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Initiating the Creation of a Procedurally Secular Society through Dialogic RE. The Three Realms.

‘Secularism is no longer that element of neutrality, which opens up space for freedom for all’ (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI)

Introduction

Drawing upon a lengthy interview with the then Cardinal Ratzinger in the Italian newspaper, *La Repubblica*, both UK journalists, Bruce Johnston and Jonathan Petre, write an article for a November 2004 edition of the *Daily Telegraph* that engages with the problem of secularisation faced by the Catholic Church (Johnston and Petre, 2004). Typically, they portray the word “secular” in oppositional terms to religion and continue with the common usage of the secular/religious dyad. However, in so doing, they overlook an important point: the link between secularism and neutrality. As another journalist, Peter Kearney, and official spokesperson for the Catholic Church in Scotland points out:

A secular society is a good thing. The Church is totally supportive of that and always has been – that is a very fundamental Christian principle, the idea of the separation of Church and state. (Duffy, 2016)

This approval for a secular society which comprises a secular or neutral space brings to mind the work of Robert Markus and his 2006 book, *Christianity and the Secular*, in which he recalls the original use of the term *secular* being used in the context of a three realms’ model of society.

Three realms model of society

According to Markus there arose in early Christianity an understanding that society comprises three realms namely, the sacred, the profane, and the secular; and he defines these realms as follows:

- a) *Sacred* - ‘...will be roughly coextensive with the sphere of Christian religious belief, practises, institutions and cult’ e.g. participating in mass, attending Bible studies class, etc.
- b) *Profane* - ‘...will be close to what has to be rejected in the surrounding culture, practises, institutions...’ e.g. abortion, pornography, etc.
- c) *Secular* - ‘...does not have such connotations of radical opposition to the sacred; it is more neutral, capable of being accepted or adapted...’ e.g. attending school, discussion in a pub, etc. (Markus, 2006: 5-6)

This paper intends to demonstrate, first, through argumentation, that such a *three realms’ model of society* is beneficial not only to the Catholic Church as it contends with secularisation but to all; and, second, through school-based research, that such a societal model should build upon dialogic pedagogy.

Catholic Church and secularisation

There are thus two different readings of modernity and with that, two different readings of how the Church should engage the contemporary world. While the Whigs want the Church to accommodate the culture of modernity, the Augustinians favour a much more critical stance. (Rowland, 2005)

In response to the challenge posed by modernity and secularisation, theologian Tracy Rowland asserts that two major movements have arisen within the Catholic Church namely, Augustinian Thomism and Whig Thomism. The former rejects secularisation which it perceives to be toxic (Weigel, 2013) whilst the latter seeks accommodation as it holds secularisation to be underpinned by liberal values that have their roots in Christianity (Rolheiser, 2016; Smith, 2008). Ultimately, though, both movements have a similar strategic aim of reclaiming “lost ground” for Christianity. For the Augustinian Thomists this will be a re-creation of Christendom whilst for the Whig Thomists this will be a re-Christianisation of Western societies’ liberal values. However, the prospects of success for both sets of Thomists appear to be slim (Xxxx, 2018).

Ultimate and subordinate ends and the principle of self-limitation

Another possible approach, though, is the Thomistic concept of “ultimate ends and subordinate ends”. As Augustine Di Noia outlines at his Faith & Reason Institute Lecture, ‘Divine Wisdom and Christian Humanism,’ 23 February, 2000:

It was one of the great contributions of Aquinas to western thought to have shown that to say ‘ultimate’ is not to say ‘exclusive.’ (Rather it is) to say that no other subordinate end could ever take the place of the ultimate end, but it doesn’t mean that subordinate ends couldn’t be pursued.

Rather than seeking the ultimate end of re-creating Christendom or re-Christianising Western societies a more profitable route for both Augustinian and Whig Thomists may be the creation of a three-realms’ model of society in which the secular realm is strengthened. Not only is this a more realistic ambition; but also for Augustinian and Whig Thomists it can legitimately be pursued as a subordinate end.

Adoption of the strategy of seeking subordinate ends rather than ultimate ends necessitates the Catholic Church embracing the principle of self-limitation. This requires the Church to impose upon herself the self-limitation of not making ‘...a direct appeal to the absolute, a transcendent notion of ultimate truth, [as this] is a step outside the bounds of reasoned public discourse’ (Calhoun et al 2011: 19). Thus, for the creation of a three realms’ society with a fortified secular realm, the admission price for the Catholic Church is the self-imposition of a vow of silence regarding transcendent, revealed knowledge with a focus, rather, on human reasoning.

