congregation. For transescents, connecting socially by finding commonalities and creating community, along with connecting knowledge are both extremely important. The practical theology of this parallel includes the implementation of practical experiences of team building, learning how to work together as disciples, and how to solve problems through the connection of ideas. As conflicts and areas of confusion emerge, the connecting of the community members and the connecting of the ideas learned in that community take on the form of community problem solving for the greater good.

Being in community and connecting with one another: recognizing, respecting, accepting, and celebrating points of diversity, creates a model for the unification of God's people. Young people, especially transescents, struggle with unity from within and during the onset and advancement of puberty. The engagement of creating connections assists in the development of healthy coping strategies. This aspect of the affective domain is key not only to this parallel but throughout all the parallels. In the CLC, the affective domain does take on a larger role, especially in the creation and sustaining of a faithful learning community of disciples. In this parallel, learners also begin to encounter elders who are introduced, invited to provide small talks for exposure and connection, and observed as role model disciples. The experiences of connecting with these elders in the church then becomes part of the engagement of pedagogically appropriate monitored collaborative discussions. The intent is to create not only the connections, but also to provoke interest in developing the learners' own roles in the faith community for the future.

Engaging in a Pedagogy of Praxis (EPP)

Frierie's work is seminal in CRE research, and it is his research which will assist in eliciting engagement in a "pedagogy of practice." It is clear that practicing offers an opportunity to achieve the ability to execute an activity more naturally and more quickly. A pedagogy of practice works best when that practice is reflective, and the practical theology term is "praxis." Frierie's commitment to having learners be co-creators of knowledge, an adaptation from the PCMs "curriculum of practice," allows for a community of learners to be co-creators of the community and of its subsequent shared praxis. Groome's model of shared Christian praxis is at the center of this parallel. While the idea of SCP is to develop activities in all parallels, as well as in the faith community at large, it is in the Engaging in a Pedagogy of Praxis (EPP) parallel where young people begin to learn how to engage as practitioners of their own faith.

In the EPP, young practitioners of faith take their observations and connections to a deeper level. It is important to note that the reflexive nature of these parallels may see learners having developed a deep capacity for practice in one area and then use that skill in the CFC parallel to the need to engage in another practice. An example would be a young person who has a specific ability of giftedness in the way of musical contributions to the liturgy of worship. The deep connection to the music of the liturgy may lead to a connection with the history and traditions of liturgy, which then may reflexively lead to a deeper appreciation and praxis in the EPP parallel. In the EPP, learners go beyond connections with the elders and other leaders of their faith community and develop deeper understandings of their roles, while beginning to envision themselves as future leaders. In this parallel, faith leaders of various areas of congregational life are invited

into the CRE classroom, not just to be introduced or to speak briefly, as in the CFC, but, instead, elders plan with the classroom instructor to be involved in the learning process, modeling a way of sharing what it means to be a disciple. In the next step, both the teacher and guest engage learners in praxis, reflecting on what it means to have relationships and understandings with elders.

In the EPP, Shared Christian Praxis is of primary importance. SCP should underline every pedagogical activity that occurs in this parallel. Outcomes of this parallel include helping to form learners as practitioners of their own faith but enabling them to see themselves as valuable members of the faith community and to provoke them into envisioning themselves as leaders. Transescents not only long for connection as in the CFC, but they also enjoy looking forward to what is to come. The EPP helps transescents see themselves not just as practitioners of their own faith, but also helps them look forward to being elders with a variety of gifts within the faithful community as a member of the Body of Christ. In this parallel, interaction with clergy would be helpful so that young people who may be starting to feel a call to ministry may have direct conversations with an expert in that journey.

Developing Christian Identity (DCI)

Developing Christian Identity takes the PCM concept of identity and employs that ideology within the concept of Christian vocation, to build an ever-evolving, progressively renewing sense of what it means to be a disciple, in identity and vocation, within a Christian community and in larger society. This facet of the model reflects on questions such as "what does it mean to be a prophetic voice" rather than questions of "what does it mean to be a Christian," which is a question for the core parallel. These

questions are to be continually revisited and revised, reinterpreted and reformed in every part of this model. As in the other parallels, the DCI is not meant to be a final or ultimate "stage," but rather an ever cycling, growing reflective hermeneutic of living as a Christian disciple. It is about an action of "employing" (as in Christian vocation) one's identity for the transformation and salvation of the world, the proliferation of the church, for laying claim to the power of the Holy Spirit, for engaging the message of Christ as a disciple, and for radically renewing the kin-dom of God.

The DCI provides for advanced opportunities to do "research" on particular avenues of Christian vocation. In other parallels, learners are connecting and practicing what it might be like to have particular roles, and even to experiment briefly in assuming those roles. This parallel is about engaging on the deepest level with what it means to understand roles as a part of identity formation. Ultimately, Christian vocation is progressive and ongoing throughout life, but in the DCI, learners can exist in a safe place and time for real discussions about life and living as a faithful member of society. This parallel is where the difficult questions are engaged, such as "What is my purpose in the kin-dom of God?" and "What does it mean for me specifically to identify as Christian?" In the effort toward ongoing formation as practitioners of their own faith, learners in this parallel can safely ask the difficult questions in community, looking for authentic responses as well sometimes not being able to formulate or find an answer. Learning how to live with issues such as cognitive dissonance, ambiguity and unsolvable doubt is what the offers.

