Spiritual Diversity in Modern Ontario Catholic Education: How Youth Imbue an Anti-Colonial Identity Through Faith

by

Terri-Lynn Kay Brennan

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Sociology & Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Terri-Lynn Kay Brennan 2010
Spiritual Diversity in Modern Ontario Catholic Education:

How Youth Imbue an Anti-Colonial Identity Through Faith

Doctor of Education 2010

Terri-Lynn Kay Brennan

Department of Sociology & Equity Studies in Education
University of Toronto

Abstract

Approximately one in two parents across the province of Ontario, regardless of personal religious beliefs, now choose to enrol their children in a public Roman Catholic secondary school over the public secular school counterpart. The Ontario Roman Catholic school system has historically struggled for recognition and independence as an equally legitimate system in the province. Students in modern schools regard religion and spirituality as critical aspects to their individual identities, yet this study investigates the language and knowledge delivered within the systemic marginalization and colonial framework of a Euro-centric school system and the level of inclusivity and acceptance it affords its youth.

Using a critical ethnographic methodology within a single revelatory case study, this study presents the voices of youth as the most critical voice to be heard on identity and identity in faith in Ontario Roman Catholic schools. Surveys with students and student families are complemented with in-depth student interviews, triangulated with informal educational staff interviews and the limited literature incorporating youth identity in modern Ontario Roman Catholic schools.
Through the approach of an anti-colonial discursive framework, incorporating a theology of liberation that emphasizes freedom from oppression, the voice of Roman Catholic secondary school youth are brought forth as revealing their struggle for identity in a system that intentionally hides identity outside of being Roman Catholic. Broader questions discussed include: (a) What is the link between identity, schooling and knowledge production?; (b) How do the different voices of students of multi-faiths, educators, administrators, and so forth, contradict, converge and diverge from each other?; (c) How are we to understand the role and importance of spirituality in schooling, knowledge production, and claims of Indigeneity and resistance to colonizing education?; (d) What does it mean to claim spirituality as a valid way of knowing?; (e) In what way does this study help understand claims that spirituality avoids splitting of the self?; (f) How do we address the fact that our cultures today are threatened by the absence of community?; and (g) What are the pedagogic and instructional relevancies of this work for the classroom teacher?
Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance and support of all those directly or spiritually involved in seeing this work through to completion. Initially, without the approved consent of the representative Ontario Roman Catholic school board where this research took place, the document before you would never have been. I applaud the board’s progressive stance in wishing to see this work come about. And I especially appreciate the progressive and compassionate nature of those colleagues who provided their time, assistance and lived experience to discuss the evolution of Ontario Roman Catholic school communities. Many of you, as educators of conscience, create and maintain safe and empowering spaces of difference and diversity daily for youth and I hope your own successes continue.

The consistently helpful reassurance and unwavering vision of my supervisor Dr. George Dei, whose ability to develop and nurture the growth of all his students in body, mind and spirit amidst the turbulent arena of critical anti-colonial qualitative research is unarguably applauded. As well, the inspiration to persevere and continue to transition between the lenses of sociology, history and theology was guided and developed through my committee members, Dr. Elizabeth Smyth and Dr. Michael Attridge. The valuable recommendations and advice of Dr. Dei, Dr. Smyth and Dr. Attridge has kept the process flowing even when my life took me abroad. More recently, the dynamic ways of viewing this work and the encouragement to continue to tell the stories of youth in future work could not have come about without the enthusiasm and critical lens of the external examiner, Dr. Cynthia Dillard. I uncompromisingly offer my respect for each of these inspirational and dedicated academic professionals and their individual contributions and support to this work and future projects.

To my family, especially my maternal grandmother and Nannie, Marjorie Gray, and my parents James & Florence Brennan, I wish to express how my pride abounds to be a descendent of your spirit and diverse identities and those that came before you. To each of you, who never doubted the faith in the work and ability to stay focused, I extend my heartfelt love, praise and tearful thanks. To my closest friends and sisters, Andrea, Brenda, Carol, Jo, Jodie, Julie and Lisa whom provided much sanity and comfort throughout these past six years, without your wisdom, your identities and your shared experiences through tears, laughter and multiple bottles of wine, I would not have survived.
To my editor, best friend and partner in life, Mr. Mark D. Read, whose patience, keen eye for detail and determination to see me complete successfully, I owe the most sincere thank you and gratitude. Without his assistance and encouragement in all aspects of my world, I would certainly not feel as confident and proud in the contribution that this research will make to the discussion on youth identity, spirituality and Catholic education in Ontario. Moreover, his consistent patience, comfort and shoulder to lean, cry and laugh on, has rigidly provided a safe and progressive mirror for myself to take stock in those diverse identity spaces I occupy daily. *You were an island and I didn’t want to pass you by.* Thank you.

Finally, I wish to offer the most direct and genuine thank you to those students and parents who took the time to complete the surveys, and/or volunteered their time, honesty, passion and conviction on the issues at hand. Their ability to provide some of the most thought-provoking and revealing words and ideas will hopefully not go overlooked nor unacknowledged by those who continue to take up critical ethnographic work on issues of identity in spirituality as well as educational theorists and facilitors. Without their voices, the comprehensive reason that I began and saw this work through would never have been sought with such interest, fervour and determination. I thank you from the bottom to the top of my person: space, history and identities.

*Special Acknowledgment & Dedication*


>You began this journey with me, and side by side walked and listened to my struggles and accomplishments day upon day. Although your body left before completion, your spirit saw me through to the end. Your eyes, your kisses, your footprints and unconditional love will never be forgotten. Thank you for believing in me.*
Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ....................................................................................................................... iv

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................ vii

List of Tables ................................................................................................................................. ix

List of Appendices ........................................................................................................................ x

Chapter 1 Youth Identity, Spirituality and Catholic Schooling ............................................. 1

1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 1
    1.1 Roman Catholic schooling in Ontario: The history of struggles ................................. 5
        1.1.1 Prior to confederation – Ryerson’s legacy ................................................................. 5
        1.1.2 Since confederation – Davis’s legacy & the politics of equal-funding ..................... 9
    1.2 Roman Catholic schools versus public schools ............................................................. 14
        1.2.1 Roman Catholic schooling: Communities of respected identities ....................... 17
    1.3 Liberation theology in theory and practice ................................................................. 20
        1.3.1 What would a theology of liberation look like in schooling? .................................. 23
    1.4 Research objectives: Identity, faith & schooling .......................................................... 25
    1.5 Personal subject position, lens and bias ................................................................. 26
    1.6 Chapter outline ............................................................................................................. 29

Chapter 2 Literature & Theory: Identity, Faith and Roman Catholic Schooling .............. 33

2 Overview – How youth define and identify an identity ...................................................... 33
    2.1 Identity through social conditioning ......................................................................... 35
        2.1.1 Identity in the diaspora .............................................................................................. 39
        2.1.2 Struggles for identity and contemplations ................................................................. 40
        2.1.3 Finding identity through discourse: An anti-colonial discursive framework .......... 41
    2.2 Defining beliefs ................................................................................................................. 44
        2.2.1 Roman Catholic spirituality and schooling ............................................................. 48
        2.2.2 Cognitive spirituality ................................................................................................ 50
    2.3 Resistance and community ........................................................................................... 52
        2.3.1 The language of resistance ..................................................................................... 53
        2.3.2 Spiritual resistance .................................................................................................. 54
    2.4 Areas of divergence ......................................................................................................... 57
Chapter 3 Methodology – Critical Ethnography in a Single-Case Study ................. 61

3 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 61

3.1 Field of research ............................................................................................... 62

3.1.1 Approaches to gathering data ........................................................................ 64

3.1.2 Data Collection ............................................................................................... 67

3.2 Critical ethnography within a case study ......................................................... 69

3.2.1 Validity as a tool ............................................................................................ 71

3.3 Data analysis ...................................................................................................... 73

3.4 Limitations and challenges of this research .................................................... 74

Chapter 4 Identity, Religious Spirituality & Education – Front Line Voices .......... 76

4 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 76

4.1 How youth envision and project an image ....................................................... 79

4.1.1 Finding identity in faith ................................................................................ 92

4.2 Religious practice .............................................................................................. 96

4.2.1 Religion versus spirituality .......................................................................... 98

4.3 Roman Catholic schooling: modern images .................................................. 100

4.3.1 Roman Catholic schools as progressive ...................................................... 102

4.3.2 Representative diversity in modern Roman Catholic schools ...................... 106

4.3.3 Roman Catholic versus secular schooling .................................................. 108

Chapter 5 Student Voices – What Can We Learn from Their Words? .......... 114

5 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 114

5.1 Challenges and miscues ................................................................................... 117

5.2 Naming social acceptability and difference ..................................................... 119

5.2.1 Visions of the ‘Other’ school ...................................................................... 122

5.2.2 Freedom of identity .................................................................................... 124

5.3 Resistance to a false identity .......................................................................... 128

5.3.1 Describing faith ......................................................................................... 130

5.3.2 Interpreting the language of faith ............................................................... 132

5.4 Communities in faith ....................................................................................... 135

5.4.1 The Roman Catholic school system needs to take stock ......................... 139

Chapter 6 Conclusion – The Wisdom of Youth .................................................... 143
6 Overview ..................................................................................................................................................143
6.1 Links between identity, schooling and knowledge production ..................................................144
6.2 Different voices: convergence and divergence .............................................................................148
6.3 The importance of a spiritual identity .........................................................................................150
6.4 Spirituality as a valid way of knowing and resistance .................................................................152
6.5 The strength of community ........................................................................................................155
6.6 Lessons to be learned ..................................................................................................................156

References .............................................................................................................................................161

Appendices ............................................................................................................................................173
List of Tables

Table 1  Student Religious Affiliation for Geographic Region ...........................................63

Table 2  Surveyed Students by Religious Affiliation ..........................................................77

Table 3  Parents by Religious Affiliation .............................................................................78

Table 4  Comfort in Religious Discussion at School .............................................................94

Table 5  Religious Content in School ................................................................................105

Table 6  Parental Reasons for Roman Catholic Schooling ..................................................107
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>University of Toronto Ethics Review Committee Approval</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Letter to school board principals and chaplains requesting participation in research</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>Introductory/assent letter to students/families</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>Student survey</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>Parent survey</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>Student interview questions</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G</td>
<td>Introductory/assent letter to school board teachers/administrators</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H</td>
<td>School board teachers/representative interview questions</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I</td>
<td>Interview key words and code system</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
Youth Identity, Spirituality and Catholic Schooling

1 Introduction

Access to free and equal education is a global human right (Bellamy, 1999). In Ontario, Canada, access to formal Roman Catholic education is a publicly funded right. Approximately one in two parents in Ontario appreciate and take advantage of the choice to immerse their children in a faith-based schooling experience by choosing the public Roman Catholic secondary system over its secular counterpart (Ontario Government, 2006). The option to choose is an essential right according to the Vatican: “As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental” (Concæcan Inc. – Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, p. 457). Since 1984, when the provincial government legislated open access to Roman Catholic separate schools, more parents have chosen to enrol their children in Ontario Roman Catholic schools than ever before. A steady increase of Roman Catholic secondary school enrolment has been most visible in the dense multi-cultural communities within the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA).

Since the mid-1980s, the number of immigrants to the Toronto CMA (those persons who have landed or become permanent residents) has increased 65%, accounting for two-thirds of Toronto’s population growth between 1986 and 2001 (Strategic Research and Statistics, 2005, p. 1). The immigrant share of Toronto’s CMA total population reached 44% in 2001 and for all intents and purposes makes up about half of the area’s current resident population. Of those recent immigrants, the majority identify their place of birth in Asia, while the Caribbean islands of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago are also noted frequently as places of origin (Strategic Research and Statistics, pp. 7-9). While Roman Catholics were numerous among earlier immigrants (pre-1986) from Italy and the United Kingdom, their share of the immigrant population has fallen with more recent arrivals belonging to the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh faiths (Strategic Research and Statistics, p. 10). As the racial, cultural and religious diversity in many Ontario communities continues to increase, many families who either cannot afford to send their children to a private faith-based school, or are uncomfortable with the public
secular option, are choosing public Roman Catholic schools for their children regardless, it seems, of their personal faith background.

The history of the Ontario Roman Catholic school system is not one of noted diversity until the open-door policy and extended funding package to secondary education that was introduced in the province with Bill 30, in the mid 1980’s. By the late 1990’s, the Government of Ontario had further implemented complete and equal funding of Roman Catholic schools, taking the burden off local parishes and communities to match the funds that were once only funnelled into the public secular system. As the population of Ontario increases in its cultural, ethnic, racial and religious diversity, it is little wonder that in the dense multi-cultural communities of the Toronto CMA, highly politicized economic and social debates have brought the issues of open-access and full-funding for Roman Catholic schools to the forefront of every political election in the province for the past two decades. Some recent arguments have focused on defending or challenging the constitutional claim of equal funding for Roman Catholic schools, to the exclusion of non-Christian faith communities (Chung, 2007; McGowan, 2007; Royakers, 1988; Shamai, 1997; Westhues, 1985), while other recent critiques debate the legitimacy of funding a denominational system that is no longer solely represented by Roman Catholic youth, arguing that its mere existence devalues the perceived quality of education received in the secular system (Battle, Bennett, Begin, Bielfeld, Bondar, Bregman, Broadbent, Burstyn, Galloway, Cleveland, Coffey, Cooke, Cressy, Green, Galabuzi, Grinspun, Franklin, Friendly, Gilbert, Gordon, Hyman, Ingram, Jestin, Kidd, Kidder, Levin, McGregor, McMurtry, McCuaig, McQuaig, Mehta, Mendelson, Mustard, Nyberg, Omidvar, Pascal, Pecaunt, Perly Rae, Phipps, Rae, Reisman, Roberts, Shakir, Gross Stein, & Zaibak, 2007; Benzie, 2007; Brown, 2007; McGowan, 2007; Murray & Stunt, 2007; Torstar News Services, 2007). Even the United Nations Human Rights Committee has ruled that Ontario’s education system is discriminatory, as the Roman Catholic system continues to be fully funded by public taxes, but other faiths receive no such funding (CBC News, 1999). Since the identity of the clientele at schools is constantly changing, so too should the constitutional framework that legitimizes an educational system which privileges one faith above all others.

Identity, in terms of ethnic, religious, racial, classist, and so forth, has become entrenched within an epistemological framework constructed by the history of Canadian education, inspired by all spheres of the social, political and economic agenda of those in power. It is through
constitutional text and congregational church struggles that modern Roman Catholic schooling has placed its roots in the Ontario consciousness. Religion, used as a moral compass and/or as an oppressive tool enforcing conformity, is a lens of interpretation for the entire world (Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson & Zine, 2000, p. 70). The Roman Catholic Church, like all Christian Churches, embarked on centuries of colonization and indoctrination of Indigenous and conquered communities throughout the last half of the second millennia. During these expeditions, its role as oppressor has been much documented and charged. Even as recently as the 1960’s in Africa, leaders within the Roman Catholic Church initiated an inculturation movement that infiltrated the African ‘Other’ with Roman Catholic doctrine and authoritarianism to assimilate culture and educational facilities (Makang, 1997). This movement did not allow for a questioning of the European neo-colonial supremacy. Today, Indigenous communities around the world are still struggling and resisting the force of Westernized canons started through Church doctrine, and the result of traditional educational genocide. As Indigenous languages disappear, and culture and customs continue to be devalued, spiritually injured communities search for methods to reclaim self-identity and empowerment.

In Ontario, Roman Catholics have been both oppressor of Indigenous communities, and oppressed by the Protestant majority. The social stigma associated with being Roman Catholic is historically matched with the perspective that Roman Catholic communities harshly demanded conformity and assimilation to maintain strength in numbers and vision as a unified community against its oppressors. Yet just as Deborah Post (1995) conveys how public perception might argue she is black because whites will not let her be anything else, Roman Catholic communities might argue that they are straight-jacketed into being seen as rigidly oppressive Roman Catholics because the status quo does not understand the range in diversity, opportunity and multiplicity that this identity holds. The Roman Catholic Church promotes that through their schools in Ontario, exposure to the range in self-identity, including an identity in faith, can be nurtured and valued. The Ontario Roman Catholic school system, with its equal access protocol, can take pride in the level of diversity that currently exists within its schools as it represents ecumenism and inclusivity in action. Yet as the system evolves in the twenty-first century, the trappings of the past still haunt education in the province of Ontario. Current Roman Catholic schools in Ontario are sites of colonial knowledge production and acquisition for all youth. The need to reflect on the method and quality of educational information and delivery in moulding and
nurturing today’s youth in self-proclaiming their own empowered voice in a racial, cultural and spiritual identity is imperative on the part of all educators. Roman Catholic schools in Ontario should start unravelling the oppression that continues in education.

What is missing consistently within all the political, social and economic debates are the perspectives of the clients most affected by the evolving environment and educational output within Roman Catholic secondary schools across the province: their youth. The lack of student perspectives and voice in modern sociological literature reflects society’s tendency to ignore their voices (Dei et al., 2000, p. 19). To provide voice in an anti-colonial discursive framework and critical ethnographic study is to solidify not only a right to expression, but also to legitimate influence on power in privilege in discussion and action. If youth are not empowered with the knowledge that their histories and subjectivities are of equal or greater value to the lived experience in modern schooling, then the system itself cannot be a safe space of genuine inclusivity. The voice of minority or marginalized youth in the Roman Catholic school system has been greatly ignored and silenced because of the historical nature of the Roman Catholic system and its own struggle for an equal voice in the framework of provincial politics. Therefore, the main intent of this research is to provide those students a forum to discuss their experiences, challenges and successes in the Ontario Roman Catholic secondary school system.

The struggle that Roman Catholics have put forth to be recognized as a legitimate community who warrant the right to educate under their own guidelines is a crucial aspect to understanding the evolution of Roman Catholic schools in British colonies around the world. The provisions for maintaining any form of education outside the secular will always be challenged by mainstream society (Matthews et al., 2003, p. 29). Moreover, as Marc Depaepe (1997) further questions with any inquiry into educational standards or evaluations, “the question remains whether a neutral and value-free reconstruction of the past is possible” (p. 210). However, the impetus of this research will not debate the potential truism that the Ontario Roman Catholic school system was historically founded on a political, ideological and dogmatic theory of education. The intent of this research is to present a critique of the current Roman Catholic secondary school environment using the voices of youth to focus on: (1) youth identity in schooling and education; (2) youth identity in faith; (3) anti-colonial oppression versus community empowerment in Ontario Roman Catholic secondary schools; and (4) resistance and change through a spiritual liberation theology for Roman Catholic school youth.
1.1 Roman Catholic schooling in Ontario: The history of struggles

The fight by Roman Catholic communities across Ontario to achieve equal status and monies has been a public struggle since the earliest European settlements some two hundred years ago. In eighteenth century British North America (the area later to be defined as Upper and Lower Canada/the provinces of Ontario and Quebec respectfully), English Protestant colonists claimed territory and governance over all other ethnic groups, especially non-Protestant Roman Catholic communities. Associated inferiority came not only with imperially assigned titles on the colonized Indigenous populations, but also with those groups who were historically marginalized in their homelands of Britain, Ireland and mainland Europe. Diasporic groups who imagined their new immigrated lands to be free of ethnic, racial or religious judgment were challenged again to accredit their space and identity as legitimate.

Roman Catholics were especially alienated in the newly Protestant established territory of British North America. Roman Catholics formed community alliances, eventually banding together in their own villages and towns, forming their own network of trade groups, and establishing their own schools and schooling practices. The presence of their own school system by the early nineteenth century was to avoid assimilation and the erosion of their culture, customs and values. The rudimentary government system at this time did not demand acculturation but allowed independent Roman Catholic communities to remain active with limited political involvement (Dixon, 1976; Manzer, 2004). Slander and ridicule haunted Roman Catholic communities, including their educational system, and they were constantly on the defense to nurture and mould their youth on their own terms in the face of illegitimacy.

1.1.1 Prior to confederation – Ryerson’s legacy

From its inception, Canada has been a nation moulded by religious and lay voices. Religious leaders such as Toronto’s Anglican Bishop Joseph Strachan (1778-1867), Roman Catholic Bishop of Montreal Ignace Bourget (1799-1885) and Methodist Ministers Salem Bland (1859-1950) and J.S. Woodsworth (1874-1942) have each influenced legislative policies and societal infrastructure through their denominational vision of Church doctrine (Bland, 1920; Bourget, Routhier & Trudel, 1871; Strachan, 1825; Woodsworth, 1915). Their voices were as strong as
the fathers of confederation in laying the foundational itinerary of the Canadian constitution and subsequent political and social policies, including education.

Some of the earliest notes on organized education came through the push of John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant-governor of British Upper Canada (the area largely known as Ontario today) in 1791, who offered publicly subsidized education for children from the upper classes (Sweet, 1997). Simcoe’s work resulted in the first piece of educational legislation to preside over the area with the District Grammar School Act of 1807. This Act offered male children of Upper Canada’s social elite a publicly funded education decidedly constructed and pedagogically taught through the lens of the Church of England (Sweet, 1997, p. 21-22).

During the early half of the 19th century, education was in the hands of men and women who were training for a life in public service or the clergy in British North America (McGowan, 2005; Gidney & Millar, 1990). Clergymen from both Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations taught those youth within their respective parish communities. However, Protestant church leaders were the only educators to receive funding from governmental groups in support of their time teaching. Teaching communities were in effect congregational communities, but the organization of Protestant teaching communities was one overseen by regional authorities. The recognition of a separate Roman Catholic educational community, and possible funding from outside their congregations was not a consideration until 1841 when Bishop Alexander Macdonell introduced the School’s Act for the United Province of Canada (the union of Upper and Lower Canada, respectively Ontario and Quebec today). The Schools’ Act of 1841 legitimized and formally recognized Roman Catholic denominational schooling across Ontario (Dixon, 1976; Murphy, 2001). The work of Macdonell and the approval of the School’s Act also rooted Roman Catholic communities and their right to educate children through the lens of Roman Catholicism in the legislative framework of what would become the British North America Act of 1867. The establishment of Roman Catholic denominational schooling across Ontario Roman Catholic schools would work parallel to the Protestant school system, both being overseen by the Upper Canada government. As the colonial attitude in Upper Canada at this time was entrenched with ideals and directions that would promote loyalty to the staunch Protestant British crown, the emergence of Roman Catholic schools heightened sectarian violence, social alienation and linguistic/religious profiling in many rural and urban communities across the region (Stamp, 1982).
It was within this volatile environment that Egerton Ryerson, an influential Methodist minister, became the first chief superintendent of education in Upper Canada. Ryerson, a prolific author and newspaper editor, held the government appointment from 1846 to 1876, and weaved what would become the foundational groundwork for the Ontario Educational system (Dixon, 1976). Although he reported to the provincial parliament, as there was no post for Minister of Education at the time, Ryerson had great discretionary powers and wide administrative latitude (Gidney & Millar, 1990). His curriculum was to uphold civic and moral character in all of Ontario’s citizens and was a proactive vehicle for Christian, albeit Protestant, indoctrination. Canadian Protestants wanted to lead all school children “away from the evils of “Catholicism”, and Ryerson piloted this vision (Dixon, 1976, p. 15) with the implementation of opening and closing exercises consisting of the Lord’s Prayer and readings from Protestant scripture in all common (public and Protestant) schools across the region (Houston & Prentice, 1988). Through Ryerson’s lens, the Roman Catholic or separate school system was seen as foreign and opposing to the dominant Protestant curriculum delivered in the common schools. He boasted of his disgust of the existence of a Roman Catholic system on numerous occasions, and pushed for a “free, universal, and academically progressive public school system . . . that would promote loyalty to the Crown, solid citizenship, a sound curriculum, and a generic Christianity” (McGowan, 2005, p. 1). With a curriculum delivered by a majority of clergymen and women, Roman Catholic children and their families were singled out as different and unwelcome in many circles of Canadian society (Houston & Prentice, 1988; Stamp, 1982). The seeds of resentment within colonial oppression were thrust upon Ontario Roman Catholics at a time when their nation was being encouraged to unify so as to stave off territorial challenges by their southern neighbours.