Such an approach garners support from Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who comments:

What, then, ought we to do? ...I am in broad agreement with Jürgen Habermas’ remarks about a post-secular society, about the willingness to learn from each other, and about self-limitation on both sides. (Ratzinger, 2006: 77)

Somewhat surprisingly, this expansion of the role of religion in the public sphere has been mooted by no less a figure than Jürgen Habermas, regarded as ‘...the personification of liberal, individual, and secular thinking’ (Schuller, 2006: 15). In a revision of his earlier thinking and writings, Habermas (2006: 51) now argues for a *post-secular society* in which he envisions that:

The neutrality of the state authority on questions of world views guarantees the same ethical freedom to every citizen... When secularized citizens act in their role as citizens of the state, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth. Nor must they refuse their believing fellow citizens the right to make contributions in a religious language to public debates.

Habermas' vision is of a post-secular society in which religion returns to a renewed public sphere in which religious imagery and language are freely used. Other eminent liberal theorists have also revised their views of religion in the public sphere e.g. John Rawls who accepts in a late work '...that religiously motivated arguments should be accepted as publicly valid...' (Calhoun, 2011: 78).

Moreover, if the secular realm in such a society is one in which the public sphere of debate is marked by self-limitation, then the liberal traditions will also need to accept the self-limitations of restraint from advocacy of secularist ideologies that contend religion should be banished from the public sphere; and secularization ideologies in which religion is held to be a purely private matter. Hence, the adoption of the principle of self-limitation necessitates that the underpinning liberal traditions be those of *political liberalism* and not *comprehensive liberalism*. As advocated by John Locke, political liberalism envisions a society in which persons from diverse traditions alter their ways of acting and thinking in response to conversations with others; and this takes place in an environment supported by the values of freedom and tolerance (Wright, 2013).

Procedurally secular society

A three realms' model of society with a fortified secular realm or renewed public sphere is regarded by such as Rowan Williams to be procedurally secular. That is to say, in his view '...it is possible to imagine a "procedurally" secular society... which is always open to being persuaded by confessional or ideological argument on particular issues, but is not committed to privileging permanently any one confessional group' (Williams, 2007: 334). Unlike programmatic secularism, which strives for a public sphere empty of religious views, procedural secularism welcomes '...fair and open argument about how common life should

be run because everyone argues on the same basis... [of] “public reason”.’ (Williams, 2007: 329) Within such a society people from all walks of life have a voice, their views are respected, and there is genuine dialogue.

Support from the Catholic Church for this politically liberal vision of a procedurally secular society is found in the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (2005) with his *missa pro ecclesia* to the College of Cardinals in the Sistine chapel,

I address everyone... to assure them that the Church wants to continue to weave an open and sincere dialogue with them, in the search for the true good of the human being and of society... and declare the willingness of all Catholics to cooperate for an authentic social development, respectful of the dignity of every human being... so that mutual understanding may create the conditions for a better future for all.

The creation of a procedurally secular civilization requires the Catholic Church to pursue the subordinate end of a fair, just society and not the ultimate end of a Christian society. The pursuit of such a subordinate end is in accord with the longstanding support of the Church for a secular society that separates Church from state. Although separate, both state and Church act in a complementary fashion for the common good as attested by the plea from Pope Francis that ‘Everyone must be committed to building a society that is truly just and caring’ (Guardian, 01 January 2014). Indeed, Pope Francis points to how this might be achieved with this affirmation of the desire of his predecessor for ‘open and sincere dialogue’ namely,

...I consider essential for facing the present moment: constructive dialogue... When leaders in various fields ask me for advice, my response is always the same: dialogue, dialogue, dialogue. (Pope Francis 27 July 2013; as quoted in Sherman, 2015)

This desire for dialogue is strongly evident within recent Vatican proclamations concerning education. In mid-April 2017, the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) published *Educating to fraternal humanism* and, in paragraph 12, it speaks of “fraternal humanism” as ‘...a “grammar of dialogue,” as pointed out by Pope Francis, able to ‘build bridges and... to find answers to the challenges of our time’. And such learning for fraternal humanism begins within the classroom as the CCE (2017: Para. 14) claims:

Education to fraternal humanism has the weighty responsibility of providing a formation of citizens so as to imbue them with an appropriate culture of dialogue. Moreover, the intercultural dimension is frequently experienced in classrooms of all levels... so it is from there that we must start to spread the culture of dialogue.