Perhaps what is most important is that the DCI is where moral development is emphasized by way of investigative and real-life experiences. In this parallel, as learners

continue to engage in learning about the deeper aspects of Christian vocation, they engage in questions like "Why does the church say this is wrong, and why don't I believe that?" In response to the world, learners in this parallel tackle other difficult questions such as "Why does God allow sickness and poverty?" Learners learn what it means to be considered a "villain" or "hero" in a theological sense, connecting to what they have learned through the process of the BCC as well as in the other parallels. Once again, this model is flexible, so it is highly probable for transescents to come to class already holding some of these difficult questions in their souls, and, in efforts to maintain the spirit of SCP, they may choose to dive deeply into such questions, realizing they need to learn some core knowledge from the BCC or to make some connections with elders first before they journey toward a fuller understanding of those deeper doubts.

In Chapter Four, it is emphasized that building learning environments that are theologically and spiritually safe is important to the process of building new knowledge and experience, including the practicing of spiritual giftedness. In the DCI parallel, we find the most potentially emotionally volatile arena for learning. Safe places to learn that are guarded by intentionally set agreements becoming critical in creating opportunities for authentic learning, especially in the DCI. Even if CRE practitioners have previously discussed and set guidelines and expectations from the learning group, it bears reiterating that this parallel may be one in which the repetitive nature of clearly stated guidelines be revisited. The unifying concept of love is to not be forgotten, and that commonality of the greatest of the spiritual gifts is one that is learned by practice and re-engagement over the course of given time periods. Where the development of Christian identity is

concerned, it is yet another critical moment to reinforce Christlike love of God, neighbor and self to ensure safe learning for all learners.

Final Reflections on the RREM

The interdisciplinary dialogue that was facilitated by this study along with the theological reflections of transescence and spiritual giftedness led to a rich engagement. Looking at conation as occurring when spiritually gifted behavior happens is an opportunity for further rich discussion. As the transescent, Jesus engaged in "the business of the Father" in Luke, so must CRE programs continue to revise and re-invent themselves to be about that same work. The underlying motivation of that work Jesus begins at age twelve in the Temple, as a disobedient transescent, is the same connector of the work that we must do to continue to reach young people and shape the future of the faith; it must be about love – love for God, love for neighbor and love for self. These three must live in equanimity not only in the world of CRE, but also in the reality of discipleship at all levels of the faith community.

CRE is about changing the world through the eyes of the faithful, to bring love through empowerment, to educate young people appropriately for their developmental needs, and to encourage spiritual giftedness by provoking a sacramentality of conation. We take our cue as disciples of Christ who calls us to make the world a better place in God's name. The Holy Spirit offers us multiple and diverse spiritual gifts, just as we are diverse members of the Body of believers. These components of our call as Christian religious educators and scholars form the foundation of work in the church. Continuing to encourage dialogue in the CRE contexts as well as with the diverse voices of other disciplines in educational institutions should guide ongoing evaluations of what we are to

do to pass on the faith and help shape the minds of the members of the future church in the spirit of the greatest of the spiritual gifts: Love.

The RREM is a first attempt to facilitate a novel, interdisciplinary conversation between two fields of education practice. It is presented here as both pastoral response and as conversation starter. Sunday School is near and dear to my heart as the author of this study, as reflected in the introduction. In addition, my experiences as a public-school educator have enriched my understanding of the need to engage in this practical theological discussion. Faith communities and their mostly volunteer education staff remain in charge of the task of educating those who will literally embody the future of Christianity. That task can be daunting, but I cannot imagine higher callings than to touch the future of the church. As educators, we are expected to work miracles out of the miracles we have experienced ourselves. To touch the future of the faith is a beautiful task of the teaching disciple of Christ and to work for transformative justice through faith is to be God's hands and feet on Earth right in present times. May we keep believing. May we keep teaching. May we keep changing the world.

Appendix A

Taxonomy of Behavioral Manifestations of Giftedness

Above Average Ability

General Ability
- High levels of abstract thinking, verbal and numerical reasoning, spatial relations, memory and word fluency.
- Adaptation to and the shaping of novel situations encountered in the external environment.
- The automatization of information processing. Rapid, accurate and selective retrieval of information.

Specific Ability
- The application of various combinations of the above general abilities to one or more specialized areas of knowledge or areas of human performance (e.g., the arts, leadership, administration).
- The capacity for acquiring and making appropriate use of advanced amounts of formal knowledge, tacit knowledge, technique, logistics, and strategy in the pursuit of particular problems or the manifestation of specialized areas of performance.
- The capacity to sort out relevant and irrelevant information associated with a particular problem or area of study or performance.

Task Commitment
- The capacity for high levels of interest, enthusiasm, fascination and involvement in a particular problem, area of study or form of human expression.
- The capacity for perseverance, endurance, determination, hard work and dedicated practice.
- Self-confidence, a strong ego, and a belief in one's ability to carry out important work, freedom from inferiority feelings and drive to achieve.
- The ability to identify significant problems within specialized areas. The ability to tune into major channels of communication and new developments within given fields.
- Setting high standards for one's work, maintaining an openness to self and external criticism, developing an aesthetic sense of taste, quality and excellence about one's own work and the work of others.

Creativity
- Fluency, flexibility, and originality of thought.
- Openness to experience; receptive to that which is new and different (even irrational) in thoughts, actions, and products of oneself and others.
- Curious, speculative, adventurous and "mentally playful." Willing to take risks in thought and action, even to the point of being uninhibited.

Sensitive to detail, aesthetic characteristics of ideas and things. Willing to act upon and react to external stimulation and ones' own ideas and feelings.

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