Until his death, Ryerson considered Roman Catholic education to be inferior to that of common/public schooling, and his legislative direction stigmatized public perception of the Roman Catholic Church and its educational system (Dixon, 1976; Murphy, 2001). As parents of Roman Catholic and Jewish students in the common school system complained about the hypocrisy they faced being in a “common” or “public” system, Ryerson insisted on an ethos that was solidly Christian-Protestant (Houston & Prentice, 1988; Shamai, 1997). Yet, despite his best efforts to create a singularly efficient educational system within Ontario, his vision was strongly challenged by Roman Catholic communities across the province.
The Roman Catholic minority of Upper Canada rallied around supporting their schools with private funding and vocal action at all public, political and social events (Dixon, 1976). Political allies, in the form of the French Roman Catholic population in Upper Canada, propelled another significant move forward for all Roman Catholic communities across Upper Canada with the passing of the Tache Act in 1855. This Act extended the rights of the Roman Catholic minority to create and manage their own schools.

Another key piece of legislation was introduced in 1863, when the Scott Act confirmed that Roman Catholic school trustees possessed the rights and privileges to manage and control their own schools (Dixon, 1976). The Scott Act also provided Roman Catholic schools with an official share of governmental subsidies through the Common School Fund. In essence, by the time of Confederation in 1867, Roman Catholic school communities in Ontario shared some of the same rights and privileges, organizational power and control as their contemporaries in the Protestant public or common school system.

Although Roman Catholic leaders were solidifying the long-term presence of their schools across the Ontario countryside in government legislation, Ryerson used this same time to unify all common schools in Ontario through the use of stock textbooks (Houston & Prentice 1988; Harrigan, 1986). Textbooks were counted upon to convey what Ryerson, (a firm representative of the Christian, upper-class, white men who dominated the Ontario parliamentary system of the time) agreed as the most useful and necessary knowledge to “deal with the practicalities of life and to provide an inkling of the standards of belief and behaviour expected by adult society” (Houston & Prentice, 1988, p. 238). As only the upper class was allowed or expected to attend school in mid-1800’s Canada, delivery of appropriate knowledge was ensured on the ‘best sort’ of Roman Catholic and Protestant youth. As Manzer (2004) suggests, “Thus on top of the vertical mosaic of social blocs based on religion, language, and race there was added a differentiation of educational programs that corresponded to the hierarchy of occupational classes” (p. 5).

One of the most circulated texts was the Irish Reader; possibly as a result of the similar indoctrination messages promoting devotion to Queen & country that infused British colonial schools. The reality of an Ontario common school system which was advertised as non-sectarian, truthfully meant that all students were delivered a Protestant view on the past and present, with
preparation for the future. Although Harrigan (1986) suggests that the “Views expressed in textbooks probably tell us more about official views of the time than they do about effective agencies of socialization” (p. 84), textbook messages of the time delivered biblical stories, the conception of God and the duties owed to him as preached by Protestant clerics (Houston & Prentice, 1988, p. 240). In truth, the Irish readers were saturated with a very specific political philosophy that emphasized social harmony and criticized radical public protests as futile and immoral. In 1868, Ryerson put forth a new Canadian version of textbooks, which did not step too far away from the earlier Irish readers, highlighting growing nationalist feelings of patriotism and unification (Houston & Prentice, 1988, p. 245). With the British North America Act of 1867 constitutionally recognizing Roman Catholic schools as separate but valid institutions in the colony of Canada, government officials and regional representative put more public onus on highlighting unification than on difference.

1.1.2 Since confederation – Davis’s legacy & the politics of equal-funding

In 1867, the provincial territories of Upper/Lower Canada united with the colonies of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, under confederation as British North America. The constitution that was drawn up at the time of confederation became the foundational constitution for the Canadian nation that expanded its territorial borders further west, north and east over the next 70 years. This constitution is still in place today. The British North America Act (BNA), 1867 references education in Section 93 and states:

> In and for each Province the Legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education, subject and according to the following Provisions:

(1) Nothing in any such Law shall prejudicially affect any Right or Privilege with respect to Denominational Schools which any Class of Persons have by Law in the Province at the Union:

(2) All the Powers, Privileges, and Duties at the Union by Law conferred and imposed in Upper Canada on the Separate Schools and School Trustees of the Queen’s Roman Catholic Subjects shall be and the same are hereby extended to the Dissentient Schools of the Queen’s Protestant and Roman Catholic Subjects in Quebec. (Van Loon & Whittington, 1987, p. 670)

The BNA Act guaranteed the existence of separate schools across Canada, including all rights and privileges as given to the common school system. The struggle of Roman Catholic
communities to legitimate their schools in Canadian society was achieved, and at its core wove a pervasive bond between the Roman Catholic Church and the state (Manzer, 2004). But within three years, Roman Catholic community achievement toward controlling their own legally entrenched schools was disrupted with two new additions to the constitution. In 1871, legislation was introduced to change the name “common schools” to “public schools”, along with the creation of a “high school” system extending the public school years from Grade 10 to Grade 13 (Dixon, 1976). This change in name, however, was only applicable to public common school boards; constitutionally, Roman Catholic schools would retain reference as separate schools. Furthermore, redirected monies attributed to assist the separate system would no longer support beyond Grade 10, only the newly titled public system would receive funding up to Grade 13 (Dixon, 2003). Roman Catholic secondary schools could offer classes in Grades 11, 12 and 13, but at the total and private cost of the community.

The twentieth century saw Ontario, in particular, debate extensively on the legitimacy and validity of financially supporting the Roman Catholic school system. As the post World War I economy improved, both public and separate high schools became numerous and accessible. Yet, the provincial government limited access to enrolling in separate schools beyond Grade 10 when there was a competing common high school within the same district boundaries. Archbishop of Toronto, Neil McNeil challenged this restrictive legislation with the Tiny Township Case (1925-1928), arguing that within the constitution, Roman Catholic schools operated as “public schools” and in turn “high schools” as identified in legislation, and therefore held constitutional rights to receive provincial grants and could collect taxes to support their schools for all grades including 11, 12 and 13. The Privy Council maintained the ruling on the side of the government to uphold its limitation of separate school grades not to go beyond 10 in rural Ontario (Dixon, 2003; McGowan, 2005).

Post World War II Canada craved a more inclusive and egalitarian educational system. The country became enamoured with producing a well-educated citizenry whose members would enjoy individual freedoms of equality and opportunity to participate fully in public life (Manzer, 2004). Hence one of the most energetic proposals for equal recognition and funding for Roman Catholic education came about in 1946 when Roman Catholic school trustees argued for equal funding past Grade 10 in The Royal Commission on Education (Hope Commission). The report took four years to create, resulting in an exhaustive investigation into the Roman Catholic versus
the public system, and in 1950 it not only reconfirmed the lack of high school funding for separate schools, but further recommended a limitation of the system to Grade 6 in order to boost the numbers for the public junior and senior high schools (Dixon, 2003). The Roman Catholic school system found reprieve however, as the Hope Commission report was shelved by Premier Leslie Frost. Frost became a quiet supporter of the separate school system by alleviating, in small doses, the financial burden of some of the urban separate school boards.

In 1963, the first step toward equal funding came in the delivery of the Foundation Tax Plan (Dixon, 2003). This plan significantly improved government grants for separate schools as compensation for their inability to tax most corporations. Then again in 1969, the creation of county and district school boards replaced the hundreds of small local public and separate boards, thereby funnelling monies through fewer hands into a larger pot for distribution. Both of these provisions, as put forth by the provincial government, strengthened the power and voice of the separate system, and strengthened financial support for a separate Roman Catholic educational system.

As the Roman Catholic system continued to fight for equal funding and equal respect throughout the 1960’s, the public system began to respond to the diversity of identities that it was witnessing in their communities. The public system initiated the removal of any religious routine in their schools by eliminating the daily Christian prayer in secondary schools. Consequently in 1969, the Mackay Report recommended a halt to religious education in all primary and secondary public schools, with only the retention of a daily prayer in the public elementary schools of Ontario (Shamai, 1997). Any religious presentation was left to the discretion of the principals at the secondary school level.

By 1971, William Davis, the Ontario Minister of Education, still maintained that if the government were to extend funding to separate schools, the act would be too costly and would be too political toward opening the doors for other denominations to plead their case for equality. The establishment of an equally-funded denominational high school system would “fragment the present [public] system beyond recognition and repair, and do so to the disadvantage of all” (Dixon, 2003, p. 14).

The persistence and dedication of Roman Catholic parents to achieve equality never faltered in Ontario communities even with the decisive election results of 1971 that saw William Davis
become Provincial Premier. This particular election was marred by public perception that a riding was won or lost depending on how the political candidate sided on the separate school issue. Walter Pitman, a National Democratic Party (NDP) candidate running in a Peterborough riding commented to Father Carl Matthews, SJ, in October 1971, “that marketing research indicate(s) . . . an election could be won, at least in part, by opposing the separate school system” (Dixon, 2003, p. 14). With Davis’ Premiership, however, Roman Catholic school boards were given the option to establish schools beyond junior grades with limited financial support.

Between the years of 1971 to 1984, Roman Catholic Bishops persisted in opening forty-one new high schools to complement the existing fifty-seven throughout the province. Throughout this period, the demand for extended equal funding continued. In 1977, Dr. Henry B. Mayo suggested in his Report of the Ottawa-Carleton Review Commission, “if a thing is right, it should be done, and the tradition should be broken (when prudential judgement allows, as St. Thomas Aquinas might say)” (pp. 127-128). His report encouraged extension as a means to necessarily recognize both parental and religious rights, while appreciating a desirable diversity in Ontario schools. The Jackson Commission on Declining Enrolment, a year later, also offered a re-examination of extended funding. Then in 1982, The Secondary Education Review Project Report recommended that the separate board become officially established as a Roman Catholic Board of Education including elementary and secondary (Grades 9 and 10) panels, and that grants be provided to equally fund the Roman Catholic secondary panel with partial subsidies going toward private Roman Catholic high schools (Grades 11-13) (Dixon, 2003).

During this same period of time, the instituted Charter of Rights and Freedoms again raised, albeit ineffectually, the question of rights of Roman Catholics versus Protestants in education. The 1982 Charter addressed issues of racism and discrimination in Canadian society, yet its reference to education defaulted to the founding 1867 Constitution. Section 29 of the Charter states, “Nothing in this Charter abrogates or derogates from any rights or privileges guaranteed by or under the Constitution of Canada in respect of denomination, separate or dissentient schools” (Van Loon & Whittington, 1987, p. 704).

Throughout the rest of the 1980’s, there was a distinct increase in Roman Catholic high school enrolment throughout the larger cities of Ontario. However, the physical availability of accommodating the increased numbers placed an urgent need on addressing unsubsidized
funding for Roman Catholic high schools (Walker, 1986). The existence of the denominational educational system had been supported mostly privately through the archdiocese, local parishes, and partial returned revenues from religious and lay teaching staff. By 1984, the Ontario Bishops presented a statement to Premier Davis requesting equal funding for their schools on the grounds of historical and legal precedent that had been set forth through Macdonell’s Schools Act of 1841:

> Children must be educated somewhere at public expense and since it is visibly not possible to adapt public schools to satisfy the legitimate philosophical and religious views of a respectable segment of the population, it seems unfair that those who work to provide acceptable education for their children in alternative ways should be deprived of reasonable support for public funds. (Walker, 1986, p. 375).

In the spring of 1984, the Ontario Elementary Catholic Teacher’s Association (OECTA) reaffirmed their support for extended separate school funding through its Report of the Task Force on Education Policy. As the pressure mounted on all sides for the Ontario Government to take a final stand on extended Roman Catholic school funding and the legitimacy of a separate school system in the province of Ontario, Premier Davis officially announced a complete turn around from the decisions of a decade previous and put forth Bill 30 in the provincial government (Dixon, 2003). On June 12, 1984, to the total surprise of everyone, Davis’s Bill 30 extended funding to grade 13 for all separate boards in the province of Ontario. He offered that his decision to extend funding was a matter of conscience, equity and logic.

The press release associated with Premier Davis’s change of mind included the following reasons:

(1) The change in policy would still honour the Confederation contract of 1867; (2) A basic education in 1867 consisted of graduation from elementary school, in 1984 a basic education meant attaining a secondary school diploma; (3) In 1971, extended funding would have been costly due to infrastructure costs, in 1984 there is excessive classroom space; (4) Extended funding would not undermine the viability of the public system, but acknowledgment had to be paid to the one-third of Ontario pupils who were in the Roman Catholic system; (5) Withholding provincial grants or taxes to separate schools beyond grade ten, in the minds of Roman Catholics was “arbitrary and inequitable”; and finally (5) Separate school completion would strengthen the social fabric of Ontario as “the letter of the old law cannot substitute for common sense” (Ontario Government, 1984, p.6).
The Roman Catholic bishops agreed to all of the conditions put forth in Bill 30 in 1984. For the last twenty-five years, Roman Catholic Education in Ontario has been openly accessible and equally supported as a legitimate and valued educational option for youth throughout the province.

1.2 Roman Catholic schools versus public schools

As one faith-based educational system found validation in the government legislature, if not in the social fabric of the province, public schools continued on a path that was moving in the direction of secularization. The trepidation of promoting or singling out any one faith over another gained momentum as the diversity of Ontario communities evolved and flourished. The response was to erase the option of religious discussion by denying communities recognition of diverse faiths in schools. Addressing religious or spiritual concepts in Ontario public schools at present is done so with caution and apprehensive action, usually in the form of highlighting what food or dress is indicative of annual festivals, celebrations or sacred events. Hence, reference to modern public schools is often interchangeable with the title “secular”.

It then becomes a matter for argument over the value of religious or spiritual faith in one’s life and how a society can provide safe space for that identity to flourish. Identity is the thread that binds all religiously-based schools, although it is seldom described in exactly those terms. Children who are educated in a secure, familiar, affirmative environment will grow up knowing who they are and where they have come from (Dei, 1996; Dei et al., 2000; Dei et al., 1997; Sweet, 1997). The moral and values-based aspect to religious schooling can be seen as an integral part of growth and learning, while equipping young people with crucial and ethical judgments to tackle the outside world. One could further argue that those who are more religiously literate have a distinct advantage in understanding the world-view of others and will be enabled to better interact in today’s ethnically, racially and religiously diverse society.

Mulligan (1990) states that today’s Roman Catholic schools must offer, “a Catholic education that unmasks, questions, critiques and challenges the non-gospel values of our culture and society” (pp. 30-31). His suggestion places the onus on Roman Catholic educators to role-model through language and actions the values and morals of a spiritual being for today’s youth. One English teacher interviewed by Mulligan (1990) put it this way: “in talking about evangelization
in the Catholic high school, we are not talking so much about teaching something as we’re talking about being something” (p. 40).

Issues of race, class, gender and religion are categories that rank people and evoke a standard of measure toward Western Europe’s ‘civilized’ societies. In all cases, “difference becomes the means by which a dominant group can assert its identity by exterminating, oppressing, marginalizing, or simply ignoring those it wishes to exclude” (Wright, 2004, p. 133). The voices of youth promote the Roman Catholic system as a healthy alternative to the secular educational system of Ontario, yet the struggle for Roman Catholic youth to embrace and internalize a Roman Catholic worldview as a living directive appears difficult because of the historical stigma associated with the denomination. For non-Roman Catholic youth in the system, their hidden identity remains necessary for avoiding alienation that is expected from peers within the system. As Mulligan (1994) suggests, “Catholic education really takes place in the gap; that is, in the struggle area, between the ideals of the vision statements and the lived reality of the corridors, classrooms and cafeteria” (p. 157).

Whereas youth in the secular or public school system may feel “deeply threatened at the core of their being by the invitation to enter a mind set where there is no sense of the sacred, where connection is devalued” (hooks, 2003, p. 180), youth in the Roman Catholic system, who sit outside the denominational concept of this faith, can also feel devalued and relegated toward searching for space that honours their difference or identity as ‘other’. Youth shift their identities through image and action, defiant not to be labelled or pigeon-holed within a single identity.

Whether inspired by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or by the perceived rise in quality education that the Roman Catholic system was now offering, Premier William Davis’ turn around reignited the social ridicule and racism that Macdonell’s Grammar School Act of 1841 perpetuated nearly 150 years earlier across Ontario. Opening the doors of Roman Catholic schools to the general public through full and equal funding as delivered to the public boards has its share of both fans and critics. The biggest concern of some Roman Catholic educators and clergy is that separate school integrity will be lost by opening their doors to everyone (McGowan, 2005; Manzer, 2004). Public board employees and supporters have also gone on the offensive to challenge completion of funding by filing legal action claiming constitutional religious discrimination in that no other denominational faith has been given the option to
receive equal funding for education (Manzer, 2004). Public teacher animosity is reminiscent of Protestant discrimination witnessed 140 years ago in the Ryerson era. They are experiencing loss of jobs because of declining enrolment and many regard a potential expansion of Roman Catholic high schools as a danger to job security (Dixon, 2003).

Arguments against any form of religious instruction or education in the public system have been strongly presented by many in the Jewish community (Shamai, 1997). Themes of protest revolve around arguments separating church and state in education and the multi-cultural nature of defining Canadian identity. There has also been a call to protect and enforce the self-esteem and social acceptance of non-Christian students in all schools, not just separate schools (Shamai, 1997). The Roman Catholic populace in Ontario has held on to the demands of the Holy See to ensure that an educational system that was Roman Catholic would be available to all in the community and to all grade levels well into the twenty-first century. Yet, it seems that for months after Bill 30 was adopted, separate schools were considered an insidious threat to a democratic and multi-cultural society. Since the promise of full funding was made, Roman Catholics have wondered about the price. They are taken aback by attacks from public school teachers; many Roman Catholic leaders did not believe job anxieties had come from an unjust concession, but were a response in turn with the historic rejection of Roman Catholic claims (McGowan, 2005; Dixon, 2003).

After a century of evolving legislation in Ontario education, terms such as ‘integration’, ‘pluralism’, ‘values’, ‘common good’, ‘equitable’, ‘enlightened public opinion’, and ‘investment in the future’ have begun to take on new meaning in government assemblies and school corridors. Equal funding for Roman Catholic schooling has not only come to fruition in Ontario, but has also been upheld in the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan (Flynn, 2003). Yet the question of how far the system has come since Pope John Paul II, in an address to Newfoundland educators in 1984, implored Roman Catholic educators to “grasp firmly the challenge of providing a kind of education whose curriculum must be inspired more by reflection than by technique, more by the search for wisdom than the accumulation of information” (Murphy, 2002, p. 15), is hard to judge.

One can only hope that the expansion of social diversity in our public schools has propelled educational communities to recognize and value difference, striving to transform from an
historically vertical mosaic into an equitable space for minority social groups and diverse youth identity (Manzer, 2004). Students have been aggressively thwarted in pursuits to explore their inner selves in a society that has been evolving beyond the confines of a Euro-centric agenda, and modern curriculum further restricts their attempts to embody a concept of equality of educational experiences for individual students. To the critics who suggest that religiously segregated schooling leads to a form of “religious apartheid” and “ghetto” schooling (Zine, 2004, p. 52), their argument fails to take into account the number of healthy and tolerant citizens who place their own successful educational experience in the Ontario Roman Catholic system of the past 150 years.

1.2.1 Roman Catholic schooling: Communities of respected identities

It has been suggested that education in the Euro-American context is directed under the reality that schools are merely political sites for the reproduction of power and social inequality (Dei et al., 1997). The importation of colonial and imperial forms of education, that is education from a perspective of Euro-centric superiority controlling and dominating what is learned and how it is delivered, can amputate the self from the educational community. For youth to embody an identity that is empowering, the essence of how their identity is multi-dimensional in body, mind and spirit needs to be acknowledged. Westernized forms of education, focusing on naming and defining the body, mind and material, neglects the soul and spirit, while negating identity and voice of the minority, marginalized or ‘other’.

The Roman Catholic school finds true justification in the mission of the Church. It is based on an educational philosophy in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony. Through it, the local Church evangelizes, educates, and contributes to the formation of a healthy and morally sound life-style among its members (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1988, p. 34). Ontario Roman Catholic schools offer a value-based system through the lens of a particular religious denomination. Roman Catholic values are defined as a set of principles, codes and ethical mores based in Christian philosophy and Biblical parameters. The lessons of the Ten Commandments, the awareness and practise of the sacraments and a belief in the salvation of Jesus are all aspects of Roman Catholic values as outlined in modern Roman Catholic schools. Without a values-based system of learning and growth, many argue that
present and future generations will not be able to nurture supportive and sincere citizenship in community.

The Ontario Roman Catholic school system was historically upheld because less mobile parents, more specifically mothers, stayed at home and were more directly involved with their children’s daily routine. Community parishes staffed their local schools with teachers who lived within the catchment areas of both school and parish (Murphy, 2002, p. 15). The links among home, school and church were much more intertwined and mutually supportive in the past. Roman Catholic high schools in Ontario today house a diverse range of students who identify with being English as Second Language speakers, who cover a diverse scope of socio-economic conditions, and align with other Christian or non-Christian denominations (Ornstein, 2006; Strategic Research and Statistics, 2005; White, Leake & Hunter, 2005). Parents and students who also admit to not reflecting on faith, or admit to agnosticism or atheism are also amongst the school populations. The inclusive nature of a modern Roman Catholic school now represents the multi-dimensional ethnic, racial and faith-based communities that exist throughout Ontario and the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area in particular.