So, a procedurally secular society is for the benefit of all and recent authoritative writings from the Catholic Church suggest that it can begin in the classroom with dialogue. Let us now consider some school-based research that intends to promote such dialogic pedagogy.

Pedagogy

It is generally acknowledged that education ‘...has a central role in shaping a society...’ (Hartnett and Naish 1990: 12) and according to Carr (1993: 6) pedagogy has a ‘...crucial role in the process of social reproduction i.e. the process whereby a society reproduces itself over time and so maintains its identity across the generations...’ However, pedagogy need not only be concerned with social reproduction and preservation of society’s status quo, since,

... (as) mainsprings of schooling. They can serve... as levers of social production. They can be in the vanguard of social change... (Hamilton 1990: 55)

The argument herein is that it is in the interest of all to create a procedurally secular society and one example of such a society is the *three realms’ model* as mooted by Markus (2006). A

distinctive feature of this model is that the secular realm acts as a neutral, buffer zone for the exchange of moral, philosophical, scientific, religious and worldviews amongst others. In effect, the secular realm is a “safe space” as citizens of such a society show restraint by adopting the aforementioned principle of self-limitation. Pedagogically, the school should create such a “safe space” as ‘we need to teach pupils how to dialogue...’ (Castelli 2018: 146). Indeed, the creation of a ‘safe space’ is commented upon by the Commission On Religious Education (CORE, 2017: 26) thus:

The phrase ‘a safe space to discuss difference,’... was the most often quoted single phrase across the evidence gathering sessions. Teachers and subject experts alike turned to it to explain the distinctive place of RE in the curriculum. This is not ‘safe’ in the sense of ‘sanitised’ but rather a space where people can talk – agree and disagree – freely about the contentious issues raised by worldviews.

Hence, this ‘safe space’ within the school is analogous to the secular realm within a *three realms’ model* of a procedurally secular society: both act as a neutral zone for the discussion of worldviews.

After creating a safe space within schools, the question arises as what type of dialogue the students should learn. Given that adult citizens should develop their faculties of reasoning, Mercer (1995: 105) suggests the following:

Exploratory talk foregrounds reasoning [emphasis added]. Its ground rules require that the views of all participants are sought and considered, that proposals are explicitly stated and evaluated, and that explicit agreement precedes decisions and actions. Both cumulative and exploratory talk seem to be aimed at the achievement of consensus... In cumulative talk... ideas and information are certainly shared and joint decisions may be reached... Exploratory talk, by incorporating both conflict and the open sharing of ideas represents the more ‘visible’ pursuit of rational consensus through conversation.

Action research has previously been undertaken by Xxxx (2014) that focuses on the use of a safe space within a school to develop the dialogic skills of cumulative talk (building consensus) and exploratory talk (constructive criticism). This research was conducted with twenty students at a Scottish city-centre comprehensive secondary school and the following recommendations were made that

...any future study should increase the number of participants such that the analyses undertaken can have more robust statistical significance. Also, the sample should be across different types of secondary schools as the school used in this study can fairly be described as an academically high-attainment city comprehensive. Attention should be paid to schools of different types (e.g. faith, selective), with different locations (e.g. suburban, rural), and with different overall levels of attainment.

(Xxxx, 2014: 69)

These recommendations underpin the research methodology for this study (Xxxx, 2019).

Research sample

Originally, a stratified sample was sought based on the criteria outlined above. However, through necessity, ten secondary schools were recruited through opportunity sampling.

Although this form of sampling proved to be a relatively straightforward and ‘...quick way... of choosing participants, [it] may not provide a representative sample, and could be biased’

(McLeod 2014). So, it is important to analyse the target sample in order to ascertain if there is a reasonable degree of representativeness; such that the findings may be relatable to RE teachers in the UK. Of the ten schools who participated in the study, nine were from England and one was in Scotland. Therefore, information with regard to classification criteria below is based primarily on England and its education system (see Figure 1 below):

< Insert Figure 1 near here >

With regard to the first criterion, the ten secondary schools represent the three most common types of schools – academies, comprehensives and faith schools. Although both academies and faith schools are over-represented this was deemed acceptable given the UK Government’s long term goal of “academisation” and the special focus for faith schools.