The public secular school system also represents the multi-dimensional, diverse communities that exist in Ontario but the main difference it shares with the Roman Catholic school system is the acknowledgement of faith as an aspect of spiritual identity. Although the Roman Catholic school has become the primary place for young people to make contact with the church, for 70-80% of students, the Roman Catholic school has become the only experience of church (Mulligan, 1994, p. 43). When celebrations are not shared together, then the weakening of the bonds of a Roman Catholic community ensues, and individualism holds sway for educator, trustee, parent, and student. The need to build and nurture a sense of trust and support in the epistemological sense of community is a directive of the Church and Institute for Catholic Education in Ontario (ICE). Community as a living entity is the heart of Roman Catholic schools in Ontario. As Murphy (2002) explains, “Creating community is never accidental to the Catholic educational enterprise but at the very heart of what we do” (p. 16). Although Roman Catholic school communities are made up of diverse faiths, it is their existence as a community that accepts and flourishes in spiritual faith that sets it apart from the public secular system, without apology.
The Roman Catholic system, however, is not without its challenges or criticisms. Mulligan (1994) suggests that there appears to be growing disillusionment with the official church on the part of Roman Catholic educators across Ontario. Mulligan refers to the official church as being a “hierarchy” that “is more authoritarian than enabling” (p.59). He also suggests that the clergy “are more cleric than servant” and the system as a whole entails “outmoded, irrelevant laws and disciplines that are more obstacle than help” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 59). Rémi Parent (1989), further qualifies this line of thought in his work, *A Church of the Baptized* in which he suggests the church needs to transition from a church of uniformity to that of unity in plurality. He sees the problem as laying fundamentally in a clergy-laity relationship, one based on power and control, as a structure that deprives people of their subjectivity, or their responsibility to and becoming part of the church. As Murphy (2004) suggests, “What is often forgotten is that community is necessary to remembering and telling the stories by which people define themselves” (p. 6).

Roman Catholic communities need to unify in faith toward knowing who they are, and where they are going as a community-of-persons.

During Mulligan’s (1990) interviews with students, the idea of a Roman Catholic school community was very salient in discussion. The community was a living entity for some students that emphasized obligations to support each other both within and outside the larger community. As one of the students, Christopher, suggested:

> I’ve experienced a public high school and a Catholic high school, and here I really do feel there is a stronger sense of community. Also, there is emphasis put on the community outside the school: the city, those in need, our responsibility as Christians for the poor, etc. None of this was emphasized in the other high school. (Mulligan, 1990, pp. 166-168)

Throughout Mulligan’s interviews, it was the sense of community that was the outstanding difference between the Roman Catholic and secular system. The repetition of words such as “spirit”, “bonding together”, and “family” were commonly used, and students offered that religion classes provided a positive respect to human life that stood out within their Roman Catholic school experience. It is imperative that youth who are in search of an identity that is valued and legitimated, within a space of knowledge acquisition, access their sense of spirit and skills of interpretation (Mulligan, 1994). In accordance with Dei et al., (2000), the teaching and nurturing of spirituality in schools should be separated from religious doctrine. Teachers need to enunciate the values, norms and beliefs to guide youth’s internal sense of self, personhood,
individual and collective specialization. Youth can build inclusive connections as a community-of-persons in schooling when spiritual identity is prided and encouraged. A spiritual identity is a valuable and legitimate identity worth protecting, nurturing and promoting in all youth. A spiritual identity is also one that can be freed, acknowledged and valued through acts of liberation, liberation in society, in faith and in schooling. Broaching youth in faith-based educational environments requires a discussion platform that is rooted in safety, compassion and a freedom to expose the self without persecution. A discussion platform based in liberation theology provides a foundation to engage in dialogue that is non-judging and supportive of youth identity and youth identity in faith. Liberation theology as a discipline provides a faithful understanding and action toward supporting and removing the chains of oppression in all routines of life, in the home, in our communities and in our schools.

1.3 Liberation theology in theory and practice

As an ontological movement, liberation theology challenges the injustices and contradictions of religious faith both within the Church and within society. This movement stresses the incomprehensible mysteriousness of the reality of God, and shifts the onus toward acknowledging God throughout the course of human history in stories of oppression, alienation and struggles for survival. Liberation theology can therefore be defined as a theological movement attempting to unite theology and socio-political concerns in a “dynamic, ongoing exercise involving contemporary insights into knowledge (epistemology), humankind (anthropology), and history (social analysis)” (Webster, 2007, p. 686). A more secular view of liberation theology might suggest that this movement strives to regain identity that has been stripped, corroded and devalued because of its difference outside of the status quo.

The primary text for most theologies of liberation is found in Luke 4:18-19, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”. In this particular gospel, the work of Jesus is focussed on liberating the poor, providing justice for the alienated and freedom for the oppressed. One branch of the movement can be found in Black Theology or the Black Church. This movement necessitates viewing liberation in conjunction with black history and black power. “Black Theology is engaged theology, committed to the amelioration of the condition of black people
and consciously locked in battle with white racism” (Cruz, 2007, p. 171). Black theology recovers symbols and identities destroyed by slave masters, reaffirms economic, social and political space which oppressors have denied, and seeks to destroy alien gods, creating value-structures according the God of black freedom (Cone, 1969). This form of liberation is inextricably related to the Exodus event and the freedom from bondage that God unconditionally supports. As Cone (1969) suggests, “In the relations and events in the life of his people, God always takes his stand unconditionally and passionately on this side alone; against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it” (p. 45).

Another form of the movement is seen in the Liberation Theology of Latin America. This branch of theology has risen in response to the colonialism, imperialism and multinational corporate agency that exploits and dehumanizes those who sit outside the wealthy social, economic and political classes. Unlike Black Theology that does not place its roots in another strictly denominational religious movement, the Liberation Theology of Latin America is, for the most part, a Roman Catholic theological movement. At their core, however, all forms of theologies of liberation emphasise deliberate distortions of Christianity that have been perpetrated to maintain the existing relationships between master and slave, oppressor and oppressed through lending sanction to the status quo.

It was at the Latin American Catholic Bishop’s Second General Conference at Medellin, Columbia, in the Fall of 1968, that Liberation Theology was formally announced as a priority of the Roman Catholic church and community in Latin America. This post-Vatican II forum concluded that poverty violated human rights to such a degree that it had become a situation of injustice and could therefore be called a form of “institutionalized violence”, while the privileged sectors exhibit “a lamentable insensitivity . . . to the misery of the marginated sectors” (Brady, 2005, Medellin 2.16, 2.5, 2.9). Liberation theology, for all practical purposes, equates loving one’s neighbour with loving God, and this expression embraces the salvation of all of humanity, past, present and future (Webster, 2007). Liberation theology is meant to be a way of life, a doctrine for people to become the agents of their own destiny and to aid the poor and socially maligned as brothers and sisters, equal in their place of communal stewardship of the earth.
To be considered poor in the eyes of liberation theology is not only a situation of material deprivation, it also is the state of suffering the diminution of human dignity because the poor are denied full participation in socio-political life. Gutiérrez (2004) wrote that to be poor, one is crushed within a “subhuman situation . . . to be poor means to die of hunger, to be illiterate, to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person” (pp. xxi-xxiii). Liberation theology turns to the Christian faith as a means for bringing about liberation. It holds that in the death of the peasant, the Black slave or the Native Canadian, we are confronted with the monstrous power of the negative and forced to recognize God in the suffering and despair of oppressed peoples (Webster, 2007; Hodgson, 2005).

For theologian Roger Haight (1985, p. 134), liberation theology begins with the experience of poverty, its destitution, suffering and premature death as an experience that evokes outrage, condemnation of causal conditions, and perpetuates guilt for allowing it to continue. He reaffirms the concept of historical consciousness within a theology of liberation where persons living in this time realize that the present is a product of the past. The process of liberation entails a solidarity moving beyond community and linking liberation with unity among all people and with God. This historical viewpoint is not just a point of entry to seek data and analyze unjust structures; it leads to a method of correlation whereby it seeks answers to dilemmas in light of Christian tradition (Haight, 1985). Recent historical consciousness and social awareness have perpetuated the movements in theology toward liberation and social justice. Yet, progress depends on a realization of social interdependence, that social structures and situations are changeable human structures, and society must recognize ways in which all people participate in imposing oppression and/or being victims. Liberation theology “is often polemic, not only against society but also against the [Roman Catholic] Church and other theologies insofar as they fail to meet the exigencies of historical life” (Haight, 1985, p. 19) and the social injustices that exist globally. Many groups in positions of power (political, economic and religious) are caught in a dialectic of acting positively to liberate the negative in society, while recognizing their space as historic perpetrators within the oppression. Theologies of liberation are often woven within existential arguments toward understanding dialectics of power and control where both oppressors and those oppressed are equally victims and supporters of their place through maintaining the status quo in their own right (Webster, 2007, p. 686).
1.3.1 What would a theology of liberation look like in schooling?

The strength of liberation theology is in its compassion for the oppressed and marginalized and its conviction that Christians should not remain passive and indifferent to their plight. As schools that promote a community-of-persons, within a community of faith, Roman Catholic school epistemologies also create their own dialectic to go one step further than the public system in acknowledging a faith identity, but still control the exposure of faith diversity again by their very existence as “Roman Catholic” in name. Yet the denial of their perpetuation within the ontological dialectic of power and privilege as colonial oppressor both in the past and present also must result in an evolution toward strengthening liberation at the root of the theological framework in schools. Various schools and schooling practices around the world and throughout Canada have attempted inclusive liberation practices that encompass a spiritual dimension of theological ecumenism, a faith-based approach to accepting and working with members of other faiths toward achieving an equally progressive and positive community.

Internationally, a Dutch model of education role-models successful integration of diverse forms of religious education into its schooling practices. In a pluralistic society, much on the same scale as Canada, Dutch schools have taken on the ideology that children should come from a position of strength in their own religion and culture to contribute to a multi-faith society, while being exposed to all other religions and cultures during their educational experience (Sweet, 1997). The Dutch describe their system as one formed on the concept of integration: an exchange between a minority community and the larger community, where the newcomers do not have to sacrifice their identity in order to be accepted and/or respected. According to Rahmat Khan Abdur Rahman, the principal of the Soeffah Islamic School outside of Amsterdam, “integration is a basic set of rules which is valued by everyone and yet people have in addition a certain freedom toward developing their own identity” (Sweet, 1997, pp. 134-135). The Soeffah Islamic School is an example of a publicly-funded religious school that provides an inclusive plurality of faith-based pods housed in a single playground. Each pod is religious in nature, for example there are Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Islamic and Public/Secular buildings where the students engage in their own religious/non-religious teaching for a period each day, but they also share core training in a shared building that affords the integration of math, English, science, social sciences and fine arts programming (Sweet, 1997). In this environment, faith in education carries value, and the option to attend a publicly-funded religious-based school such as the Soeffah
Islamic School is certainly an alternative to the public secular school for Dutch parents. The Soeffah Islamic School offers a multi-faith ecumenical environment that embraces difference in faith and nurtures a respect and pride in one’s own identity as well as that of others. “For those who believe the public funding of religiously-based schools will lead to ghettoization, social division, and religious conflict, the Dutch experience suggests otherwise” (Sweet, 1997, p. 144). According to Sweet, the Dutch example has proven to be successful because of a policy of equality and tolerance that has contributed to the integration and emancipation of religious minorities.

In 1995 the Edmonton Public School Board responded to public pleas for the subsidization of a public Hebrew school. Fears did expound from the Jewish organizers that the presence of non-Jews would negatively alter the school, yet, within a framework of self-reflexivity, the system works because there is an acknowledgement and acceptance of diversity (Sweet, 1997, p. 71). Mark Weinberg, Director of Education at the private Hillel Academy Jewish school in Ottawa, offers that, “because culture and religion are so intertwined” he says, “you can’t have one without the other” (Sweet, 1997, p. 72). One can even argue that the success of a cultural or ethnic community is imbedded within the success of its religious community, and vice versa.

Examples of successful faith-based schools provide evidence to counter the argument that assimilation over integration will disintegrate the minority religion within any dominant culture. Some minority groups in the Toronto CMA have responded to their fear of assimilation by establishing private and independent schools; but many cannot afford private schooling. Independent schools only foster and support a classist system at its core. Private schooling might salvage a religious or cultural identity, but marginalizes the group by its own existence. Private schools limit not only the social interaction of youth but also curtail the opportunity for discussion and understanding of pluralism and social justice in the curriculum and community. Inclusive faith-based schooling supports a dialectic view of the world that moves students away from dualistic ways of thinking and addresses the challenge of integrating social and cultural values that promote alternative and multiple readings of the world into classroom pedagogues, instruction and school curricular (Dei et al., 2000, p. 82). Dennis Murphy concludes in his 2003 Catholic Registrar supplement ‘Called to Teach: The Catholic Teacher as Witness’, that historically, Roman Catholic schools offered hope to those “little people - born bright, but not rich” (p. 21), providing competence and confidence to make them “part of a society that did not
care for them at all” (p. 22). His language and connotation work in a patronizingly ensuring manner and also offers a truth to a mainstream society that has historically discriminated on the grounds of faith, class, race, and gender. The enlisted plurality of Roman Catholic schooling as inclusive is intentional.

1.4 Research objectives: Identity, faith & schooling

This research intends to fill that void offering an investigation into a particular identity of Roman Catholic school youth through the lens of a non-Roman Catholic sociologist, raised in the public/secular education system of Ontario. It states my bias and attempts to also maintain consistent self-reflexivity on that bias. It also provides voice to Roman Catholic school youth directly as the primary research data.

This research explores four main themes in modern Roman Catholic schools within the Toronto CMA: (1) youth identity in schooling and education; (2) youth identity in faith; (3) anti-colonial oppression versus community empowerment in Ontario Roman Catholic secondary schools; and (4) resistance and change through a spiritual theology of liberation for Roman Catholic school youth. A single-case study methodology was employed to gather the research data. The methodology incorporated survey and interview data from 10 schools across the Toronto CMA. Three hundred survey packages were distributed to three hundred randomly selected students. Within each package was a student survey as well as a survey to be completed by a parent or guardian in the student’s same household. Of the 600 surveys distributed to students and their respective parent or guardian, 71 were returned by students and 69 were returned by parents. Of the 71 student surveys, 15 students volunteered freely, and with parental permission, to participate in an interview process.

Critical ethnographic data was collected through student and staff interviews. The interview data was then analyzed through an anti-colonial discursive framework. An anti-colonial discursive framework is an approach to theorizing colonial relations and the implications of imperial structures on the processes of knowledge production and validation, toward creating space for Indigenous, minoritized and alienated communities engaged in the pursuit of agency, resistance and subjective politics (Dei, 2002, p. 4). This research study argues that the modern Ontario Roman Catholic school system is still a site of colonial supremacy, which dictates and delivers Euro-centric assimilationist knowledge while ignoring the lived histories and identities of the
current youth in the system. The interview data have been triangulated with the literature to date, incorporating the voice of youth in Canada and in Ontario Roman Catholic schools, as well as with educators in the same schools and school board under investigation. The research offers a lens of self-reflexivity for the Ontario Roman Catholic school system toward creating an inclusive environment that embraces racial, social and faith-based diversity as equally prided within the system.

A qualitative critical ethnography in education posits the voice of youth as the primary source of understanding the attitude toward immersion in an educational environment. Through a critical ethnographic approach, researchers can be particularly responsive to situating people as actors in complex negotiation with the social realities and challenges they confront (Anderson, 1989; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac & Zine, 1997; Simon & Dippo, 1986; Zine, 2004). The youth engaged for this research passionately discussed the level of diversity that exists within their communities and school environments. The need to incorporate that diversity as a sense of pride and privilege into the daily social fabric of schooling is critical for all communities today. By acknowledging the level of diversity in modern Ontario Roman Catholic schools, especially within the Toronto CMA, empowerment of voice and action will take hold in the student population as members of a community-of-persons in spiritual faith.

1.5 Personal subject position, lens and bias

My own subject-position as an educator for seven years in a Toronto CMA Roman Catholic secondary school has inspired this research. My father, a devout Roman Catholic of Irish and First Nations (Six Nations Mohawk) descent, and my mother, raised in the British Anglican tradition, each held strong beliefs on issues of faith and encouraged my weekly attendance at either the local Roman Catholic or Protestant Church services. Ironically, and for some years, I chose to attend the closest church to my house, which was Presbyterian, before switching to the United Church and eventually the Dutch Reformed Church because my circle of friends attended those services. I only remember setting foot in our local Roman Catholic parish church twice with my father for Sunday services. Most notably, however, I was never forced growing up to believe in any one religion by either parent. Each of my parents’ own personal and inclusive attitudes toward faith inspired my own comfort and respect for diverse religious and spiritual visions.
As a product of the Ontario secular elementary and secondary school system, I grew up within an era of hearing and internalizing a unique understanding of Roman Catholic schooling through my father’s lived experience and that of the Protestant community in which I was raised. The stigmatism associated with a Roman Catholic identity outweighed the normalcy that I witnessed with my father and nearby Roman Catholic neighbours. Like Lois Sweet (1997) in her self-disclosure on interacting with local Roman Catholic children in the community of her youth, “I, for one, was so afraid of the stereotypic “other” that I had no idea how to handle an actual relationship with someone so seemingly different as a Catholic” (p. 3). My father quelled my fear to some extent, but his own experience as a product of the pre-Vatican II system was relayed with a sense of mysticism and guilt-ridden anxiety that I could not totally understand nor relate to.

I was baptized an Anglican, and have attended various Christian and non-Christian services over the years, yet now as an adult I cannot comfortably lay claim to any particular organized religion currently in existence. I do not believe in the traditional sense of a God, but I do believe in the spiritual sense of human existence having an essential and holistic connection to space, time and energy within all things known and unknown. As a graduate of human evolutionary science, I have an appreciation for science and scientific principles. It is within this framework that my own sense of being and existence has formulated around an inner belief and spiritual value system. I regard my occupation of body and space as one with a connection to community, both natural and perceived, and with a purpose destined by time and energy. I do not share in a utopian belief of life after death, being the product of divine creation, or in the existence of a place of salvation or stagnation in heaven, hell or purgatory.

My choice to not align with a particular religion or Christian denomination does not afford any disrespect for those establishments or belief systems, but rather expresses my own satisfied conscience toward understanding lived reality in something more spiritual. My understanding and interaction with everyone and everything I engage is internalized with self-reflexivity on my lived experience and identity as described here. I acknowledge my place of privilege and power as an educator and one who has negotiated space to achieve the power to hear, decode and project the stories, ideas and lived experiences of the youth engaged for this research. I impose the act of bringing in to oneself the sense of learning and knowing, but will self-reflex on the value, legitimacy and learned experience that support my own various identities and how they
are expelled out onto others. I do uphold the gospel concept, “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged” [Matthew 7:1], not so as the word of God, but as a moral and ethical code that is grounded in the spiritual sense of safety and peace in community.

Through my current position as a teacher and guidance counsellor, I have encountered many youth who are exploring the rationale for religion and spirituality in their own lives. Some of these students question their position in a denominational institution when they cannot lay claim to the belief system placed in front of them. It was through interactions with these spiritually wandering students that I began to question the acceptance of diverse faiths in modern education, especially within the exclusive framework of Roman Catholicism. Qualitative data are pivotal to providing the words, actions, signs and symbols that offer the positionality of social actors, in this case the position of youth in the system. At no time during the research process did I underestimate my position of power or influence as an educator working with students or how my personal biases may have become disclosed in conversation with participatory youth. Nor did I underestimate the prior knowledge that I brought to this research, as a product of the colonial secular system of Ontario, or as a product of mixed race and faith, with a personal subjectivity aligned with spiritual inclusivity and acceptance. As a researcher investigating a topic that is so inherently passion-filled, sometimes volatile and always personal, I, as do all researchers, need to consistently take stock of my own lens of bias and positionality.

As part of a critical reflexive praxis, I located myself within the research and identified my source of knowledge production as both shaped and limited by my personal history and experience. Reflexive praxis in ethnography, therefore, requires being attentive to the ideological orientation of one’s research, including any preconceived biases or meta-narrative constructs that contain meanings (Zine, 2004). My reflexive praxis consists of acknowledging my role as a privileged possessor of expert knowledge, who holds a direct position of power perceived or otherwise over the students involved with this research, yet who needs to act as a catalyst to work with and empower those local participants. My self identity in religion, race, gender, ability, age and experience contextualize my language, my mannerisms, and my ability to engage, respond and retract dialogue with others. The imperative, to step outside of one’s cultural context and worldview, is essential to the process of reflexive critical analysis, especially concerning highly sensitive issues such as identity in faith (Zine, 2004). As a sociological researcher using a critical ethnographic lens, I have placed my identity firmly on the table in all
discussions, and attempted to make myself aware of how it places assumptions, bias and parameters around interpretation and responses. As a sociological researcher, there needs to be a move toward enlarging our own knowledge location and critique of others’ lived experience. As Zine (2004) further suggests, we must challenge our a-priori assumptions about those whom we study and engage in the field, as part of reflexive inquiry.

To empower the voice of my students propels those youth to not only being research subjects, but to being collaborators in the research production at large. Anderson (1989) refers to collaborative research as a strategy that allows researchers and informants to collaborate on how meanings are constructed and negotiated within textual accounts. By recognizing and recording the multiple voices occurring within communities, we will be able to analyze the specific factors that affect the formation of historical situations, legitimate collusions, and their subsequent social actions (Quantz & O’Conner, 1988). By quoting student dialogue and offering it up for further interpretation, this research is not only revelatory, but legitimately gives voice to the voiceless. Therefore, as those voices are immersed in a faith-based environment, it is mandatory that I am self-reflective in disclosure of my lived reality and worldview to provide openly and equitably a fair and valid interpretation of those legitimate voices.

1.6 Chapter outline

Chapter 2 outlines the discursive theoretical framework used to analyze this research. An anti-colonial approach was used to investigate youth, identity, faith and schooling since the interwoven context of power and privilege in schooling is inherently tied to anti-colonial theory. The Euro-centric nature of Canadian schools is deconstructed, thereby revealing the historic legacy of Roman Catholic education in Ontario and the political power dynamics that the system still enacts with youth.

The work of Bibby (1985, 2001) and Mulligan (1990, 1994, 2005) are compared to provide background data on the subjects of modern Canadian youth identity and Ontario Roman Catholic school youth identity in faith. The chapter deconstructs naming and the titles allocated within a hierarchical agenda in schools. The chapter also discusses diasporic roots and peer alliance as a means for youth to employ resistance strategies for withstanding an oppressive system. Some resistance strategies encourage youth to adopt discursive titles in order to weave their way
through safe spaces in schools, negotiating acceptance within peer groups and gaining approval by family, educators and the community at large.

Definitions of religion, faith and spirituality are also investigated. The historical context of these terms and how they are internalized through a lens of non-Roman Catholic and Roman Catholic beliefs are revealed. Spirituality is further deconstructed to decipher its distinction in the Roman Catholic faith as well as outside a religious context. The call by Roman Catholics and non-Roman Catholics for Roman Catholic schools to incorporate spiritual language outside of a religious language is discussed. The vision of faith-based schools, nationally and internationally, that appear to work outside of a strict denominational system are also put forth as role-modelling examples that the Roman Catholic system may regard toward accommodating the diversity within their halls.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and field of research for this study, that of a single-case study methodology within a critical ethnographic approach. A single school board within the Toronto Metropolitan Census Area was used for this research. This school board covers a vast and diverse area of geographic, socio-economic and cultural/ethnic communities. The approach to gathering data in this region is discussed, as well as the challenges and limitations to access.

The validity of using a critical ethnographic approach to gathering the data for this particular research is discussed. Validity is seen through triangulation of the primary resources in survey and interview data combined with the interviews of staff and background research literature. The anti-colonial discursive framework for analysing the data is put forth to provide context for deciphering the survey and interview data. Through this research, anti-colonial thought is linked with a post-modernist sociological theory relating to the non-static nature of power in and between the institutional structures of our society. This discursive theory allows for those who have been colonially victimized to empower their sense of assimilation through learning to negotiate the self within the colonizer’s world. The challenges to analyzing the data are also offered.

Chapter 4 outlines the key points from the data, including student and parental survey text and tables, interview notes and recordings from students, and interview dialogue with staff. Youth describe the influence and need for peer acceptance, first through image, then through peer association, and finally through vocalizing faith conviction. Youth define the concepts of
religion, faith and spirituality in accordance with the literature and also within personally modern and unique ways. The strategies used by youth to empower themselves within a faith-based identity that may align with Roman Catholicism or spirituality is offered.

Brief biographic images of each of the interviewed students is provided in the data findings of Chapter 4 as a means to bring those voices and identities further into the consciousness of the reader, and to allow for the complexities and conviction of these youth to be shown through other details to their identities, valued stories, lived experiences and histories.

Chapter 5 offers analysis of the data, focussing on the research directives and questions. Triangulation of the surveys, interviews with students, and dialogue with staff help to provide a unique and often contradictory picture of how youth personalize faith and schooling, beyond the subjective impressions of adults and theologians. Youth reveal that they are strong in their faith-based beliefs and formulate a religious or spiritual identity that is very personal. Their attempts to empower themselves through voice and action against the colonial establishment and pressure from peers is evident and powerful. Youth, especially non-Roman Catholic youth, also discuss their strategies for remaining hidden within the system, while Roman Catholic youth display criticism of the system through noticeable resistance tactics.

Although these youth are supportive and appreciative of the Roman Catholic system, they are also critical of its stigmatic presence in the social sphere and reveal how the system hides and ignores youth. Students offer resistance strategies toward protecting an identity that they consider valuable, but offer limited strategies for the system to improve. The essence of being Roman Catholic is questioned negatively, while an aspect of some other identity in faith is put forth with consideration.

Finally, Chapter 6 reviews the critical points of understanding the history of Roman Catholic education in Ontario and how it continues to play the role of colonizer in the modern era of our communities. Some of the key theoretical, philosophical and practical issues broached by this study are discussed, such as: (a) What is the link between identity, schooling and knowledge production?; (b) How do the different voices of students of multi-faiths, educators, administrators, and so forth, contradict, converge and diverge from each other?; (c) How are we to understand the role and importance of spirituality in schooling, knowledge production, and in claims of Indigeneity and resistance to colonizing education?; (d) What does it mean to claim
spirituality as a valid way of knowing?; (e) In what way does this study help understand claims that spirituality avoids splitting of the self?; (f) How do we address the fact that our cultures today are threatened by the absence of community?; and (g) What are the pedagogic and instructional relevancies of this work for the classroom teacher?

Youth today live with and encompass diverse identities in the realm of race, culture, gender, class, ableism, sexuality and faith. They acknowledge a sense of spirituality outside of religion that offers a lens into personal identity that needs to be acknowledged and engaged in modern schooling environments. Youth need to be further empowered within these identities through the dismantling of current educational systemic establishments, and with having their voices heard to assist in the creation of new forms of schooling environments that take pride in diverse faith identities and offer voice to voiceless youth. Liberating the spirit through identity recognition and empowering self-knowledge will bring about successful youth who move into the circles of becoming educators in their own homes, schools, and community organizations, now and in the future.
Chapter 2
Literature & Theory: Identity, Faith and Roman Catholic Schooling

It is thus education’s noble task to encourage each and every one, acting in accordant with their traditions and convictions and paying full respect to pluralism, to lift their minds and spirits to the plane of the universal and, in some measure, to transcend themselves (International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, 1996, p. 18).

2 Overview – How youth define and identify an identity

Youth identity is unstable, shifting and multi-dimensional. It ebbs and flows within the social dynamic of their surroundings and within all their relationships. How youth envision, describe and name themselves within the parameters of their social relationships and environmental conditions is shaped upon how youth think they are being viewed by others, and how they might wish to be viewed and named. Naming an identity therefore becomes limited within the context of time and space. Historically, youth have not had many opportunities to name their identity in academic, political or public social spaces. Curtailed by the illegitimacy of age and maturity, many youth have been silenced by academic authority figures and government representatives when issues affecting their personal growth and awareness have been broached. Many youth are further silenced and marginalized because they sit outside the majority norm or expectation. Ontario youth who align with an identity that is not white, male, middle/upper class, Christian, heterosexual or able, challenge the system to affix a name that is socially acceptable in modern communities and schools. For these youth, the struggle to lay claim to an identity becomes even more elusive and unstable in their surroundings and relationships. Therefore, for youth to self-identify, they need to feel confident in laying claim to that self-identity as a valued space. Youth also need to possess the strength and empowerment of a legitimate voice toward naming that identity.

When named by another, the name can be scripted to devalue or empower the body doing the naming. Colonial forces saw to degrading, marginalizing and alienating those they colonized through naming with suppressive titles and identities. Edward Said highlighted the salient power relationships implied through the act of naming in his book *Orientalism* (1978). It was a relationship that positioned Westernized image and knowledge at the top of global dominance and control. Said (1978) wrote, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself
off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (p. 3). Western European colonialists used language and text to manipulate and enslave the peoples of the East. The title of Orient alone is historically laden with exoticized reference to white paternal power, and the dominance of a weak and naive population.

Around the world, Western European colonization appropriated titles to people and identity without retribution or atonement. The indigenous peoples of North America were incorrectly labelled “Indian” by 15th century Spanish explorers who originally thought they had landed on the Asian landmass of India. The title of “Indian”, although replaced by politically correct language in many legal and government documents today, is still the most globally popular and rife title for North American indigenous populations. The proliferation of the title of Indian has maintained a mask over the true identity of the Indigenous peoples of Canada for centuries. Indigenous Canadian communities have attempted to shed that mask by establishing a name respective of their embodied space, that of First Nations. Their fight for recognition in every arena of Canadian government, and social and economic affairs, is continuously ongoing with limited success outside of the political arena. Social institutions, such as schools are slow to adopt inclusive practices that acknowledge a name respective of their lost identity. The prolific act of naming holds with it power and privilege. Previously marginalized communities and peoples are in a constant struggle toward acquiring a legitimate voice and valued space in post-colonial Canada.

Racialized names are only one aspect toward assigning inferior status and identity to those colonized and considered different. Roman Catholic and white non-English-speaking populations (amongst others) have been discriminated against in many of the colonies appropriated by British power, such as pre-Confederation Ontario where Ontario Roman Catholic communities fought for space, legitimacy and identity in the midst of the Protestant majority. Roman Catholic schools were established to avoid the assimilation of present and future generations of youth who might otherwise have experienced loss of voice and identity. Yet, as Ontario has become home to many populations of diverse cultures, races, and religions, the concept of multi-cultural plurality is superficially alive and well in all schools, secular and Roman Catholic alike (Ornstein, 2006; Strategic Research and Statistics, 2005; White, Leake & Hunter, 2005).
Roman Catholic schools appear to be equivalent to public secular schools in terms of what is taught and who teaches it. Roman Catholic schools are predominantly a representation of Euro-Western ideals, values, stories and lives lived. For youth immersed in a Roman Catholic school, the struggle for self-identity and empowerment would be no less than any other youth of the modern age. Yet, for non-Roman Catholic youth, enrolled in a Roman Catholic school the injury to identity may parallel the struggles of Roman Catholics past. Roman Catholic school communities encourage an inclusive attitude within their schools but the salient representation of colonial power that Roman Catholic communities themselves have endured and delivered is always an underlying foundation to knowledge acquisition and power in modern classrooms.

2.1 Identity through social conditioning

Youth identity is diverse and evolving. How youth define and take up their space in society is constantly fluctuating. As youth grow and evolve they continue to explore and adapt to a multitude of identities and roles. As Dei (2000) writes “Identity is the lens through which youth view themselves in relation to history, culture, and society” (p. 60). If youth see themselves in affirmed roles while assuming respected responsibility and duties, they will project a positive image of themselves on to others. Yet, the culture we are in fragments youth and their identity (Mulligan, 1990, p. 46). Culture, popular media, liberal capitalistic materialism, religion, peer pressure and family relationships all are common themes that weave their way into stories of identity about youth and by youth. Bibby, Mulligan, Murphy and ICE (the organizational body which coordinates and promotes publicly-funded Catholic education in Ontario) have all contributed the most significant works on youth identity and Roman Catholic education in Canada over the last three decades.

Through a twenty-five year study, Canadian sociological researcher Reginald Bibby (2001) provides evidence on trends and patterns on teen experience, values, joys and worries. He draws his conclusions from his on-going nationwide study involving over three thousand youth and young adults, spanning the years 1975 to 2000. Bibby concludes that according to youth today, the biggest influence in their lives is the way in which they are raised. Home life and family are pivotal in shaping and empowering today’s youth. Youth rank each of their parents as two of the most influential voices in their lives (Bibby, 2001, pp. 30-31). Other significant influences include music, literature, and other adults. In Bibby’s (2001) study, youth specifically identify
teachers as around 36% influential in their lives, whilst the influence of God (directly named) or some other supernatural force is shown to affect young men 35% of the time, while it is influential 43% of the time in the lives of young females. Surprisingly perhaps, the youth surveyed by Bibby put forth that television, luck, what people in power decide and the Internet are the least of the most influential factors in their decisions and on their identities.

James T. Mulligan has taught religious education at the secondary level for twenty-five years and has extensive background in working in faith formation with teachers in Ontario’s Roman Catholic school system. Mulligan’s (1990) work in Ontario Roman Catholic schools figuratively complements and challenges Bibby’s (2001) work across Canada. The most poignant evidence Mulligan uncovers suggests that students are becoming more and more interested in doing well at school to ensure higher education and the best jobs. At the same time, Mulligan’s interviews posit that in an increasing number of instances, the “family environment is fragmented, violent” (p.47), with an increase in “trendy parents” caught up in the “capitalistic mentality” of our time. In the lives of youth, there appears to be an all-pervading ‘relativism’ and a diminished sense of truth or what Mulligan calls an ‘absolute’ (p. 47). He considers youth as becoming fragmented within an increasingly secularized society, and unlike Bibby, posits religion and faith as diminishing factors of importance in the lives of youth.

The Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) in Ontario has, most recently, initiated an internal evaluation of Roman Catholic schools in the province. ICE (2007), under an initiative to re-launch the ‘Our Catholic Schools’ provincial dialogue, instructed school boards across the province to engage members of their communities to evaluate the quality of education in schools and assess the challenges they face now and in the future. The report echoes many of the findings that Bibby and Mulligan have put forth previously. Highlights include how the community regards their schools as sites of religious freedom, entrenched in a distinct culture, but surrounded by fear for a continuing existence because of encroaching secularism and the disintegration of links between school, home and parish. The response of the dialogue by ICE (2007) is to ignite an “overall vigilance and commitment to protecting the Catholic faith” (p. 15). They would address this issue by focussing on “effective promotional and defensive strategies” (ICE, p. 15). The report also outlines that these strategies should “clearly illustrate the distinctiveness of the system to wider audiences and strengthen our [ICE] position and relationship with Ontario’s political decision makers” (ICE, p. 15). The report focuses on Roman
Catholic schools as institutions needing to perpetuate a homogenous image of solidarity and commitment within the erosion of faith that is taking place in schools. The report does not highlight the level of diversity currently existing within Roman Catholic schools communities, especially within in the Toronto CMA, nor acknowledge the voices of those diverse families who should have been engaged in the Schools dialogue.

Bibby’s (2001) sociological lens provides a different image of youth in schools, not one of erosion, but one of youth saliently questioning the institutional homogeneity of religion and desirous of connecting with a spiritual centre not plagued with colonial demons of power, control, assimilation and paternal supremacy. Bibby’s findings share similarities with Mulligan’s work in highlighting how the media does dictate accepted images and behaviour for youth in dress, music, language, and in broadening the scope in making moral and ethical choices (p. 46). Both researchers also suggest that youth do place a high level of importance on individualism, and having the freedom to make choices toward determining their life outcomes (p. 47).

Bibby’s work further highlights a generation of youth who are very aware of their ‘footprints’ in the global world, enacting serious concern with such pertinent issues as the environment, global poverty and economic exploitation. Contradictory to this, they also tend to adopt the values and actions of an adult generation that is very much into individual materialism. Youth get caught up in a struggle to make a difference in a globally positive way, while adopting a liberalist agenda to acclaim power and prestige through possession and image. Youth also show the deepest personal concerns for their life at school and what life after school holds for them. About seven in ten feel the pressure to do well at school, and the pressure to be competitive toward achieving more than others in school (pp. 34-35). Their concerns for personal achievement through credentials is followed closely by concerns about the amount of leisure time in their lives, complemented with the desire to earn enough money to maintain a level of comfort they are either accustomed to or wish to obtain.

Two notable upgrades, according to Bibby (2001), are that teens, compared to adults, have more acceptance of racial and cultural diversity, and “exhibit a fresh openness to religion, the supernatural and spirituality” (p. 322). Bibby also reports that although many modern youth are not being raised in “particularly devout homes” (p. 322), he does put forth that “a surprising one in two indicate they have spiritual needs and are receptive to a religious movement they find to
be worthwhile” (p. 322). One challenge he has noted for educators is that “young people are increasingly interpreting values and morality in a very personal, as opposed to communal, sense” (p. 316). However, he then offers that a teen who is mistakenly returned change by a teller, and appears to be “plugged into a religion-based ethical system, such as Catholicism, might not give back the ten bucks either, but at least he would feel some pangs of guilt!” (p. 316). Bibby’s analogy implies a moral implication that would be held by someone who acknowledges a religious or spiritual dimension to his or her identity.

Bibby (2001) presents that religion has maintained the largest following like no other organization in Canada, short of citizenship, for generations. One in four Canadians claim to attend services once a week, and receive a high level of enjoyment from it, with just less than half of the students surveyed offering that they would be open to greater involvement in what Bibby identifies as “organized religion” (p. 114). He concludes that one in five teenagers identify as being highly involved in organized religion, yet three out of four youth still identify with some form of religious grouping, such as Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism or Islam (p. 117). Bibby’s research presents today’s emerging generation as interested in and receptive to interpretations of life and an existence that transcends “the human plane” (p. 117). Just over half of today’s youth believe in a God or Supreme Being, yet when asked if life has meaning beyond what we ourselves give to it, 83% of males and 88% of females responded positively (p. 118).

Youth are adjusting to a changing society that is requiring them to become critical thinkers and in turn they are questioning the institutions that have named their identity. Youth are challenging those named identities. They are searching for ideas and answers that fit outside of the expected or traditional viewpoints toward finding pride in identity and individuality that they can name themselves. They do want to belong to a community, but one that acknowledges their voice and space as valuable and free.

As society evolves, access and manipulation to information evolves with it. Society must accept that the storytellers and emphasis within the stories, is also evolving to nurture a generation that respects diversity and difference as equal and worthy. As Mulligan (1990) states, educators must most importantly listen to our youth, whilst “being aware of the needs and preoccupations of the 15-year-old girl or the 17-year-old boy, their struggle for identity, and the most important concerns in their young lives: their need for acceptance and friendship” (p. 129). As youth
suggest that their success at school and life is important to them, the influence of education and educators is extremely salient in its time and space. Just as the 1996 UNESCO report *Education for the Twenty-First Century* directs, education must not reduce facilitation of learning into a pre-programmed accommodation factor imploring round students to fit into square holes, it must provide a spiritual acquisition to understanding self in the world:

There is, therefore, every reason to place renewed emphasis on the moral and cultural dimensions of education, enabling each person to grasp the individuality of other people and to understand the world’s erratic progress towards a certain unity . . . but this process must begin with self-understanding through an inner voyage whose milestones are knowledge, meditation and the practice of self-criticism. (p. 19)

Education and school communities need to embrace youth who are influenced by their families, the media and material world, yet who seek an identity that is self-determined, unique and respected as well as capable of success.

### 2.1.1 Identity in the diaspora

Schools can provide discursive spaces for youth to challenge their identity as similar or different to the accepted and controlling groups. Identity definitions, however, are curtailed by parameters established by the controlling groups. Just as Dei et al. (2000, p. 99) suggest, “the hegemonic discourses that teach the privileged to question and silence marginalized experiences and voices, [are] the same discourses [that] teach the marginalized themselves, to seek privileged approval or acceptance of their marginalized experience” (p. 99). The struggle for youth to reflect a legitimate and positive image in such politically contested sites such as schools, is harder fought in such sites because of relational history. The everyday practices of schooling encourage investigation into how the structures that are often conceptualized as merely coming from the outside are in fact present in the everyday actions of groups and individuals (Yon, 2000, p. 126). Female, male, Black, Brown, White, heterosexual, homosexual, able, disabled, Roman Catholic, Christian, Sikh, Muslim; these names and categories are not literal nor fixed identity markers. These names imply a set of relationships: social and interactive relationships between students, families, educators and elders in all communities. But the names also imply historic relationships about representation and representational practices through which identity is imagined.

Historic relationships have often used these names to marginalize or alienate groups and in turn individuals, especially in schools. Individuals are no longer unique as lone persons, but are rather
faceless members of an essentialized group. Marginalized students should resist what Dei et al. (2000, p. 171) refer to as this “invisibility”: the negation of self and identity that occur through everyday schooling practices. The perception of invisibility in identity is a negation of “social, cultural, historical and political realities of marginalized groups in society through the exclusive practices of Eurocentrism” (p. 171). As identity is always relational, students will then define themselves in relation to others, a relationship that may be invisible if self-esteem and worth are not nurtured.

Dubois’ concept of double consciousness, as reviewed by Harrison (1992) draws attention to how Black people may adopt a practice of living their lives or seeing themselves in terms of how they imagine they are being perceived by others. Marginalized youth may also invoke an invisible or transparent identity that is relational to others and their cultural or social groupings. As youth use music and fashion to assist in creating an identity both self-imagined and perceived by others, the signifiers and metaphors in music and fashion become qualifiers in expectation and understanding. Music and fashion can allow youth to portray an image that allows them to fit in with a desired peer group, but music and fashion can also create a false sheath or façade over their true identity. These expectations and understandings are aligned with race, culture and religion, and become essentialized or pejoratively defined in terms of the falsity or truth of the descriptions of essential properties. Social science requires the discovery of such essences and their true definitions, especially given that descriptions and knowledge are provisional and facts are always conceptualized in terms of theory. Dubois’ concept must work outside of an essentialist framework, moving beyond the association with an image or culture, and/or moving beyond invisibility or transparency. As the discourse becomes embodied, race, culture and religion are not always just about what one sees or interprets. Moving outside of the essentialization of race, culture and religion can validate a true identity in a legitimate space that is visible.

2.1.2 Struggles for identity and contemplations

Many youth have diverse diasporic roots and routes toward positioning themselves with an identity that is valued and visible. Connections to family memories of other places and of dispersed histories affect perception of oneself and others in specific ways. Yon (2000) notes through his interviews with youth that there is “a desire to distinguish race and culture so that
one can engage in shared cultural interests that transcend race and ethnicity” (p. 82). Youth engage in and mould social relationships that seek to empower a self identity that is unique yet entwined within personal histories of shared struggles. The youth from Yon’s study suggest that there is a deeper desire to move beyond societies racial and ethnic identifications toward exposing the relatiivities of youth’s struggles through their personal qualifications of wearing a racial, ethnic or religious identity.

Racial and ethnic identities are the initial spaces for seeking out allies in resistance or empowerment struggles in schools. To form relationships with those who share in the struggle for identity and voice will empower those who are alienated in the larger social order. Yon (2000, p. 92) places these relationships between two complex and shifting positions: the discourse of ‘roots’ and its appeal to fixed origins, and the discourse of “routes” which acknowledges transformations while challenging the integrity of beliefs in the purity of culture and race. Identifying allies who share in common histories or roots in one’s community or educational environment, will strengthen the journey or route those youth take toward empowering their struggle to exist and possess a voice beyond the racialized or ethnically, religiously-defined body. Community relationships are essential toward empowering voice, but as social relations are constantly shifting, identities formed around race, culture and religion can be unstable, discursive and essentialized. Identities need to evolve, rework and reinvent themselves through various “rooted routes” and alliances.

2.1.3 Finding identity through discourse: An anti-colonial discursive framework

For youth to embrace an identity that is valued, acknowledging and challenging the colonial parameters surrounding schooling and society may afford a lens toward healing and emergence from a status of invisibility. But to do so would directly challenge the Eurocentric institutions that dismiss the knowledge and identities of the marginalized and oppressed. The hegemonic social order of social theory aligns its strength within the philosophical grounding of the academic and political interests of the privileged. Hegemonic knowledge can repeatedly constrain the choice of discourse and in turn prescribe subject-identity and space of articulation within accepted forms of interpreting theory and employing valid knowledge (Dei, 2000). Dominating social theory evolved through a Euro-centric philosophical approach of acquiring and understanding knowledge using colonizing language and interpretation of stories and events.
Challenges to main-stream social theory therefore became challenges to Western knowledge, culture, power and privilege. The placement of qualifying a legitimate social theory in philosophy should therefore not heed enough reason to promote facts or truths about social participation and difference if the social theories and philosophical foundations are not inclusive and equitable (Dei, 2000). Social theories must evolve to provide voice for those groups that have been silenced because of their social placement and mould their parameters to engage alternative ways of acquiring and interpreting the voice of the silenced.

Epistemologically, the post-colonial viewpoint proposes to speak on behalf of the colonized subjects, rather than to write and interpret social relations, knowledge and ideas from the standpoint of the colonial authorities (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 583). Knowledge derived from a post-colonial standpoint must remain separate and distinct from the colonizers’ interpretation and provide legitimacy and value to the colonized experience and social location. Yet, post-colonial theory is still a philosophy routed within the language of the colonizer. A legitimate social theory should provide ideas, concepts and voices toward transforming knowledge and knowledge acquisition (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). To legitimately investigate ways of knowing and being in those who have been provided little recourse to voice within a framework that works outside of Westernized philosophy, an anti-colonial discursive approach is adopted.