With respect to the second criterion of attainment levels, the sample skews towards the lower end of the spectrum with regard to attainment levels and, for the third criterion, there is a spread of locations for the schools across four types of city, town, semi-rural and rural.

Finally, regarding the fourth criterion, the sample is skewed towards schools that have catchment areas containing neighbourhoods of deprivation. Although, two of the criteria are somewhat skewed, overall there is a broad representation of school types, attainment levels and locations such as to afford a fair degree of robustness to the research findings.

All but four of the sixty-five students from this opportunity sample were in Key Stage Four or Five (Y10-Y13) and they attended 5 academies; 4 faith schools (2 Anglican; 2 Catholic)

and 1 comprehensive school. The students self-declared their religious and worldviews background as follows:

Agnostic =	22
Atheist =	14
Catholic =	8
Christian Other =	12
Deist =	2
Muslim =	2
Non-religious =	4
Sikh =	1

Research background

The students were removed to a safe space in the school, such as the library, and participated in paired conversations that were recorded and subsequently transcribed and analysed. They had two texts for prompts – one concerning evidences for the historical authenticity of the Gospels – and the other referring to science and the supernatural. Drawing upon the recommendations of McKenna et al (2008), a prompt sheet was devised (see Figure 2 below) with the purpose of clarifying the procedure for the students’ conversations such that they may develop the dialogic skills of cumulative talk and exploratory talk.

< Insert Figure 2 near here >

This prompt sheet offers ‘ground rules’ for the conversations, as advocated by Mercer and Dawes (2008); and the rules need repeated reference as it cannot be assumed that students are

aware of the ground rules that will produce a productive discussion. Indeed, according to Mercer and Dawes (2008: 70), this is likely not to be the case since ‘for some children, school may provide their only real opportunity for learning how to engage in focussed, reasoned discussion...’ And so they will need assistance in order to ‘...benefit [from] a shared understanding of this important aspect of how to make it happen successfully’ (Mercer and Dawes, 2008: 65). The reasoning behind having *paired* conversations is an acknowledgement that these two types of talk (cumulative and exploratory) are ‘...rather a brave thing to do and tend[s] not to happen unless there is a degree of trust within a discussion group’ (Mercer and Dawes, 2008: 65). Establishing such a degree of trust within a group takes time and it is technically more difficult to record and accurately transcribe the dialogue of each participant in a group; but a paired conversation tends to overcome these difficulties. And so, with such paired conversations, it is important that both students feel comfortable and their conversations should ‘...enable pupils to articulate their own views as well as listen to and interpret the views of others’ (McKenna et al, 2008: 16).

The research fieldwork addressed the following four research questions with the students.

Research questions

As the students’ paired conversations take place apart from the visible control of their classroom teachers, then the first research question examines the extent to which the students remain on task. Further, given that on task activity is defined as comprising only cumulative talk and exploratory talk, then this question is coupled with the second research question namely, ‘To what extent does this intervention promote participation in cumulative talk and exploratory talk by the students?’ Based on the findings from the earlier action research (Xxxx, 2014) the quality of these conversations were classed as follows:

High quality - conversation comprises at least 700 words of which a minimum is 70% cumulative talk and/or exploratory talk;

Mid quality - conversation comprises at least 500 words of which a minimum is 50% cumulative talk and/or exploratory talk; and

Low quality - conversation fails to meet either or both of the above criteria.

As an illustration, a sample of some of the findings from high quality, mid quality and low quality paired conversations are outlined below. Please note the names are fictional to protect anonymity.

Conversation A [High]

Y10 Tamara & Chase (both non-religious)

There are 2181 words in this passage of conversation. In terms of cumulative talk and exploratory talk, the two students are on task for 92.3% of this conversation.

Cumulative talk comprises 1161 words (53.2%) of the conversation, which ranges across various forms of discrimination. Exploratory talk comprises 853 words (39.1%) of their conversation and encompasses the future demise of religious belief, judgement day, and the influence of society upon beliefs and actions.

Conversation B [High]

Y10 Shannon & Scarlett (both non-religious)

There are 2183 words in this passage of conversation and in terms of cumulative talk and exploratory talk; the two students are on task for 99.2% of this conversation. Cumulative talk comprises 22.0% of their conversation and they touch upon forms of prayer, dreams and fate.