An anti-colonial discursive framework can be defined as a theoretical lens that validates the voices of the marginalized or underprivileged through an alternative means of interpreting and analyzing data (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). This framework provides an opportunity to measure a theory outside of accepted and expected philosophical parameters in the academy by offering more than empirical philosophy. As a sociological theory, anti-colonialism provides a way of interrogating concepts and constructs of power and privilege, while challenging the right to knowledge production and promotion (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). Anti-colonialism not only acts to raise the voice of the disenfranchised out from the shadows but also works to provide self-reflection on whose knowledge is being transferred and used to generate the rules one lives by, especially in educational settings.

To challenge the oppressive forms of knowing and acting, opens up theory to accept and acknowledge that many within colonial systems challenge and confront that which has eroded their place in history and sense of identity for generations. In the modern era, there is an
insurgence to combat those colonial forces that continue to interweave in all factions of lived reality around the world:

As a theoretical perspective, anti-colonialism interrogates the power configurations embedded in ideas, cultures and histories of knowledge production, validation, and use. . . Its goal is to question, interrogate, and challenge the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations. (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 300)

An anti-colonial discursive approach provides a safe space of self-acceptance and self-identity that is not hidden or shrouded under a name chosen by another. It empowers the voices of the marginalized and dominated, and places legitimacy and value on those same voices.

The anti-colonial discursive framework within this methodology aligns itself within a single revelatory case study as an ideology that is neither static nor affirming, but rather evolving within interpretation. Theory should provide a specific lens to understand the complexity of social dynamics and emphasize discussion and comparison between “what is possible with what exists” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 298). Hegemonic social theory is static and rigid. To offer the juxtaposition of power and content in society through an anti-colonial lens, this research offers a discursive framework in response to the evolving nature of power and privilege in society. An anti-colonial discursive framework promotes that power is not just held by the colonizing oppressor but can be also held by the colonized. Through strategic alliance within the colonizing network, those colonized develop resistant responses to their social surroundings as a means to survival and maintenance of self-identity. To retrieve this knowing all community members must be guided by a sense of collective destiny and a political desire to use knowledge to fight social injustice and oppressions (Dei, 2002).

Anti-colonial discursive theory also acknowledges the role of the Roman Catholic Church in perpetuating endemic inequalities in producing and reproducing knowledge, especially through their schools. An anti-colonial approach qualifies the use of alternative, mostly indigenous, frames of reference within investigation of social theory and development. Regardless of how progressive or anti-discriminatory some schools, school boards or government administrations might think they have become, the roots to a modern framework are still imbued with an imperial authority of what is truth in text and literature. Investigation into religious and spiritual identity within Roman Catholic school youth will further empower the processes of knowledge
production and validation, pursuit of agency, resistance, and subjective politics of today’s youth. Students have either successfully adopted an accepted space within current educational standards or they challenge those standards by standing outside the margins in an undefined or unaccepted space. If this text asserts that Roman Catholic schools are sites of colonial knowledge, delivery and acquisition, then providing voice to non-Roman Catholic students inside those same schools is an act of anti-colonial empowerment.

2.2 Defining beliefs

Roman Catholic schools can provide religion as a subject of study, and religion as an aspect of identity. In a culture where alignment with a religion, faith or spirituality is often essentialized, youth prove evasive in defining an identity within these categories. The exploration in sociological, philosophical and theological thought on definitions of faith, religion and spirituality can also prove elusive. Just as each denomination would outline a unique definition for each of these terms, the language associated with defining religion, faith and spirituality would also prove unique and wavering. Asking youth to define themselves within concepts that are constantly evolving and multi-dimensional, compounds the struggle to propose an identity that is internally and externally accepted and valued.

As each of the terms religion, faith and spirituality are often used interchangeably in popular discussions, it is appropriate to clarify their usage in this research. Essentially, the definitions are offered as “secular” or having a world-centered approach where there is no implied or necessary connection to anything really “out there”, transcending humanity. However, language is elusive, and the multi-dimensionality of each term proves to be just as elusive when definitions are sought, whereas names and titles are often designed for a particular epistemological purpose based in philosophy, social theory or psychology. Similarly, the understanding or interpretation of each term by all those bodies involved in this study would assert their own lived experience and self knowledge on those interpretations regardless of the secular meaning being offered.

To self-identify within a religion, is to align in a cultural or anthropological reality with a title, such as Jew, Muslim, Christian, and so forth (Rule, 2007). Religion tends to be related to formal traditions and codes with observable and articulated sacred texts or scripture (Dei et al., 2002; Shahjahan, 2004). Religion is often considered a shared system of principles or doctrine, associated with institutional structures, related to the belief in and worship of a supernatural
power or divine presence which is regarded by some as the creator of the universe, or can help explain our relationship to the natural world and beyond the known world (Dei et al., 2000; Love, 2001). Religion is an aspect of every culture. Unfortunately, the large number of often contradictory definitions of the terms “religion” or “religious” posits scholars toward the impossibility of formulating a generally acceptable definition (Rule, 2007).

The term “faith” is “regularly used to denote the many-sided religious relationship into which the gospel calls people – that of trust in God through Christ” (Packer, 2007, p. 431). Faith is confidence or trust in oneself or the community around us, just as Packer (2007, p. 433) offers that Roman Catholicism formally identifies faith with credence, as an “explicit” faith in knowing its object and an “implicit” faith that accepts whatever the church offers in this life and after. Groome (2002) suggests that “Every religious faith expresses itself in three ways: (1) in a confession of beliefs that summarizes its convictions; (2) in spiritual practices and ways of worship that reflect a relationship with the Transcendent; and (3) in a code of ethics that guides and evaluates life choices” (p. 174).

Greely (1991) argues that Roman Catholics remain in the church because of the sacramental life of the church, and it is this aspect of Roman Catholic heritage that parishioners see as a faith to pass on to their children. Sacramentality allows for probing of oneself to understand the connection and absences with God as a step toward critical consciousness. “Catholicism emphasizes more than other Christian faiths the function of the Church in God’s work of salvation in all aspects of life” (Groome, 2002, p. 32).

However, it cannot be assumed that when Roman Catholic school youth reference faith they are internalizing the Roman Catholic description as outlined by Packer, Groome or Greeley. Faith, for the purposes of this research, is then used in text to represent a concept that sits outside of religious parameters, which does not ascribe to any particular system of belief. Faith highlights the confidence and optimism one has in the sincerity of the surrounding community. Any view and interpretation of faith will depend on one’s worldview of scripture or spiritual embodiment, a sense of God or higher being, combined with human and non-human relationships.

Finally, spirituality is a term often considered to represent a deeper relationship or connection to God, nature and the world. As Houston (2007) writes, “Spirituality is more abstract, even misleading, when used as the asceticism of any religion, including specific traditions of the
Catholic devotion” (p. 1138). Spirituality is a term that in modern times has transcended a theological definition. It is used to describe states of being that are separated from, if not intentionally avoiding, religious connotation. Yet, it is an elusive term that both social scientists and theologians refer to with a holistic understanding of space, time and human existence. This vision of the term has its roots in the Enlightenment period.

Spirituality has a strong history of not being framed within a single dogma motivated by church or state idealism. Some 200 years ago, George W. F. Hegel began metaphysical discussions on the concept of spirituality, outlining it as a dialectical position of the self during the Enlightenment period, and the separation of church and state. Hegel debated that the spiritual entity within oneself was not a romanticized or imagined realm of conviction but an identity formed out of something beyond the human body (de Vries, 2007, p. 544). Hegel’s philosophy introduced that all humans contain a metaphysical entity, or spirit, incorporating an internal essence or being, which constantly seeks a level of freedom from the social and political conflicts among which they are immersed (Mah, 1987, p. 12). Both Hegel’s spiritual identity and modern spirituality lay their foundations within the realm of metaphysics as something that cannot be touched, yet all the same can be felt and internalized as a way of being and interpreting the world. Hegel’s spirituality did not necessarily lend itself to a Christian description but imbued expression of rationality in the mind which is the only real thing; everything else is an expression of the mind (Mah, 1997). Spirituality for Hegel was described through a metaphysical language of ethereal understanding.

Wane (2002), who suggests that modern spirituality is “personal, unique, and individualistic” (p. 144), affords a definition that is shifting and evolving with time and space. It is also defined as a claim unto oneself, the relation one has to the community and how that relational environment appeals to external spaces (Dei, 2002). Spirituality can be seen as something larger than an individual and even beyond the soul. It is found, accepted and outlined by an internal energy that connects us with all that surrounds our being, including humility, empowerment, liberation and “reclaiming the vitality of life” (Palmer, 1999, p. 30). Yet, spirituality is also a concept woven within the framework of religions to help modernize their language and lend to the evolution of particular faith development. According to Houston (2007, pp. 1139-1140), the nature of Christian spirituality is defined by an acceptance of God, who through scripture directs a sense of life purpose in belief of a “Christocentric” vision in the Trinity. Houston further argues “It is a
life of prayer, possessing a sense of the eternal dimension in all one’s existence, within an intense awareness of life lived in the present before God, through community and fellowship alliance” (p. 1140). For Houston, Christian spirituality is defined by the quality of public worship, not necessarily engaging in a special practice, but rather invoking it as a lifestyle.

American theologian Richard McBrien (1994) presents spirituality as a holistic encounter that one has with self and the world, accepting that which is beyond human manipulation. He argues “To be spiritual means, beyond that, to know, and to live according to the knowledge that God is present to us in grace as a principle of the personal, the interpersonal, and social and even cosmic transformation” (p. 1019). He further presents that to be open to the spirit is to accept explicitly who we are and who we are called to become, and to direct our lives accordingly in response to God’s grace within us.

Individuals can be spiritual, yet not belong to any one religion; they are inseparable although not coterminous. One can be religious, yet lack a spiritual core. Dei et al. (2000) suggest that “for many people religion is part of their understanding of spirituality in that religion and religious values help mould personal character” (p. 62). Spirituality is an acceptance of the intangible aspects of existence that align our sense of self equally with all other things, organic or inorganic, on the planet, possibly in the universe. No sense of superiority, power or control exists within a concept of spirituality for all humans have the potential attributes to be spiritual in some sense of the word (Houston, 2007, p. 1138).

Unfortunately, in modern discussions, the term spirituality has broadened to the point of diffusion in religious and metaphysical discussions, and the embodied definition is divergent and multi-layered. With this in mind, there is a danger in offering up the term as a focus for discussion in a research methodology. Dei at al. (2000) conclude, “Spiritual knowledge, like all knowledge, is constructed within a specific context, and “one-size-fits-all” approaches are not very useful in a pluralist society” (p. 71). The secret when addressing students on the topic is to describe spirituality as resilient, responsive, joyful, patient, humorous, hopeful, happy, flexible, and enforce that an inner “spiritual” core embodies infinite knowledge, being and consciousness (Dickman, 1980; Kolander & Chalander, 1991). Therefore, for the purposes of this research, the term spirituality encompasses an understanding of how one positions oneself within one’s worldview. It is a term neither linked with a religious or faith-based epistemology or ontology
but relates to one’s faith within the spirit of self or of something beyond oneself. To possess spirituality, one does not necessarily have to believe in an all empowering, infinite deity, nor something that is supernatural or beyond human manifestation. Spirituality links human identity within the space of nature and the natural world, while inherently balancing existence on the exchange of communication and interaction within the larger community and global network. In form and output, this vision of spirituality can be aligned with theologies of liberation in that it seeks to offer a sense of self that is of service to self as working as a member of a community-of-persons in faith and commitment to overcoming oppression and alienation.

For the purposes of this study, it has been the evolving essence and use of language in describing spirituality that is most relevant. Language is paramount in revealing how spirituality is understood as separate from religion and faith and how it can lead to empowering self identity. As Shahjahan (2004) suggests, language encodes our worldview and if it aligns with a spiritual epistemology it will shape what is to be known and how something can be known. Shahjahan writes, “A spiritual way of knowing should ensure that the language we use is consistent with the metaphors and symbols that affirm our center and help us find our center” (p. 699). Yet, as the students and families involved in this discussion are members of a Roman Catholic schooling environment, there needs to be further clarification as to the concept of Roman Catholic spirituality. This term is distinct within Roman Catholic thought and holds meaning and context that is formed out of theological interpretation of scripture and the gospels.

### 2.2.1 Roman Catholic spirituality and schooling

Roman Catholic spirituality finds its roots in the writings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aquinas believed faith was based in God’s revelation through scripture, and that God’s existence is not based in reason, but in belief (Geisler, 2007, p. 1197). Spirituality is based in certainty about reality, just as identity equates being is being. The order of being offers that God is pure and infinite, God alone is being. Everything else has being. God alone has an essence and exists as pure actuality without form. Humans possess a hylomorphic unity of a spiritual soul and body where despite their coexistence as one, there is no identity between them; the spiritual soul survives death and awaits the reunion with the body at the resurrection (Geisler, 2007, p. 1198). For Aquinas, the essence of spirituality is to accept God as infinite, and humanity as finite, with an identity that is segregated by the very nature of human existence. Aquinas’ spiritual identity is
fixed, ethereal and embodied only through a belief in the divinity of God. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) adapted the work of Aquinas into the key document of the religious order he founded: The Society of Jesus, otherwise known as the Jesuits. His *Spiritual Exercises*, published in 1548, is the classic spirituality manual for sincere Christians to reorder their lives toward a single-minded mission of God through service and charity (Donnelly, 2007, p. 589). It is in the work of Ignatius that roots for a theology of liberation began to take hold. Both Aquinas and Ignatius highlighted the divinity of God, and the necessary work of humanity to educate in service to God. Both theologians laid down a foundation of Roman Catholic spirituality based in piety, servitude and the love for self as toward God, representing God in his image and action. In modern Roman Catholic communities, including schools, the work of Ignatius and the Jesuits has perpetuated and reinforced a relationship between critical thought and emancipatory reform through social justice action in local communities and with international outreach. Spirituality in education should encourage and support student empowerment and move students toward a vision of the world that challenges oppression and inequality within and beyond acts of social justice in their own backyard and across the oceans. Spirituality and a theology of liberation are inherently linked toward empowering and overcoming oppression of the self and one’s community.

Theologian Thomas Groome (2002) aligns the work of Aquinas and Ignatius with the Biblical teachings of Jesus on inclusivity and love. He argues that the gospel notation for “In my father’s house there are many dwelling places” [John (14:2)] is clearly representative of how Christians should embrace a united community of reconciled diversity, not a community of uniformity (p. 11). Roman Catholic spirituality ensures a distinct and deep belief, attitude, conviction and commitment to respecting humanity as an approach to life, to others and definitively to God (Murphy, 2005, p. 4). As a community, all Roman Catholics need to offer unconditional respect in all relationships, name their prejudices, and critically reflect on them in order to recognize their negative origins and destructive consequences (Groome, 2002, p. 71).

Monsignor Dennis J. Murphy (2001), a strong voice in the affairs of Roman Catholic education in Ontario, encourages Roman Catholic school boards to continue fostering a sense of spiritual identity and inclusivity within their student populations. Roman Catholic schools should imperatively pursue changes in language to encompass that sense of inclusivity in their curricular and liturgical text (Murphy, 2001, p. 22). Both Groome (2002) and Murphy (2001) suggest that
individual contributions to one’s society are important, but it is the sociological offering of a community-of-persons that provides the global community with the call to teach and to learn together as one. Murphy (2005) argues, “Believers struggle today against a secularism that insists that religion, morality and spirituality are purely private affairs having no place in public discourse, in politics and often in discussions about how we educate our children” (p. 13). As the purpose of schooling is to provide a unique place in which youth can learn and grow, Roman Catholic teachers, students and parents need to work together to establish a spiritual way of knowing through understanding, action and love (Lee, 1969, p. 81).

2.2.2 Cognitive spirituality

As researchers in Ontario secondary schools note the decrease in parish participation on the part of families and especially youth, it becomes imperative for educators to influence a sense of spiritual development through a creation of community loyalty norms and ethical identities (Mulligan, 1991). In the past, Greeley et al. (1976) and Greeley and Rossi (1966) have offered that as a group, American Roman Catholic school youth are more inclined to share in the broad value consensus of the larger society. In more recent times, the work of Frey et al. (2004) has provided quantitative data promoting that a spirituality of well-being and hope is alive and well in American Roman Catholic school students.

According to Frey, Pedrotti, Edwards and McDermott (2004) in their article, *Spirituality Index of Well-Being*, their spirituality index measures the spirituality of over five hundred high school students attending Roman Catholic schools across the Midwest United States. The index defines spirituality as the sum of two components: self-efficacy and life scheme, where the terms are cognitive in nature and distinct from religiosity (p. 480). Frey and his colleagues reference spirituality as qualities of what it is to be human, and as representations of a person’s sense of purpose, meaning and power in life. The concept of ‘hope’ is delivered as secular in meaning and proposes optimism for the future, in career, life choices and happiness. The analysis for quantifying significant correlations on themes and using t-testing for independent sub-themes seems paradoxical and depleting of the valid sense of knowing and understanding how youth connect with their personal sense of spirituality and hope.

Hope as a concept, can find links within morality, within feelings of guilt, to acting ethically. Frey et al. (2004) have identified hope as secular in meaning, that is not having any religious
association; yet it must be kept in mind that their research subjects were students from within a Roman Catholic high school. These researchers also identify the research population as predominantly Caucasian, of a lower socio-economic status, and that “generalizations to other high school students of diverse ethnicities or different levels of socio-economic status may not be appropriate” (p. 489). Yet, the possibility of a brighter outlook may be afforded through the curricular, instructional or social environment of a Roman Catholic school over that of the secular system. As Frey et al. further suggest, the “depiction of spirituality as a cognitive process is consistent with both the ‘sense of meaning, purpose and power’ approach to defining spirituality and the ‘educating the whole person’ mandate of Catholic education” (p. 489).

Roman Catholic schools have to be considered sites of a different level of “hope”, “moral”, and “ethical” learning to that of other secular, public schooling environments.

The Frey et al. (2004) study reveals an evidential pattern of construct validity within cognitive spirituality and hope for Roman Catholic school youth. If spirituality as a lived epistemology is invoked in youth, then Catholic school youth are predisposed to possessing a progressive and positive outlook toward themselves and their identities. Catholic schools, in accordance with Frey et al.’s study, inspire a way of knowing and believing in oneself and one’s community that has, what Dillard (2000) might refer to as, self liberation and purpose. “Spirituality in education is education with purpose . . . education that is emancipation. . . . Spirituality in education is education that connects, education that is about building relationships between and across teachers and students, males and females, Others and Ourselves” (Dillard et al., 2000, p. 447). It is important for students to work with the community that aligns with and affirms their own spirituality. These communities will empower one’s sense of spirituality to further validate lived experience and ways of knowing through a process of identity shared in roots and routes.

It therefore becomes crucial for Roman Catholic schools to bring some form of spiritual dialogue predominantly into community discussions, especially as Roman Catholic theologians and educators interpret the move of Roman Catholic youth away from a community alliance in church attendance. This fluctuation in what appears to be a disinterest in faith has prompted Roman Catholic schools to push the concepts of church during class time more vehemently. Roman Catholic school authorities are driven to necessarily validate their continued existence through enforcing their differences as proactively teaching faith. Content is pushed over context. Mulligan (1990) quotes an Ontario Roman Catholic school principal who suggests that “We
seem to accept the secular demands of leadership as normal and natural . . . There is so little
time and interest in the religious dimension . . . except to logically legitimate ‘Catholic
education’” (Mulligan, 1990, p. 49). The reality however, has the system at a crossroads. Roman
Catholic communities, through schooling, are caught between preaching the voice of scripture
and praising the morality of historic existence; preaching will turn away those on the verge of
secularization while praising will turn away those who yearn to return to a sense of ethical
Roman Catholic values in language and community dialogue. Youth today are caught as well in
achieving an identity that is respected in the community and believing in a community that will
continue to accept diverse and different identities that evolve over time. Students possess faith
but question denominational authority and legitimacy. As one Montreal youth states, “I believe
in God and I love this Pope, but I don’t agree with everything the church says” (Bibby, 2001, p.
119). Youth are caught between a perceived separation of religion as an institution and the
messages adopted through spiritual faith. They are desirous of being accepted and finding a true
identity, but also follow blindly, challenge vocally, and decide with their feet, both in attendance
at Roman Catholic schools and non-attendance at Sunday sermons.

2.3 Resistance and community

The concept of community is one shared between the struggles of marginalized peoples and the
strength that Roman Catholics identify as connecting within faith. Community refers to a
collective group of individuals engaged in common activities and sharing common interests,
where education is for the entire community: children, parents, guardians, educators and elders
(Dei et al., 2000, pp. 6-7). Community education, in essence, then promotes cultural, personal,
and political agency through which strategies, process and structures are used by community
groups to know and understand the world and their place within it. If schools can build trust at
the grassroots level within communities, than fissures between youth, their schools,
neighbourhood communities and citizenry will weaken and reduce. Schools need to become
extensions of community in the sense of youth identification with staff, as well as curricular,
instructional, pedagogic and communicative change (Dei et al., 2000, p. 12). Schools and school
communities need to work toward the theoretical concept of inclusivity that incorporates and
aligns every student and student identity within the schools’ environment, culture and
organizational life. By its very nature as a religiously-based system, the Roman Catholic school
system lies separate from its secular public counterpart. On combating the growing threat of
individualism, Mulligan (1999) suggests: “Our culture is threatened by the absence of community: a shared history, a common study. And the biggest obstacle to community is the narrow individualism so characteristic of the ‘human potential’ movement” (p. 95).

Post (1995) offers that community alliance should be the primary source for creating what she calls an ethical identity, that which defines the purpose and direction in a person’s life. To deceive oneself, to actively conceal any aspect of one’s identity or to reject participation in community, is unethical behaviour. Therefore, one’s racial, engendered, ethnic or religious identity cannot be ethical or authentic if it is not acknowledged by the community. An ethical identity roots itself in the loyalty norms of community, much like the diasporic roots that Yon (2000) uncovers with the youth of his study. Post (1995) suggests that “it is the sense of community which gives loyalty norms, the ethics of identity, their power” (p. 421). One’s connection within and to a community defines an ethical identity and confirms one’s place within the maintenance and progress of that community. To abandon that community or those who respect your input and involvement is nothing less than unethical and immoral and compromises your sense of identity both with others in the community and within one’s self. Yet Post’s argument reveals a relationship that needs to be reciprocal in its self-reflexivity if it is to be progressive and relevant. Identity not only needs to be aligned with a community but the community also needs to accept identity.

Modern communities need to adapt flexible parameters around their historic and colonial definitions of valuable identities. If a community is to maintain rigidity without adopting an ethical lens of self-reflexivity than the loyalty norms of the community need to be questioned. All alliances within a community, just as within oneself, need to be reciprocally ethical, acknowledged, supported and empowered for a community to truly flourish and nurture commitment.

2.3.1 The language of resistance

Aspects of deciphering, developing and affirming an ethical identity, double consciousness identity, routed/rooted identity, religious, cultural or racial identity in any community needs to be conditioned by the discursive nature of names and language. Shahjahan (2004) argues “Language is very powerful in that it encodes the worldview we have: the epistemological framework” (p. 698). All of the diverse ways of assigning or invoking identity are laden within a
contextual history and ontological theory. Language can empower, but it can also be disempowering. The oppressive forces that shape us have formed the identities of both the powerful and the exploited.

Without an analysis of this process we will never understand why youth can or cannot self assign a valued identity, why it is difficult to make and maintain positive relationships that afford legitimate space and voice, or even why students succeed or fail in school. Investigations into language and encoded thoughts will provide exposure of the tacit ideological forces that construct student perceptions of self-identification and the impact such perceptions can have on their identity in schools. Such blindness restricts our view of our own and other peoples’ perception of their place in history, in the web of reality. When history is erased and/or decontextualized, teachers, students, and other citizens are rendered vulnerable to the myths employed to perpetuate social domination (Semali & Kincheloe, 1997, p. 33). With diversity comes counter-hegemonies which reclassify social categories and offer alternatives to existing and dominant systems of classification. A positive sense of racial, religious or ethnic identity provides students with a connection to something of importance, to a sense of place in the mainstream and to a sense of “community”. An ethical and rooted/routed community would “act in this respect to bolster a child’s sense of belonging, validation and importance” (Dei et al., 2000, p. 105). Poignantly one principal in Mulligan’s (1990) study in Ontario Roman Catholic schools suggests, “Education serves as a sorting system for our social structure” (p. 189). School can and will validate a sense of identity and belonging for all youth in their school and home communities. If a student’s sense of belonging is compromised or assimilation is the answer to being accepted or tolerated by those of privilege, youth will not align their identity within community and will sit fragmented on the edge or margins of acceptance. Community members, especially educators, need to question their language, state of youth identity, their sense of self-worth and their sense of place within schools (Dei et al., 2000, p. 110).

### 2.3.2 Spiritual resistance

A religious or spiritual identity is a moral and political identity. For students immersed in a denominational schooling environment, who may find their faith identity fitting outside of the norm of that institution, their moral and political identity may be compromised and injured while attempting to acquire space. Dei et al. (2000) caution that, “while teaching and learning can be
spiritually and emotionally empowering these offerings can also cause ‘spirit injury’” (p. 13). Spirit injury occurs in the self through domination and degradation by those who claim superiority over the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of others. Spirit injury as revealed through the works of Patricia M. Williams (1987, 1991) can cause a life-time of self-exploration, skepticism, and distrust in others, as well as a need for self-acceptance and reclamation of pride, dignity and equity in all arenas of one’s life. Spirit injury is in accordance with one’s self-esteem, self love and self identity; becoming compromised in these factions is a slow death of the spiritual soul. Individual spirit injuries can also be felt at the group level and this can lead to the devaluation and destruction of an entire culture or community (Wing & Merchán, 1993).

Spirituality cannot be discussed outside the contexts of power. It is this potentially oppressive power that suppresses spiritual connections. One must create modes of resistance against any aspect of debilitating power if one is to uncover a path to spiritual recovery. Bhabha (1995) suggests, “Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the ‘content’ of another culture, as a difference once perceived” (p. 33). Resistance should come in the form of reclaimed space and reasserted identity within the confines of hierarchical relations of colonial power. In the case of fragmented Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic students, they need to search for equitable spaces that acknowledge their spiritual retention. Fragmented youth need to nurture healing of the whole person. Resistance may be seen with the adoption of a ‘spiritual’ label or a youth-based spirituality. However, “while an action-oriented approach to spirituality/spiritual knowing should move us beyond healing, peace and compassion, to engage in a continuing resistance, we must also avoid repeated damage to the self” (Dei, 2002, p. 9). Exploration into resistance strategies to support, heal and nurture the spirit need to occur in safe spaces.

As schools are the most common sites of reflection and growth in youth, schools need to evolve to be sites of freedom, empowerment and safety. Ontario Roman Catholic schools, to become safe sites for youth, also need to admit their colonial foundation toward controlling and denigrating diverse spiritual identities in youth. Educational systems need to provide shelter and curative methods to assist with healing the spirit of youth. Educational systems must also avoid continuing to inflict injuries. Schools need to be self-reflexive and willing to adapt representational equity responses toward their clients, re-evaluating how language and
knowledge delivery can be both oppressive and empowering. Just as Parry (1987) is critical of sociological research that remains blind to bias, so too is this work on the reflection of how Roman Catholic schools place the lens of oppression on others in society without acknowledging their own role in perpetuating oppression.

The lens of oppression can be intangible and translucent when offered by either victim or victimizer. Opinions of experience and emotion will fluctuate and evolve, much like identity, which is based in time, space and image of the dominant body and empowered voice naming the oppression. The work of Benita Parry (1987) is very critical of those social researchers who hold an uncritical lens toward their subject-position in naming oppression and the voice of the oppressed. Parry is particularly critical of Spivak and Bhabha for their lack of self-reflection and personal location in their interpretation of the colonized other. Both Spivak and Bhabha work through a post-colonial interpretation of victimization, and afford voice to those whose stories and voices have been marginalized through the colonial experience. Yet neither interprets an understanding of the oppressed through a personal lens of privilege and power, held and offered within spaces of race, religion, class, gender and ability. Even though Spivak and Bhabha represent identities of colonial oppression themselves, the continuing need to further understand one’s evolving space toward jumping between victim and victimizer of others is needed. Spivak’s work, according to Parry (1987), severely limits the space in which the colonized can be written back into history even after ‘interventionist possibilities’ (p. 40) are offered. The challenge toward identifying a colonized victim is to avoid continuing the victimization. Through an offer of self-reflexive identification on the part of the researcher, a full understanding of the voice of the marginalized may be appreciated. Incorporating the marginalized knowledge of the victim into mainstream discussion, through a contextualized qualitative approach to inclusive practice and critical research, collective reliance, mutual interdependence and strengthening of individual/group identity can be fostered. The goal is not to give knowledge to the victim or to speak for them, but rather to help integrate their knowledge into culturally meaningful systems that sustain and transform theory and ways of knowing/understanding. To acknowledge the voice of a colonized victim is justice if that voice is not overwritten by an uncritical interpretation of knowledge acquisition and presentation. Schools, much like theological and social science researchers, need to embark on moving beyond the victimization of a post-colonial framework, through a self-reflective spiritual and communal
ontology promoting the legitimacy of lived experience and indigenous knowledge. Just as Mulligan and ICE continue to speak for and represent the space and voice of the youth who represent the expected and promoted identity of the Ontario Roman Catholic school system, the perpetuation of colonialism with its desire for a homogenous assimilation continues to flourish to the detriment of the system.

2.4 Areas of divergence

Through this research study, youth were given the opportunity to provide a voice on their reflective and discursive identities in schooling and how their schooling environment helps to nurture various aspects of those identities. As a case study, this investigation provides generalized insights through the lens of social, cultural and religious identity for modern Roman Catholic school youth. Yin (2003) states the goal of a case study is “to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)” (p. 10). Case studies should focus on the generalities of various data points, through a designed theoretical method and framework that connects the data. A critical ethnographic approach was used to collect the data for this research, within a revelatory single-case study. As the direct voice of youth is rare as primary resource data, compounded with the empirical questioning of collecting spiritual identity data as valid, this research is diverging from the sociological data collection or investigations of Bibby and Yon, as well as diverging from the theological perspective of data analysis proposed by Mulligan, Murphy and ICE on Ontario Roman Catholic youth.

Dialogue of lived experience and personal understanding and knowledge was used within a specific region of the Toronto CMA and with youth enrolled at secondary level Roman Catholic schools. This data was deconstructed through an anti-colonial theoretical framework chosen as a result of the inherent nature of Ontario schooling as sites of continued colonial oppression, compounded by Roman Catholic schools being sites of religious elitism. The validity of the evidence presented during analysis was maintained through the triangulation of theory, previous investigation and new data contributed through survey and interviews. As there has been limited research promoting the direct voice of youth as the primary resource for analysis in Ontario Roman Catholic schools, the revelatory case-study approach was chosen.
Student voices from within the Roman Catholic secondary school system have previously been presented through the works of Bibby (2001), Mulligan (1990) and the Institute for Catholic Education (2007). However, none have self-reflect on the bias and subject-position of those offering the presentation. This research study is presented through the lens of a woman marginalized because of race, who holds a non-religious perspective, and who currently sits in a position of power with youth as an educator and higher-level student. This bias of position and perspective is offered to qualify the lens of analysis and interpretation. However, the impetus of the research study is to test the Euro-centric foundation and persistence in Roman Catholic schooling through the voice of the most commonly ignored subjects in all educational systems, that of its clientele, the students. The crux of conducting this research is to provide a voice to those youth who represent the modern reality of Roman Catholic secondary schools, in which pride in identity and pride in faith, are real and lived spaces outside of the mainstream established schooling environment. As Shahjahan (2004) suggests, it is extremely important to listen to those voices and respond in turn, for any service industry professional, such as educators, should serve and meet the needs of the client. Educators, employees or service providers need to reflect on their internal intentions as facilitators offering up services which are often designed to address what is thought the client is requiring. Youth want and need to be heard, and this research promotes their voice as the most important voice in the debate on the legitimation and continuation of a separate Roman Catholic school system in the province of Ontario.

The intent of this research is to use student voices currently enrolled in the Toronto CMA Roman Catholic secondary school system as a lens to envision the attraction of the Roman Catholic system over the secular system and to expose the level of freedom Roman Catholic school youth have toward exhibiting a positive identity in faith. Spiritually knowing and acknowledging identity is possessed in what hooks (2003) calls “having life in the spirit” (p. 158). Yet, engaging in a dialogue of spirituality is laden with discomfort within the field of social science. Just as Ellerby (2000) states, “western investigations into spiritual realities are heavily conditioned and distorted by limited paradigms of thought and experience” (p. 26).

Western science dictates a hierarchical need to order knowledge and is highly sceptical of anything that cannot be quantified based on rationality, objectification, or reason (Dei et al., 2002, p. 8; Dei et al., 2000, p. 53). As a term that stands subjective and difficult to quantify, any
investigation into a religious or spiritual identity proves to be difficult to validate by the nature of its content. Yet, religious and spiritual identities are valid and negotiable titles in any social or political space. The concept of social inquiry in the academy is a perpetuation of Eurocentric dominance because of its ethereal ontology that exists in colonial lands as a means to maintain the status quo in power and avoid challenges to hierarchy. The need for social inquiry to expand its definition of what is valid and real knowledge needs to expand and evolve with the society it represents, or face extinction in the world of academic discourse. As Lather (1994) suggests, “As the concept of disinterested knowledge implodes and collapses inward, social inquiry becomes, in my present favourite definition of science, a much contested cultural space, a site of what it has historically repressed” (p. 103). The need to incorporate the voices of the marginalized, and in this case the identity of youth who sit contested within the modern Ontario Roman Catholic system becomes crucial toward strengthening social inquiry as a discipline. Furthermore, investigating identity, faith and schools as sites of oppression within social inquiry is essential toward empowering the voice of the voiceless and catapulting social science toward a progressive and realistic discipline to acknowledge diverse ways of knowing.

Dialogue with youth is imperative toward exploring the meanings and space that become qualifiers in spiritual or religious identity in life and schools. Although this research study hopes to be thought-provoking, it is clearly an example of how the social science academy persistently feels the need to quantify unquantifiable topics within a language that is empirical and scientific. The emphasis within this study to quantify cognitive spirituality as “a valid and theoretically sound alternative for educational researchers” (Frey et al., 2004, p. 489) does not go unnoticed. The study, however, does suggest a correlation between the concepts of spirituality and hope in modern Roman Catholic school youth. Hope scores, like spiritual beliefs, are high in the students surveyed, more so than the general population.

Previous to this research, the work of Reginald Bibby (2001) and Bibby and Posterski (1985) incorporated dialogue and survey results on Canadian youth as a means to investigate social, political and economic positions and dreams of current generations. Investigations into Ontario Roman Catholic School youth specifically has been directed by theologians James T. Mulligan (2005, 1994, 1990), and Dennis Murphy (2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001), as well as the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) (2007). Only Mulligan has incorporated consistent primary data research in the form of interviews with youth into his work.
Mulligan, a Roman Catholic priest and educator, first investigated the changes which full-funding brought to Ontario Roman Catholic high schools in *Evangelization and the Catholic High School: An Agenda for the 1990’s* (1990). His research provided for the public an initial glimpse into the distinctiveness and similarities of Roman Catholic students and their schools with their public/secular contemporaries. Mulligan again offered dialogue with Roman Catholic school youth, but with a focus on educators and administrators in the system, with his follow-up reports in 1994 and 2005. Although his work is unique in offering Ontario Roman Catholic student voices as valid and experienced ways of knowing, his work must also be framed through the lens of a Roman Catholic theologian/educator. He self-discloses his propensity to support and reaffirm the worthy pursuit of Roman Catholic education, and with this does not question the systemic colonial directive of denominational schooling, or the plurality of students that now engage this system through various lenses of race, faith, gender identity, classism, ableism, or sexual preferences. Investigative analysis of the healthy existence of diverse student identities in Roman Catholic school environments was not his research goal. He offers insights into modern Roman Catholic schooling as a community that needs to combat secularism in schools and the society at large. Mulligan’s research does not critically provide a vision of the Roman Catholic schooling system outside of the lens of Roman Catholicism as a supreme paternalistic voice.

Roman Catholic schools in Ontario are current sites of colonial knowledge production and acquisition for all youth. The need to reflect on the method and quality of educational information and delivery in moulding and nurturing today’s youth in self-proclaiming their own empowered voice in a racial, cultural and spiritual identity is imperative on the part of all educators. Roman Catholic schools in Ontario should start unravelling the oppression that continues in education. Without engaging in self-reflexivity and acknowledging the need for change in the basic theoretical framework toward decoding colonial supremacy, the Roman Catholic school system in Ontario could face serious challenges in the years to come.
Chapter 3
Methodology – Critical Ethnography in a Single-Case Study

3 Introduction

In order to investigate religious and spiritual identity in secondary-level youth, a single-case study methodology using a critical ethnographic approach was adopted. This chapter provides the context in which this methodology was applied, as well as an overview of the critical ethnography employed to capture and analyze the data set. The process of gaining entry to collecting data, sample size attainment and the challenges and possibilities of this research will further be offered. The limitations of this research may help direct insights into future research and investigation on youth identity in Ontario Roman Catholic or faith-based schools.

As an empirical enquiry, a single-case study approach should “investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Case studies can explain generalized links between lived conditions that are too complex for an experiment or survey to explain. Case studies should also be broached if the unit of analysis is related to the way in which the original research questions were designed and queried. The primary research objectives were to investigate how modern Ontario Roman Catholic school youth define their own identity, what identity in faith they may claim, and how their schooling environment supports their identity. Objectives such as these satisfy the case study objective to generalize theories and not enumerate frequencies.

Case studies, however, do not have to solely depend on ethnographic or participant-observer data, but can be broadened to include survey and tabular recorded notes to aid with confirming epistemological validity. Quantitative research strategies in the form of surveys were used within this research to supplement interviews and observer data, and help strengthen the legitimacy of the voices recorded. Indeed, the key to doing a case study is to proceed in such a manner as to investigate many attributes or characteristics of a topic without conscious exclusion or bias. Case studies plan for and encourage more variables of interest than data points; they rely on multiple sources of evidence and work off prior theory to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2003). Using survey data as the initial point of analysis, combined with previous theory on religious
identity in youth, the complement of student and staff dialogue allows for triangulation of the data to ground the validity and reliability in assessment or conclusions.

The research directive for this investigation revolved around an investigative process that would address issues of youth identity, religion, spirituality, power and representation in schooling. To critically engage and focus on the voice of students as a means to understand how they perceive their own multiple identities within a Roman Catholic school system is the main directive of this research. The lack of previously collected data incorporating students’ voices on issues of identity and identity in faith in the Ontario Roman Catholic school system qualifies this research further as a revelatory single-case study. Yin (2003, p. 42) suggests that a revelatory case study is offered when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation. The works of James T. Mulligan (1990, 1994, 2005) present the only dialogue with Ontario Roman Catholic school students since full-funding was introduced in the 1980’s. However, his work investigates the Roman Catholic schooling environment and ethos since the changes in legislation and does not focus on modern youth identity or faith identity. This research offers a unique and unprecedented lens and voice into youth identity and faith identity in youth.

3.1 Field of research

The Toronto Census Metropolitan Area or Toronto CMA is considered the most multi-cultural region of the world, with representation from at least 113 ethno-racial groups (Ornstein, 2006; Strategic Research and Statistics, 2005). It is an area that spans the City of Toronto and 23 municipalities, the largest of which are Brampton, Markham, Mississauga, Oakville and Vaughan. Thirty-three and a half percent of those living in this community identify their religious affiliation as Roman Catholic, followed by Protestants at 23.5%, and those choosing not to identify with any religion at 16.5% (Table 1). Although Christians combined are still numerous, the share of very recent immigrants affiliated with the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh faiths is higher than among earlier immigrants (Strategic Research and Statistics, 2005).
Table 1

Student Religious Affiliation for Geographic Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliation*</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox Christian</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Religions are listed by order of their demographic share of the Canadian population.

Note. Adapted from *Recent Immigrants in Metropolitan Areas: Toronto. A Comparative Profile Based on the 2001 Census* (p. 10), by Strategic Research and Statistics, 2005, Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Some Roman Catholic secondary schools within the Toronto CMA contain Muslim, Sikh and Hindu students that are above the reflective statistics for their community. Indeed, the Chaplain at one of the schools involved with this research remarked that before investigations began at his school he did a random survey of students across the school community. Of those surveyed, he identified approximately 45-50% who consider themselves non-Roman Catholic and approximately 30-35% who identify as non-Christian (Identity withheld, personal communication, June 5, 2007).

The Roman Catholic school board region chosen for this investigation covers an extremely diversified and variable demographic population. The region hosts over 1 million residents and covers a geographic space of over 2,500 square kilometres. At the secondary level, there are over 20 full-time Roman Catholic day schools, enrolling over 30,000 students. There is extensive ethnic diversity in this region with approximately 43% identifying as immigrant status or born outside of Canada (Ornstein, 2006; White, 2005). The single largest immigrant group is Indian, while the three fastest growing immigrant populations are Pakistani, Indian and Filipino groups. The region incorporates 93 distinct ethnic groups, more than 60 different languages and is currently considered one of the fastest growing areas in all of Canada.

Economically, one in ten families in the region is considered to be in the category of low income, where more than 64% of their total annual income is spent on food, clothing and housing alone.
There are more than 25 official food banks in the region, with more than 6,000 people using the largest one at least once every month. The region also records an incidence of low-income households that are close to, or greater than, the provincial and national average in seven community areas. In contrast, the region also supports some of the highest-income households in the province, boasting sprawling estates and a “who’s who” of Canadian entertainment, politics and entrepreneurial ownership and big business, including many equestrian ranches for the boarding and training of horses. In the areas directly surrounding the schools used for this research, 39% of the population identify as Roman Catholic, within a total Christian population amounting to 68%. Approximately 18% of the regional population identify as Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim or Sikh, while over 11% report no religious affiliation (White, 2005).

It should be noted that only Roman Catholic secondary school students and employees were recruited for this research. Roman Catholic secondary schools in the province of Ontario have practised an open-door policy for allowing non-Roman Catholic students within the geographic school boundaries to enrol since 1984 (Ontario Government, 1984). It is at the secondary level in which regional cultural, racial, and religious diversity is notably representative. It is also at this time in life when youth are establishing their adult identities and planning for their future. Focussing on youth and educational professionals at this level was an intentional and exclusive directive of this research to better understand the natural evolution of Roman Catholic school communities that are optional for all.

3.1.1 Approaches to gathering data

Generating support for the research was first initiated through the school chaplains at a monthly school board meeting in the autumn of 2005. As a group, they responded with interest and several chaplains admitted that it was not only timely but poignant given the cultural, multi-faith diversity of youth in Toronto CMA schools. The chaplains encouraged the research and offered to liaise with the students chosen for involvement in the investigation. Those chaplains most interested in the research offered that the diversity of their schools was growing and they personally wanted to better understand the religious and spiritual dynamic of their schools. However, some chaplains raised concerns over the validity of this research and questioned its agenda. The response of a need to produce a clearer picture and strengthen the understanding of religious or spiritual identity within youth at a time when the secular system denies religion as an
aspect of identity entirely satisfied the concerns of those chaplains. Plus, it was made clear that their assistance and knowledge toward bridging and understanding the range of religious diversity in their schools through their daily encounters in classrooms, on retreats, and during mass and liturgy was imperative toward strengthening the success of this research. The essence of positive community involvement was a directive of the research agenda and the religious or spiritual representation of chaplains in their schools was a supportive alliance that students, teachers and administrators needed to witness while this research was underway. Their support on issues religious and spiritual also weighed in as providing crucial guidance and counselling for those students who may have had concerns when following through on survey/interview questions and dialogue. After much discussion and positive interaction, the research was given full approval by the school board chaplains.

Following the initial support of the chaplains, the thesis proposal was completed over the winter of 2005-2006 and approval to approach the Roman Catholic school board ensued. It was crucial to obtain school board approval, as its disallowance to engage students would have altered the proposal from a primary research case study dealing with human subjects to a literature review. The proposal was submitted in February 2006 and reviewed by the Director of Education, the Social Equity Officer and the Ethics Review Committee. In personal phone conversations with the Director and Social Equity Officer, both offered their approval and interest in seeing the work proceed. In May 2006, the school board Ethics Review Committee offered approval pending minor revisions to text including total anonymity of student, school and school board identity.

An official letter to proceed with gathering random student and family names for full involvement in this research was issued by the Roman Catholic school board Ethics Review Committee in September, 2006. Following receipt of the school board Ethics Review Committee approval, the thesis proposal was submitted to the University of Toronto Ethics Review Committee in October, 2006, and in February, 2007, after some minor textual revisions, the University of Toronto Ethics Review Committee awarded approval to proceed with the research (Appendix A).

In March, 2007, the school board chaplains were approached to enlist their support for following through with engaging students. At this time a minority of chaplains vocalized discomfort with
the research and wanted to halt the study. One Chaplain asked to clarify the legitimacy of not only the research but the personal qualifications of the primary researcher who is a non-Roman Catholic social scientist and one “so young.” Affirmation to recognize the diversity that is now a reality in schools was the first response to the legitimacy of the research. Also, as a non-Roman Catholic social scientist, the analysis and conclusions would be offered through a lens neither of non-bias nor from within the Roman Catholic system. This research was to be conducted with open and honest self-reflexive disclosure and a true attempt to understand the religious and spirituality identity of youth with the use of their words and inflections. Age of the primary researcher should also have nothing to do with the ability to conduct ethical and viable research. With these rebuttals presented at the meeting, strong support was then received from several other chaplains who appeared to have personally taken offence to the tone and context of their colleague and they offered to enrol their school’s support immediately in the research investigation. At the conclusion of the chaplains meeting, the research was again encouraged to proceed and enough support to satisfy the minimum number of schools required for participation.