With exploratory talk (77.2%), they consider proof, power, arguments for the existence of God, and the end of the universe.

Conversation C [High]

Y12 Alexander (atheist) & Barry (agnostic)

There are 921 words in this passage of conversation. In terms of cumulative talk and exploratory talk, the two students are on task for 96.3% of this conversation. Their 54.8% of cumulative talk (505 words) comprises discussion of heaven and hell, ghosts and spirits, other dimensions, pseudo-science and the power of science. Their 41.5% of exploratory talk (382 words) analyses the nature of dimensions, laws of the universe, and religion as a coping mechanism.

Conversation D [Mid]

Y11 Toby (agnostic) & Greg (Christian)

There are 1905 words in this passage of conversation. In terms of cumulative talk and exploratory talk, the two students are on task for 51.4% of this conversation. Regarding cumulative talk, they both question the nature of miracles especially the resurrection. With respect to exploratory talk, they examine the natures of evidence and belief.

Conversation E [Low]

Y10 Megan (Christian) & Oliver (atheist)

There are 844 words in this passage of conversation. In terms of cumulative talk and exploratory talk, the two students are on task for 36.3% of this conversation. Their cumulative talk focuses on symbolism inherent within miracles; and their exploratory talk concerns myth making.

Pleasingly, fifty-one of the sixty-one conversations are either high quality (thirty-nine) or mid quality (twelve) with only ten conversations rated as low quality. These findings indicate that this dialogic RE intervention is worthy of consideration by teachers in secondary schools as it is likely to promote good levels of cumulative talk and exploratory talk by most students.

In order, though, to sustain the thesis that RE classroom pedagogy can drive social change, there needs to be some evidence that such dialogic practices are deep and meaningful to the students. Hence the importance of the third research question which analyses the extent that dialogic RE promotes a deep approach to students' learning. A questionnaire survey was administered using ten test items from experts pre-eminent in the field of deep learning (Entwistle and Kozeki, 1985). A null hypothesis was mooted i.e. "this dialogic RE intervention does not promote deep learning." The students' Likert scale responses were subjected to a Chi Square Test and all of the ten test items post positive returns that are statistically significant (see tables 1 and 2 below).

< Insert Table 1 near here >

On the surface, this is a very positive overall response from the students, with no less than 82.2% of the returns being either "Definitely Agree" or "Agree". In order to determine statistical significance these returns are subject to a Chi Square Test (see table 2 below).

< Insert Table 2 near here >

With all of the ten test items posting returns that are statistically significant, this disconfirms the null hypothesis. Therefore, it is fair to claim that in the estimation of the sixty-five students surveyed, this dialogic RE *does* promote a deep approach to learning. Further, given that motivation is an important factor regarding the adoption of a deep approach to learning (Entwistle and Kozeki, 1985) then it is noteworthy the students indicate that they enjoy the experience of participating with paired conversations. This is evidenced by their one-sentence written comments that reflect upon their experiences. Of the sixty-two responses only two are negative; seven are mixed; and fifty-three are positive, for the following reasons. Firstly, the students cite the value in learning the thoughts and opinions of others. Secondly, they value the opportunity to speak freely. Thirdly, they appreciate encountering unfamiliar and new ideas. Fourthly, they believe that they are developing their own understandings. Finally, they welcome the depth of discussion afforded by the paired conversations.

The final research question addresses ‘How might the development of dialogic skills become a regular feature within classroom life?’ A central argument of the thesis is that the creation of a procedurally secular society begins in the classroom since, adopting a productive view of pedagogy, the classroom is a microcosm of future society. The evidence from the conversation transcripts, the questionnaire survey and the students’ comments, suggest that the development of the dialogic skills of cumulative talk and exploratory talk in the secondary school subject of RE would constitute a contribution to this project. However, the research approach of paired conversations outside of the classroom is challenging for RE teachers to take on board. Many may be comfortable with sixth formers going to a quiet spot in the school – such as the library – to engage in such conversations; but, most likely, they will be less comfortable with younger students doing likewise. Additionally, finding the time to analyse, discuss and share conversation transcripts is impractical.