An electronic letter was issued to all principals and chaplains in the school board to solicit participation in the research investigation (see Appendix B). Due to many changes or conditions that were occurring in schools at that time of the year, (retirements, administrative duties outside of the schools, temporary leave status, apathy), only eight schools responded positively within two weeks of the initial request. The letter was reissued electronically to principals clarifying the timely nature of this research and two further schools were finally confirmed by the first week of April, 2007. In total, 10 secondary schools from within the Roman Catholic school board offered to participate in the research study.

Through principal approval, guidance personnel were contacted to obtain a student number alpha-list from each participating school. The alpha-list only contained student numbers in order to maintain both anonymity of student names and to ensure the randomness of those students selected for participation in the research. With the alpha-number lists from each school, students were manually highlighted at every 25th number to ensure random consistency with the sample generation. A maximum of 30 students per school ensured a broad sample from across all of the participating schools.
The student numbers were then delivered back to guidance personnel who were directed to provide the name and homeroom teacher affiliated with said 30 numbers. Once those names were received, an unsealed envelope containing an introductory/assent letter for the student and their families (Appendix C), a student survey (Appendix D) and accompanying parental/guardian survey (Appendix E) were delivered through the Chaplain and homeroom teacher directly to the student. The introductory letter clearly explained the intent of the research and provided background as to who would have access to the information obtained and recorded during the entire scope of the investigation. Students and parents were also informed that this research would be entirely voluntary and the anonymity of the participants would be protected through the duration of the research process and eventual release to the school board, the University of Toronto and any further publications that ensue. Students or families who did not wish to participate in the survey did so freely without jeopardizing their relationship with either their school or school officials. The names of participating students and their families would only be disclosed to school chaplains and interviews with those students would be entirely arranged through the chaplaincy office.

It was the student’s responsibility to then complete the survey, as well as deliver the parental/guardian survey homeward. Consent request for interview participation was noted at the end of both the student and parental surveys and must have been completed for that student to be considered for an interview. The surveys were requested to be sealed by the participating parent or student and returned to the homeroom teacher, who would then pass the envelopes back to the Chaplain. The envelopes were then obtained from the Chaplain directly or they were returned sealed via the internal school board courier.

3.1.2 Data Collection

Completed surveys by students and parents offered an initial window into understanding the relevance of religion and/or spirituality for both students and parents/guardians at home and at school. The surveys also identified students and parents who were not Roman Catholic. The importance of religion and spirituality in the daily lives of youth was the intended crux of the survey questions, with further discussion and revelation to be broached at the time of an interview. The survey’s main use was to identify patterns surrounding issues of spirituality, religion, social peer interaction, educational support or influence and family or home life
influence. Themes or discrepancies in the survey data provided direction for preparing interview questions that would investigate issues of identity, identity in faith and supportive school environments in more detail.

Students who consented to participate in the follow-up interview, and had a parental/guardian consent signature on the completed and returned surveys, were contacted via their Chaplain and a time was arranged for an interview. Students were interviewed either as a group or individually, depending on the number of other participants from the same school and if approval was given for audio recording. A maximum of three students per school were interviewed at any one time. An attempt was also made to engage all students who agreed to an interview. It was noted that these students randomly represented the diverse religious or spiritual dynamic of their school, as well as a range of grades, gender, socio-economic and ethnic identities.

Interviews took place at the student’s home school during the months of May and June, 2007. The Chaplain was solicited to ensure that a comfortable and safe environment was provided for interviews. Questions were designed to engage issues of personal identification within a Roman Catholic school environment and self identity in faith, including school community interaction and support of faith identity in students (Appendix F). The students could, at any time, request to opt out of being recorded during the interview. To opt out of being recorded would not jeopardize their participation in the research study in any way or their relationship with the school or school officials. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded during transcription to ensure and maintain consistency of anonymity. Audio tapes, field notes and interview notes are kept in a secure and private location. The student names used during the data and analysis chapters (chapters 4 and 5) are entirely fictional.

To provide another perspective on the topic of youth identity and youth identity in faith, informal interviews with religion teachers, the Social Equity Officer and the Coordinator for Religious Education and Faith Formation were conducted during the same timeframe as student interviews. In total, eight religion teachers who had worked in various Roman Catholic and public/secular schools nationally and abroad were informally interviewed between March and April, 2007. The Social Equity Officer and the Coordinator for Religious Education were informally interviewed in September and October, 2007, respectively. The lone Roman Catholic school board involved in the research, and from which all student participants were enrolled, employed all adult
participants at the time of this research. All adults agreed to participate freely and accepted informed consent with accommodation to review the thesis for accurate quoting and representation prior to final submission to the University of Toronto (Appendix G). Their anonymity was guaranteed throughout the research process and within the final product. Interview questions covered a diversity of personal thoughts and experiences (Appendix H).

The names of all individuals and particular schools will remain anonymous when the final thesis is submitted, in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, OISE/University of Toronto. A copy of the final thesis will be submitted to the participatory school board.

3.2 Critical ethnography within a case study

Data collection for this case study was conducted through a critical ethnographic approach, grounded in what Lather (1986) identifies as “Freirian ‘empowering’ research” (p. 64). This ideological approach offers a transformative agenda to the scientific neutrality and objectivity that has inherently dictated over research processes in the human sciences. A goal of Freirian ‘empowering’ research is to challenge traditional methods of validating research, which legitimates privilege and power based in gender, class, race, faith, ability and sexuality. By placing emphasis on the voice of the students throughout this research study, those students are empowered as individuals with specific and valid personal interpretations of religion or spirituality. All students, by default of the title alone (student), are in positions of inferiority in any educational environment. Therefore, to provide an opportunity to elevate their power through respect for and notice of voice provides those students legitimate ways of knowing and living their daily reality.

The methodological task of proceeding with this research in a reciprocal, dialogic manner, empowers and provides self-determination of the subjects under investigation. As Lather (1986) suggests, those subjects, as co-researchers within the investigation, contribute to the struggle toward social justice through offering lived experience and knowledge. According to Anderson (1989), critical ethnography emerged as a result of “the dissatisfaction with social accounts of ‘structures’ such as class, patriarchy and racism in which real human actors never appear” (p. 249). Ethnographic work entails research designed to engage in a process of knowledge production. It must offer new ways of understanding, communicating or ‘seeing’ a topic that
challenges known experience and yet maintains validity or sensibility. Ethnographic work needs to be understood in the larger processes of producing a particular articulation of knowledge and thus the interest that defines critical ethnographic work is both pedagogical and political (Simon & Dippo, 1986). All researchers sit in a space of personal knowing and within ethnographic work the issue is not of being biased by your history but in answering the question, “Whose interests are best being served with this research?”

To engage in critical ethnographic work steps up the process of addressing the inequitable structures in our society, including acts of domination and suppression, by attempting to understand why and how to move and work outside these confines (Simon & Dippo, 1986). To conduct critical work in the social sciences, researchers must develop and proceed with a method that is consistent with the intention of the study, negotiate personal space in the public environment under investigation, and engage in self-reflexivity. To focus on the construction and maintenance of such negotiated elements as control and regulation is crucial within critical ethnography. A critical ethnography must commit to study the character and basis of one’s own work practices and their relation to the knowledge such practices produce (Simon & Dippo, 1986). Finally, researchers must work to renegotiate these elements from the perspective of those who have been traditionally silenced or ignored in discussions of systematic foundations and frameworks.

Within this research, critical ethnography required a faith-based centered paradigm to engage in the case study. This approach offered a different lens through which issues of power, embedded in the interviewer–student relationship, could be analyzed with a sense of balance and harmony as seen through religious/spiritual epistemology (Dillard et al., 2000). This is similar to the work of Tuhiwai Smith (2005) who suggests as part of an indigenous research study, that the connection of the subject to the land/space through the work of ethnography “relates to issues of identity and place, to spiritual relationships and community wellbeing” (p. 148-149). Critical revolutionary educators working within an epistemological spiritual framework and discursive theory must acknowledge how their work challenges legitimate ways of knowing with other valid options in knowledge production.
3.2.1 Validity as a tool

In establishing trustworthy data through a paradigm of research triangulation, reflexivity and member checks, traditional concepts of validity can be defined and redefined in ways appropriate to address modern conditions of society. The student and parental surveys were used to establish an initial, albeit presumptive and superficial, look into religious or spiritual personal or family connections. This data was qualitatively compared with the student interview notes to further establish the strength of religion or spirituality in their lives at home, in school and amongst their peers. Student interviews were further compared to staff interview notes and triangulated back through previous theory. Connections and/or discrepancies between the survey and interview data were noted and are described in Chapter 5, the analysis section.

Critical ethnography especially leaves itself open to questions of validity because of the subjectivity of data compilation and interpretation/analysis. Often educational researchers frame their work within the language of positivism to legitimize or compensate for questions surrounding validity (Anderson, 1989; Oakley, 1981). Using a revelatory single-case study also brings forth questions of validity and reliability given the nature of the research and the lack of comparative material. Triangulation of the survey/quantitative data and the subsequent qualitative interviews from various sources strengthen the validity of the research and lend credence to its reliability. Moreover, by using various voices offering legitimate forms of knowledge and lived experience, this research is further validated and strengthened in context to that source of information alone. Lather’s (1986) three lenses of validity: construct validity, face validity and catalytic validity further strengthen the reliability of interpretation of the data.

Lather (1986) identifies construct validity as a process for researchers to proceed through “a systematized reflexivity”, where a priori theory has evolved to enhance social theory through the logic of data (p. 76). The students engaged for this research bear witness to their experiences and the positional identities which they have been either forced to accept or actively pursued in issues of religion or spirituality during their secondary schooling experience. The survey questions open up the dialogue of faith-based issues in the lives of students, and the interviews help the students to reflect on their initial answers, how their lived experience has evolved and the personal spaces that they now occupy in their home, school and peer group relationships.
Construct validity is offered within the formation of data compilation, through the offering of self-reflective knowledge by the subject, of the subject. Student voices are authenticated through their written and verbal expression of growth and understanding of religion and spirituality in their modern context of education. Either as students immersed in Roman Catholic doctrine and teachings for many years, or as youth who are learning about this belief system for the first time in a Roman Catholic secondary environment, their a priori experience is presented as logical because of their lived realities. The student voices are the construction material used to build an understanding of identity in faith for modern Roman Catholic secondary school youth. Lived reality is legitimate knowledge and validates a student’s worldview.

Face validity addresses the standards used by those researched to validate the analysis and offer legitimacy to the recommendations, limitations or biases of the researcher. Face validity offers a valid impact of the analysis as felt through and by the research subjects. Dialogue with students that offer emotional or reactive responses to their experiences, allows for the text to be checked and balanced when comparing multiple voices and theory. The students have the opportunity to suggest through this research how change or alternatives can address wider, possibly systemic issues of religion and spirituality for youth in modern educational environments through all school boards, and propel religious identity to the forefront of social equity and discriminatory cases.

Finally, catalytic validity confirms the impact that the research will make on social change or theory in the lives of those researched and/or the community at large. Catalytic validity strengthens the voice of the research data through the lens of the subjects and offers direction for future recourse in schools and school board curriculum and policy at large. The influence or impression that this research investigation provides on the future lives of secondary level Roman Catholic schools in addressing the needs of their diverse populations will further strengthen or support the catalytic validity that this research intended. In combination, construct, face and catalytic validity offer a means to organize, legitimize and present the findings of qualitative data and ground them as epistemologically valid.

Epistemology is clearly linked with our worldview, which is influenced by our knowledge possession and acquisition. Epistemology is more than a way of knowing; it is a system of knowing that has both an internal logic and external validity (Ladson-Billings, 2000). How we
define and shape our worldview is in turn a result of our internal logic system and validation process. As much of this research assumes an understanding or definition of spirituality that is personal and unique, while not necessarily aligned with a religion or faith, it equally assumes that spiritual identity in experience and knowing is epistemologically valid. The quantification of spirituality as a theoretical concept is certainly not widely accepted within sociological research and higher level academic establishments. The challenge lies in providing a methodological process that not only aligns one’s spirituality with lived experiences but also validates the existence of spiritual knowing and understanding as space within youth identity.

3.3 Data analysis

The survey data was initially analyzed quantitatively for general trends and principles associated with student connections to religion/spirituality, schooling and peer relations, as well as parental connections to religion/spirituality and home and community life. The interview data was initially analysed qualitatively for general trends and principles associated with student identity, faith in identity, and environmental or schooling influences on identity and faith. Hand coding of the qualitative data was processed with a colour scheme based on key words and phrases that were identified as significant in relation to the research objectives of this study. A concordance file was created with those key words (Appendix I) and a code system was developed identifying general themes in student and adult narratives. Through triangulation, it was possible to compare individual narratives between and among students and adults, while also locating general patterns and themes in the data/dialogue. Coding separated the dialogue into five domains and within four of those domains, themes were subdivided further to assist with quick reference during analysis:

1a) Student identity was investigated for positive commentary or self-reflection. Words were separated based on a positive reference within identity, such as the use of “accepted”, “belong”, “inclusive”, “respected” and “visible.”

1b) Student identity was further investigated for positive actions or emotions during self-reflective commentary, with key words such as “celebration”, “comfortable”, “freedom”, “inspired”, “safe” and “supported.”
2a) Student identity was investigated for negative commentary or self-reflection. Words were separated based on a negative reference within identity, such as the use of “alienate”, “hidden”, “ignored”, “oppressed”, “uncool”, and “unnoticed.”

2b) Student identity was further investigated for negative actions or emotions during self-reflective commentary, with key words such as “afraid”, “conformity”, “frustrate”, “pressure”, “teased” and “weak.”

3a) Personal identity within a faith-based title or category was coded, with key words such as “Christian”, “Catholic/Roman Catholic”, “religious” and “spiritual.”

3b) Connections to a faith-based title or category were also coded separately, with key words such as “baptised”, “Bible”, “church”, “God”, “pray”, “retreats” and “worship.”

4a) Neutral influences that were tangible surfaced as generalized themes in dialogue with youth. Words such as “clothing”, “culture”, “jokes”, “music”, “nature”, “symbols” and “uniform” were coded separately.

4b) Neutral impressions were also coded separately, with key words such as “attitude”, “beliefs”, “diversity”, “experience”, “identity”, “knowledge”, “power”, “relationship” and “values.”

5) Community connections were also coded separately and included the words “community”, “family”, “home”, “peers” and “teachers.”

This initial approach provided focus on specific trends and patterns in the dialogue with which to compare the survey data and dialogue with the adults interviewed. In-depth analysis of student dialogue was further investigated and presented through an anti-colonial discursive lens.

3.4 Limitations and challenges of this research

Three hundred surveys were distributed to both students and their respective parents or guardians across 10 Roman Catholic secondary schools within one school board authority. Of the 300 student surveys, 71 were returned for a return rate of 23.66%. Of the 300 parent surveys, 68 were returned for a return rate of 22.66%. Of the 71 students who responded, 18 students had corresponding parental approval to be interviewed. By the time of the interviews only 15
students made themselves available to be interviewed: 11 approved being recorded and 4 did not approve being recorded. Of the 71 possible candidates for interview, 21% were interviewed. However, out of the overall total random data set of 300 possible interview candidates only 5% agreed to an interview. This very low return rate of student involvement with this research is problematic, as it weakens the legitimacy for triangulation of the data and places the validity of interpretation or findings in question.

However, each student’s voice has a legitimate place to be heard, and offering this research as the initial stages of what could become part of a much larger investigation, is warranted. The nature of the response rate could be also be a reflection of modern apathy affiliated with religious or spiritual investigation/discussion, concerns over disclosure of religious affiliation in such a manner as academic research or discontent toward this type of research agenda. Self-disclosure to a social science researcher investigating issues of faith may have discouraged some parents or students to participate for fear of inappropriate bias or interpretation of the data. Not engaging the analysis through a theological lens might have insulted those queried for the research and turned them off from participation. Whatever the cause or reason, the limited return rate certainly speaks alarmingly toward the need for more student voices from within the Roman Catholic system to be empowered to speak of their experiences, successes, challenges and failures.

Precedent also expects to be set with this research investigation. The Ontario Roman Catholic school system has not yet engaged in a survey or interview process that looks at the importance of religiosity and spirituality for youth. Therefore, this research brings forth strategies that may not be easily adopted in the classroom or school communities outright, yet could have far reaching influence on future direction and acceptance of the evolving and diverse natures of Roman Catholic school communities. The intent of this research is to try to prescribe strategies that can be easily adopted and incorporated into the daily routine of the classroom and school community at large while broadening the scope of understanding faith and faith identity in youth. Larger implications for the Roman Catholic separate school board toward acknowledging the diversity of students within their schools as well as promoting and nurturing a healthy spirit in their students will also be broached.
Chapter 4
Identity, Religious Spirituality & Education – Front Line Voices

4 Introduction

The survey data and interview dialogues reveal many insights into how youth envision their identity and describe their space in Ontario Roman Catholic schools. The survey provides statistical data on the initial investigations into youths’ opinions on religion and spirituality in their personal lives and at school. The survey also identifies those youth who participated in the interview process. The interview data provide a deeper understanding of youth identity within faith-based educational schooling, including topics associated with religious and spiritual identity, faith-based discrimination and future directions for Ontario Roman Catholic schooling. The combination of survey and interview data provides evidence toward how youth envision, claim and manoeuvre their identity and faith/spirituality in modern Ontario Roman Catholic secondary schools.

The interview dialogue was initially highlighted based on the work of Bray (2006), with an emphasis on key words and their context. It was then colour coded to provide general understanding of the data and the tone of discussions. Upon examination of the data through the coding and colour coding process, the use of religious descriptive themes outweighed the dialogue with students and staff alike. References to religion or being religious were most common, as well as reference to being Roman Catholic or non-Roman Catholic. References to Christian, church, faith, God, public (versus Roman Catholic schooling), secular, spiritual, and spirituality were the next most common themes in all student and staff dialogue. References to community and influential individuals in the lives of youth were also noted in large numbers, followed by positive influences and empowering language. Reference to negative factors or negative influences were least noted in all youth dialogue, yet were referenced more often during dialogue with teachers and staff representatives.

Of 300 surveys administered to students, 71 surveys were returned. The return rate on the initial random survey generation was 24%. The gender and age distribution of participating students was 41 females and 30 males, ranging from age 14 to 19 with the average age being 15 years and 9 months, with the median age at 16. Eleven students were enrolled in Grade 9, 24 students were
enrolled in Grade 10, 15 students were enrolled in Grade 11, and 18 students were enrolled in Grade 12. Two other students were repeating their Grade 12 year and one student did not provide his grade. Two-thirds of students identified as Roman Catholic, while another third identified as another Christian denomination, Greek Orthodox, Muslim, Sikh, other, or no religious affiliation/agnostic. One student self-identified as a combination of Baptist and Roman Catholic. The religious affiliations as identified by the students surveyed are listed in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Percentage of Students (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>66.19 (47/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (not included elsewhere)</td>
<td>15.49 (11/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>5.63 (4/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Orthodox</td>
<td>2.81 (2/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist</td>
<td>1.40 (1/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>1.40 (1/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist/Roman Catholic</td>
<td>1.40 (1/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1.40 (1/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>1.40 (1/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.40 (1/71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religious Affiliation/Agnostic</td>
<td>1.40 (1/71)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the student survey respondents, 35% (25 of the 71 students) optioned to be contacted further for an interview. Sixty-two percent (44 students) did not wish to be contacted further, and 3% (2 students) did not complete this portion of the survey. Of the 25 students willing to be interviewed, only 18 had received parental approval. Two of the 18 students failed to reply to an invitation to be interviewed, and one student was interested in the interview process but could not dedicate the time. Fifteen students were therefore interviewed for this research. Of the 15 who discussed the topics at hand, 11 interviews received both student and parental assent to be recorded. One of the 11 recorded interviews is only partially accessible due to tape damage, while one other recording is entirely irretrievable due to tape damage. Four students either did not wish to be recorded, or did not receive parental approval for recording of the interview. Comprehensive field notes were taken during all interviews and used as the primary source of research data.
Three-hundred parent/guardian surveys, paired with the selected child, were also administered and 68 surveys were returned for a return ratio of 23%. The gender distribution of participating parents was 43 females and 24 males, with one parent not identifying their gender. Of those parents who offered their age, the range extended from 35-56, with the average parental age at 44 years and 6 months, and the median parental age at 45. The parents or guardian families had lived within the current regional school board from 1 year to 46 years. The average length of time these parents had lived in the region was 15 years and 3 months, with a median of 14 years.

The religious affiliation of these parents is listed in Table 3. Two-thirds of the parents identified as Roman Catholic, while a third identified as another Christian denomination, Greek Orthodox, Muslim, Sikh, other, or chose not to answer this particular question. One parent specifically identified as Pentecostal/Evangelical as part of the Pentecostal category, another parent identified as Coptic Orthodox as part of the Christian (not included elsewhere) category, and one parent offered Unitarian as part of the other religion category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Percentage of Parents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>66.17 (45/68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (not included elsewhere)</td>
<td>7.35 (5/68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>5.88 (4/68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>5.88 (4/68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>4.41 (3/68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Orthodox</td>
<td>2.94 (2/68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist</td>
<td>1.40 (1/68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1.40 (1/68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.40 (1/68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not Identify (D.N.I)</td>
<td>2.94 (2/68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the parent survey results, 38% (26 of the 68 parents) provided consent for their son or daughter to take part in an interview. Fifty-four percent, or 14 of the 26 parents agreeing to an interview, agreed for their son or daughter to participate in a recorded interview. One parent voluntarily offered that their child “is not interested” in being recorded during the interview. Fifty-seven percent (39 parents) did not wish to be contacted further, and 3 parents did not complete this portion of the survey.
Staff interviews consisted of informal dialogue with eight teachers and two school board representatives. Each staff member brought a diverse range of experiences to the discussion, most of whom had taught within the Toronto Roman Catholic CMA their entire professional careers. Some of the teachers had also gained professional teaching experience across Ontario, Quebec, and internationally. The teacher and staff dialogues provided triangulation of the student and parent data, as well as adding adult opinions to modern youth identity in Ontario Roman Catholic schools. Many of these discussions revolved around notable changes that have occurred since full-funding.

4.1 How youth envision and project an image

The influence of visual and auditory media on how youth look and act is saliently prevalent in any school environment. Image is incredibly important to today’s youth; not just how one looks, but how one is perceived and interpreted by those around them. Therefore, to ease many of the students into the interview process, discussion often began on the topics of uniform/fashion, music, mainstream media and cultural influences. These topics were interwoven into the initial question inquiring about the modern lure of Roman Catholic schooling. Many of the girls were quick to discuss the positive and negative aspects of wearing a uniform everyday.