To this end, a small community of critical friends considers this fourth research question. This community comprises a diocesan RE adviser, the principal investigator for a major digital project, a university senior lecturer for computing and new technologies and two RE practitioners – an assistant head teacher at a faith school and a head of department of religious studies at an academy. A fruit of their deliberations is a suggestion that there are three ways in which new technologies can forward the development of dialogic skills in RE. Firstly, Book Creator, which is an application (app) that creates a multi-media book in which students can share videos, texts and record conversations. These are saved to Cloud as an editable document upon which students can collaborate. Secondly, “GarageBand” is free software that one can download onto a phone or other device. A teacher can then sit with students as they co-edit paired conversations prior to sharing with class. Thirdly, the use of iTunes University (i-Tunes U) in which the classroom is set up so that only two students can see what is on their screen. The students’ conversation is recorded and then shared with the teacher for editing, prior to being shared with rest of the class.

These new technologies offer students a degree of privacy for their conversations before sharing with teachers and peers and, as such, they should feature in future interventions and research intended to promote the development of dialogic skills in RE.

Conclusion

At the historical juncture of early modern Catholicism, ‘...church-state theory favoured a confessional state in which political authority was wedded to spiritual authority and the state supported, promoted, and in some cases even enforced the Catholic Church’s truth claims’ (Weigel, 2017: 46). This was termed the “thesis model” and it prevailed in the era of

Christendom when almost all Europeans, at least nominally, paid lip-service to the authority and teachings of the Catholic Church. The Reformation, the Enlightenment, and now Western secularisation, have transformed the situation such that only a minority accept the authority of the Church and obey her teachings. Hence, the thesis model is no longer valid and the current socio-political circumstances suggest that another model be sought.

Such a model may be the “hypothesis model” in which, dependent upon prevailing historical and political circumstances, the Catholic Church supports a confessionally neutral or procedurally secular state. This accords with the Church’s favourable experience of this model in the United States. (Weigel, 2017) However, such separation of spiritual and political authorities is not without criticism. Drawing upon the work of renowned Thomist, Alasdair MacIntyre, it is contended by Rowland (2017) that such separation of the sacred from the secular leads to a narrowing of religion, a focus on secular matters, and ultimately the loss of faith. Indeed, secular values such as tolerance are held by Augustinian Thomists, like the aforementioned Rowland and Weigel, to be ultimately lethal to the Christian faith.

A more optimistic position, though, is adopted by the Whig Thomists since they perceive the Christian roots underpinning the liberal values of the secular state as an opportunity for re-Christianisation. However, the Augustinian Thomists contend that the Whig Thomists are overly optimistic; and that they underestimate the Herculean nature of the task of re-Christianising the liberal values of secularised Western societies. Rather than pursuing ultimate ends of Augustinian Thomist re-colonisation or Whig Thomist re-Christianisation an alternative Thomistic aim of subordinate ends is proposed. Adopting the principle of self-limitation as mooted by Jürgen Habermas and Pope Emeritus Benedict this subordinate aim is to create a procedurally secular society. An example of such a society is Markus’ *three*

realms model whereby the secular realm is strengthened to act as a porous buffer between the sacred and profane realms. This strengthened secular realm – or renewed public sphere – is exemplified by human reasoning: and this reasoning begins in the classroom.

Classroom pedagogy is not only a means of a society reproducing itself; but also it can be socially productive and at the forefront of social change. Given the concession of leading liberal thinkers, Rawls and Habermas, regarding the role that religious language can play in a common search for truth; then pedagogies of religious education appear to be the most apt. A strong claim for the efficacy of RE pedagogies in this regard is made by Freathy et al (2017: 428) who assert that ‘For pupils, classrooms can become places of cultural production, not reproduction, in which they are empowered to make their own sense of the diversity and plurality encountered, and to develop their own voices within communities of enquiry.’ RE is replete with pedagogies fashioned from the engagement between religion and education in the service of a plural society and among the most recent are critical pedagogy (Wright, 2007, 2013) and faith dialogue pedagogy (Castelli, 2012, 2018). Both of these pedagogies envision students having intelligent conversations and the school-based research discussed herein is based on paired conversations in which students develop the dialogic skills of cumulative talk and exploratory talk.

Such dialogic pedagogy resembles the practice of Pope Francis’ “Argentine model of interreligious dialogue” that creates a civic space for matters of religious, political and societal importance (Ivereigh, 2015). And so, developing a civic space for the creation of a procedurally secular realm can begin in the RE classroom with dialogic pedagogy.

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