As the age of the student increased, there was a notable shift in attitude about wearing a uniform, from one of disdain in grades nine and ten to an attitude of acceptance, even praise, by grades eleven and twelve. Vera nodded her head in agreement when Jazmine (both senior students) stated that, “some days it is so much easier knowing what you’re going to wear.” Both Vera and Jazmine presented themselves as confident Grade 12 young woman, and while Vera was initially a bit more subdued, Jazmine’s natural effervescence came through from the beginning of the interview. Vera self-identified as Portuguese Roman Catholic while Jazmine self-identified as Roman Catholic of white European ancestry. Vera stated that she practises her religion daily in the home and considers herself to be a spiritual person. She offered that “…you can believe in many different religions, but … spirituality is more within you.” Within her own family, Vera put forward that members of the Muslim faith as well as Jehovah Witness faith are interspersed with the Roman Catholics. Her openness to learning about and appreciating other faiths inspired a self-empowering research project in which she attended the local mosque with her Muslim
uncle for three days. Her respect for wearing the female headdress gained her positive responses from the congregation and she felt welcomed.

Vera also put forth that she would be open to attending the local public school if her parents agreed. However, during the interview she described how she had been enrolled in fourteen schools throughout the Toronto CMA and in Grade 4 had started the year by mistakenly going to the local public/secular school:

... and right away when I entered the school ... we didn’t pray ... no [sign of the cross]. Not to say the public schools don’t believe in God but I didn’t see anything. And then when I went to the Catholic elementary school the next morning we prayed, and I’m like okay, I’m home again.

It was at this point in the interview that Vera offered that her Roman Catholic mother did not have a Roman Catholic school education. Vera insisted that it was her mother’s experience in the public/secular system that prompted her to ensure her own children would have a Roman Catholic school education and that it would then “be easier for them” to know “about the Roman Catholic ways”.

Jazmine initially admitted that she practices her religion just at holidays, but during the interview offered that she does engage in a daily religious practice involving reflection: “I could just be writing down something that I’m feeling and it’s just getting it out; same as praying.” For Jazmine, being Roman Catholic is, “who you are and not what you do” and she spoke very proudly and with confidence about the “family” community atmosphere that she always experiences at her rather small high school. Jazmine expressed how she was most interested in attending the local Roman Catholic high school to stay surrounded by her peer group from the local Roman Catholic elementary school and, as she approached the end of her high school education how she “would have never gotten the same high school experience that I got here”.

For both Vera and Jazmine, the uniform was not a marker of difference or identity in their secondary school. Yet, Elaine, a Grade 10 student mimicked a regular conversation with her peers on the issue of uniform conformity and peer judgement, “These type of dress shoes aren’t cool, these type of dress shoes are cooler. Wearing your skirt, your kilt this high is cooler.” Elaine was critical of her peers who she considered conform to a popular image of what is accepted or praised by modern youth. For Elaine, the issue entirely revolved around self-esteem.
She prided herself as one who challenges popular images and choices, by remarking that students need to be comfortable within them and not to follow the crowd.

Elaine, who self-identified as a very spiritual Roman Catholic, showed a mature confidence and forthright nature in wanting to share her experiences on the topics of religion and spirituality. She offered immediately that she was very interested and excited in being a part of this research. Elaine shared how she practises her religion daily in the home and, as “a spiritual person”, is comfortable sharing her religious or spiritual views in class and amongst her peers. Elaine is a self-proclaimed “hippie/flower child” who put forth that it is “so much easier to be a religious, spiritual, calm person, with good moral values when you’re acquainted with nature.” Elaine became stronger in her faith when she joined the youth choir: “I am a very musical person . . . and through music, it [faith] kind of started to touch me.” Yet, she ponders on her religious identity speculating that, “If my mother didn’t raise me Catholic, I wonder if I’d be Catholic? I don’t think I would be.” She suggested that she would probably “follow my own thing”.

The pressure to conform to a sexual identity was also a strong theme with the younger girls interviewed. Three students who provided insights into this topic were Ashley, Jodie and Shazia. Ashley was a Grade 9 female who self-identified as Christian/not included elsewhere. At the time of interview, Ashley was rather shy and elusive when clarifying any of her survey answers. She eventually explained that her quiet shyness was partially due to illness. Ashley did provide that her family had immigrated to Ontario two years ago from Jamaica. During her schooling in Jamaica, she had attended Roman Catholic schools and had been immersed in religion classes since Grade 3. She reinforced her reasons for being in the Roman Catholic system as a non-Roman Catholic by offering that her parents felt a uniform was more appropriate and supported a more disciplined image than casual clothing.

Jodie, a bubbly, Grade 10, female who also self-identified as Christian/not included elsewhere, attended a secular/public school until Grade 9 and because of this had little understanding of Roman Catholicism. She pressured her mother into allowing her to attend the local Roman Catholic high school because it was not only closer to her house but her older friends encouraged her too. Although Jodie, who interviewed with Ashley, also began cautious and shy in answering or participating in the questions, her interest turned very vocal and self-assured when she shared her dedication to faith and God, whom she identified as “her creator”, and when explaining the
satisfaction she receives from attending a church youth group regularly. Jodie identified religion as “what you believe in” and spirituality as “beyond the physical person.” She expressed how she practises her religion in the home daily but does not consider herself a spiritual person. Jodie’s passion for being immersed in a faith-based community became very apparent when she shared the impact of a community retreat experience she attended while visiting her father in the United States the previous year. The main speaker at the retreat had an inspirational story of success after a history of alcohol, drugs and violence and his encouragement that anyone can turn their lives around by finding faith in God was most overwhelming for Jodie. She described in detail how:

There was over 1000-2000 people, cause it’s really big and at least 800 of them had weed or jugs on them, weapons on them, and he talked to them and told them to bring their weapons on the stage . . . and so much of them turned their life to God . . . he got through to a lot of people, especially a lot of young men.

Shazia, another shy Grade 9 female, who self-identified as being Roman Catholic, did not, initially, appear comfortable during the interview and appeared sceptical as to how her comments might be interpreted or misinterpreted. She volunteered that she wanted to come to a Roman Catholic school because she would feel more comfortable: “I like practising my faith”. She stated that she practises her religion daily in the home and mentioned that she goes to church weekly and enjoys participating in a youth group with peers from her church on the weekends. As she relaxed with further questioning, she did suggest that the role of religious schooling is something that “you can apply to everyday life”, even though she admitted that the same level of respect offered to her identity and religious beliefs from peers was at a level much higher than that afforded by school staff. She offered that students have “no voice, cos they [the school’s administration] usually put the teachers’ word over the kids”. When probed if she was able to discuss school treatment and concerns at home, Shazia offered that she does not feel comfortable taking issues home to her mother anymore due to an incident that prompted her mother to go and voice concerns at Shazia’s school:

I’m Black, my mom is like, half Caucasian . . . and because mom looks white, and . . . I went to a Black school, they didn’t really take her seriously, they just like, they want her to leave. So I don’t go to my mom anymore cos I know she’ll go and try and fight it, and there’s no point cos no one is going to listen, I just don’t say nothing. This is what I’ve learned . . . you’re not going to win against the teachers, so just keep your mouth shut.
Yet, when asked if she would feel more comfortable about the local public secular secondary school, Shazia replied, “I would cry. I don’t want to go there.”

Yet, the challenges that each of these girls face with finding comfort in being girls was another topic separate from that of religion. Ashley, Jodie, Shazia and Elaine boisterously made comments about how their female peers attempt to “fit in” with societal expectations, through sexual rites of passage. Discussions about the uniform and how it is worn were only one aspect to the conformity of a sexual image. Elaine summarized with, “Like it’s okay now, to do naughty things with your boyfriend, and to have all these sexual partners, because people on TV do, and, you know, the cool people do.” Teachers, Ms. Hughes and Mr. Alves suggested that students are simply products of their generation and with a background in popular culture, media is their way to connect to identity and their place in society, sometimes challenging the moral consciousness of their environment. Sexist language supersedes many school hallway discussions and as both Elaine and Shazia suggested, “Guys, they treat girls like their objects.” Jodie further suggested that boys sometimes “call girls the B word and . . . . cat tease” especially if these girls are known to be sexually active. These boys imagine, incorrectly, according to the girls, that this language is acceptable and not offensive because this same language is used in popular media and especially in musical lyrics of the day. Ashley and Jodie commented on varying levels of sexual/gender based harassment at their school, with Jodie summing up that “just because they go here, it’s not going to stop them from acting that way.”

Two other students who offered information on gender bullying were Taras and Tiffany. Taras was a Grade 10 male who proudly identified as having Spanish ancestry, indicating that his dad was raised “really” Roman Catholic in Mexico before moving to Canada some years ago. Taras’ father recently converted to being an “evangelical, Born Again” Christian, while his mother, being from Ohio in the U.S., identified herself as Unitarian. Taras self-identified with the religion he was baptized, that of Roman Catholic and admitted to practising his religion once a week by attending church services. Taras indicated on the survey that he considers himself to be spiritual, but during the interview stated otherwise. He does not see a consequential difference between religion and spirituality and offered that religion is something one follows; one can be spiritual without being religious through focussing on “inner peace” and a “connection to the natural world”. Yet, he proposed that he will probably practise his religion more intently as he gets older because going to church represents balance in his life. Unlike his sister, who is
obtaining her high school education in the public/secular system, Taras transitioned from the secular elementary system into the Roman Catholic high school in Grade 9. He put forth that the importance of religion is not strongly felt in the secular system. Now in a Roman Catholic high school, he is comfortable talking about his religion in his classes. He offered that friends who had stayed in the public system at the high school level were more influenced by “poor choices”, such as drugs and violent behaviour. At the Roman Catholic high school, “there is a respect amongst the people, an acceptance of others; where the local secular high school has an air of negativity, segregation is really noticeable.”

Tiffany was a diminutive, Grade 9, Roman Catholic female who was initially rather quiet in the interview but became proudly confident as discussion ensued, so much so that during the discussion of religion and faith, she quite proudly offered that “religion is a healthy part of my identity” and admitted to practising her religion daily in the home. She also clarified that, for her, “religion and faith are based on what you do, while the spirit might be more what your religion is, but they go hand in hand”. She qualified herself as first generation Canadian, after offering that her father is from India. It was her parents who wanted her to go to the local Roman Catholic high school, yet she too was eager to attend as she implied that there was a positive and protective image associated with Roman Catholic schools, rather than a tougher, more dangerous view associated with the secular system. She also paralleled the difference between Roman Catholic and public/secular schools as that between Canada and the United States where Canada is “accepting of difference, where the U.S. is a melting pot, with conformity and assimilation, making you like them”. Ironically, even though both students found more comfort in identity at a Roman Catholic secondary school, Taras and Tiffany each offered being witness to gender bullying, where alliances were crucial to safe passage throughout the day. Tiffany further put forth, “There is use of slanderous language in regards to homosexuality and this group is most noticeably alienated” at her school.

Girls are often left confused when attempting to find their space of moral acceptance within themselves and within their peer group. As Elaine afforded, girls “just want to feel wanted. I’m not going to lie, I want to feel wanted. But, I’m not going to allow myself to be somebody’s object in order to obtain that.” However, the older girls did not offer the same concerns of sexual peer pressure when interviewed. Vera suggested upon reflection that in her four years in high school, an issue of homosexual bullying and/or gender bullying had “only happened, maybe once
in our school.” All of the senior girls interviewed dismissed the dialogue pertaining to sexual image or conformity. These girls put forth that doing well in school and having better options in the future were more important priorities at this time in their lives. Other than Taras, who recognized gender bullying at his school, none of the other boys, Philip or Randy, were vocal on issues of sexual or gender discrimination.

Philip was a Grade 9 Roman Catholic male who identified as South Korean, having only been living in Canada with extended family for the past two years. He had adapted to his new surroundings with a few struggles, most directly as a result of being an English as a second language speaker. He was most interested in attending a Roman Catholic school while in Canada in order to stay connected to his faith and offered that he would not be open to attending the local public/ secular school if his guardians agreed. Philip expressed his conviction in faith as having been inspired by a young priest in South Korea who organizes youth groups that help young people come together outside of school time.

Philip described in brief, the conflict between Buddhists and Roman Catholics in South Korea and although there is mutual respect, he afforded that Roman Catholics are discriminated against to some extent. He offered that “Canadians are more laid back” about religious difference, and yet he was very affirmative in stating how non-Roman Catholic students should not be in attendance at Roman Catholic schools. He was very emphatic in regards to Roman Catholic students mastering their own religion before being exposed to other religions. Moreover, after suggesting that he regarded himself as “too young” to have adopted a spiritual identity, he further afforded that “Spirituality is something you’ll grow into but one has to be religious first; religion helps you focus and inspires spirituality . . . spirituality is more to yourself, it’s more personal”.

At the conclusion of Philip’s interview he indicated that he would be returning to South Korea at the end of the school term since the rest of his immediate family had decided to forgo immigrating to Canada at this time. He had mixed feelings about the return.

With the same level of conviction as Philip, Randy, a confident, Roman Catholic Grade 12 male volunteered that “attending a religious-based school is important to me because . . . I can practise my faith freely . . . without being criticized and ridiculed.” Randy revealed that he practises his religion daily in the home and frequents the school chapel in the mornings for prayer before classes. Randy’s religion is treated with respect by his peers and school staff, yet he does not
spend his free time at school with peers who share in his religious beliefs. His peer group is diversified and he presented that he feels very open and comfortable around people from other religions. He shared how he is planning on reading the Koran upon completion of the Bible and he proudly described an experience attending the local temple with a Sikh friend. For Randy, “it boils down to we’re all praising God.”

Randy considered himself a spiritual person and explained how he is comfortable discussing his religion and spirituality in class and with his peers. At the time of the survey, he put forth that he would not be open to attending the local secular school, yet during the interview he indicated that he would be comfortable attending the public school system “as long as I was still able to practise my faith”. He identified his local secular high school as being more homogenous than the Roman Catholic high school and that it is the diversity of a Roman Catholic school that can then “teach tolerance and respect of difference” more directly, just as “the Catholic Church tells us we should accept everyone.” Randy did offer however, that he envisions the Roman Catholic system as “dying out” and that it is starting to be equal to the environmental aspects of the public/secular system: “Whatever it was that started off in a Roman Catholic school, whatever values, whatever it was, I think it’s starting to diminish for some reason, and I don’t know what that is or why that is.” Randy followed this up with “Teachers should be strong and firm in their Catholic views and beliefs” because, as he suggested, many teachers discuss other religions as being more relevant than Roman Catholicism, or do not even show faith in Jesus which is quite upsetting and inappropriate in a Roman Catholic school. He was critical of the school curriculum and described the populations of Roman Catholic schools as “diverse in terms of different religions” and that non-Roman Catholics or unreligious students have to “conform” to religious aspects that are repetitive with time. He put forth that “it would be easier for our school to actually make issues of spirituality more relevant, cos everyone could relate to this in some way or another.” He then went on to offer that issues of spirituality are not discussed outside of religion in his classes. Randy also indicated that gospel reggae affords him a deep sense of spirituality and a spiritual presence, especially because of his Jamaican ancestry. He described his connection through music as “not just saying it, but feeling it!” Religion for Randy is practising a faith that “can be caught up with non-meaningful rituals and practices”, while “a spiritual person is more directed towards God”.

As the interviews evolved from external influences on identity toward the internalization of identity, the topic shifted to issues of race. Interestingly, Jazmine and Vera put forth that “everybody gets treated the same” at their school when the discussion turned to ethnic difference and diversity. These girls pointed out that only one student, who wore the hijab in the previous school year, had been noticed to stand out at their school in regards to racial, religious or ethnic difference. They did not know what happened to that student, if she still attends without wearing the hijab or if she no longer was enrolled at their school. Harmeet offered, however, that racial jokes are limited but notably consistent at her school where she suggests that racialized groups “appear comfortable with their own”. However, discriminatory jokes and jeers were more extremely noticeable toward students who are disabled or display learning disabilities.

Harmeet, a Grade 10 female who self-identified as a non-practicing Anglican of European ancestry, comes from a family that has “lived in and around the community for over three generations”. Harmeet admitted that she only celebrates her religion in the home at holiday time and offered that she prefers to attend the local United Church over her baptismal church because of the more welcoming atmosphere. She was raised in the public/secular school system and was interested in attending the local Roman Catholic high school in Grade 9 because her closest friends were doing so. Harmeet shared that she considers herself a spiritual person who connects to her faith most strongly through music “cos I’m a very musical person”. She spoke confidently to challenging her peers on issues of race and discrimination, but as her peer group all identified with her ethnically and culturally, issues of sexuality and acceptance of homosexuality in Roman Catholic schools was the topic that incited the most discussion amongst her closest peer group.

Yet, for most of the other students, racial identities and roles are prominently topical in their current school environments, yet not openly categorized as discrimination. Elaine, who self-identified as being part Caribbean Black, Asian and Caucasian, curtly offered that “the racism thing is very big. Not so much that we discriminate against, just we don’t interact with other races.” Her own subject-position and lived reality was made very clear when she confessed that:

I feel like I’m not white enough for my white friends, I’m not black enough for my black friends, I’m not Asian with my Asian friends, I’m not Indian like my Indian friends. . . . Where do I fit? . . . I don’t fit anywhere. I fit with the other mixed people, but they’re all different too.
Elaine interwove issues of race and religious spirituality when she put forth that although her religion/spirituality is treated with respect by school administration, it is not afforded the same respect by her peers at school. As a young girl growing up in Nova Scotia, Elaine learned early on that her mixed race ancestry meant it was difficult to fit in with any one peer group. It was during this time that she started to spend more time with her grandfather who enjoyed being outdoors, and in turn started to develop a deeper connection to the natural world. Now at secondary school, Elaine asserted that she does spend her free time at school with peers who share in her religious and spiritual beliefs. Yet her peer group is diversified and she still feels marginalized to some extent by those peers because of her mixed ancestry. Interestingly, even if her parents approved, she would not be open to attending the local public school, which she acknowledged as being more diverse racially, for fear of losing the religious and spiritual option in her daily life.

Marian echoed Elaine’s conflict when it comes to both accepting and projecting a racial identity with school peers. Marian, who takes pride in her Nigerian ancestry, tenuously suggested that, with respect to her school, “I don’t think people do it intentionally; I just feel like, sometimes you are drawn to certain races, sometimes it’s natural. But, that does not stop me from being friends with a brown person or a white person.” This reflection came after her observations at a prom committee meeting from the previous week in which she observed, after the fact, how all the girls that came out for the meeting “naturally” sat with peers from their same racial group. Marian also indicated that “if a teacher discriminates against me because of my race, it’s not going to stop me from doing what I do. Most teachers are aware of the diversity in their classroom and are respectful”.

Marian was a very confident and articulate Grade 12 female who self-identified as Pentecostal. Marian started out reserved and guarded in what she was willing to share, but offered extremely impassioned and informative views on the topics of religion, spirituality and life at her school in general. Her family emigrated from Nigeria twelve years ago, and she was baptized as a Roman Catholic because her dad was Roman Catholic. They have both recently converted to Pentecostalism. She did not have any concerns with attending the local Roman Catholic school because she was “brought up to believe that the Catholic education system is a much better school system because it has a range of morals and ethics and different values that help you connect to faith”. Marian identified what she considers:
. . . a big difference between religion and spirituality. Religion is more of what your community as a whole, as a family do together. But spirituality is more working with your soul and having a connection with God possibly through the nature, or whoever you look up to as, as a God, type of thing.

Marian considered herself a very spiritual person, and through a church youth group and choir, she strongly connects to her spirituality through singing. She presented that “music itself and singing is very therapeutic for me, that’s a way I engage in my spirituality”. Marian also expressed that the Roman Catholic system overall has “given me some sort of platform to accommodate everybody” because of the racial and religious diversity that exists in her school. She described her experiences in the Canadian Roman Catholic system as being “very open with their culture” and although “there’s still racial segregating, racism isn’t a problem in Canada, its sugar coated”. She then compared it to her brief time in the United States before moving to Canada and offered that racial segregation is “way worse in the States, it’s in your face, racism is like right there” and everyone is expected to accommodate the “melting pot” attitude.

Yet, later on during the interview, Marian became quite adamant as to the challenges of Roman Catholic schools and critical of the school curriculum, and described how the repetition of sacramental Roman Catholicism has perpetuated student apathy toward their faith or participation in religious retreats and mass. She proudly discussed her memories of moral studies as opposed to religion during her schooling in Nigeria and commented that those courses offered a spiritual depth that is lacking in her current high school religion classes. During the comparison of the Roman Catholic to secular systems, Marian was very vocal about the strictness in the Roman Catholic system toward upholding Roman Catholic or Christian tenets, especially concerning the topic of pre-marital sex. In regards to issues of birth control, sexually transmitted diseases and the reality of sexual peer pressure on youth, Marian firmly believed that, “I think we’re kind of killing our community by not educating them.” For her, the main difference between the Roman Catholic and the secular system is that teachers are freer in the public secular system to “educate people” with “health classes, . . . sex ed. type of things.”

Discussions on racial identity often led into discussions of ethnic religious identity. As a recent migrant to the Toronto CMA from India and as a Sikh in an era of anti-Islamic sentiment, Elisa described her understanding of community interaction and interpreted a disassociation on the part of her community between diasporic roots and religious roots. She stated that, “the thing I’m
noticing is . . . the whole community, . . . it’s probably because of 9/11, . . . usually discriminate on Muslims more. I don’t get it though . . . Sikhs . . . are from the same country.” Elisa suggested that issues of faith identification outside of race are factors influencing discrimination and prejudice, and Roman Catholic schools are not necessarily free of this marginalization.

Elisa was a very affirmative and bright, Grade 10, female who offered that her family had only been in Canada for two years, before which her family had lived briefly in the United States after emigrating from India. She was proud to be Sikh but came to the Roman Catholic school because it felt comfortable and welcoming and the option to have religion in schools was important for her and her family. Elisa explained how she connects very strongly to God through music, most directly temple music in her native language. She considered herself to be a spiritual person but did not indicate that there was a strong emphasis on spirituality in her classes, unlike her experiences in the Roman Catholic schools in India. Elisa described the differences between being religious and spiritual as “religion is your faith, and how you live your life”, while spirituality is “what you really are, like your inner self”. She very poignantly stated that:

. . . if I was religious right, being a non-Catholic and not even a Christian, I wouldn’t come to a Catholic school, I would go to some Sikh school. But, I come here because I think there’s spirituality in every religion and that’s what I connect to here.

Elisa admitted that she would not be comfortable attending the local secular school if her parents agreed, nor a Sikh school. She described how “I need diversity” and how she would feel “chained up, because they would expect me to be more Sikh, and practise Sikhism, and you can’t really chain yourself to one religion”. She eloquently weaved through her interview how successful inclusivity relies upon how youth and adults in all communities “have to be open”, and how there is a need to learn to “love everyone” and the diversity everyone brings to a community.

Philip shared similar experiences to Elisa at his school. He put forth that his South Korean friends would often judge and discriminate heavily against Buddhist students or anyone who would align themselves with Buddhism over Roman Catholicism at his school. Marian contested that “it’s people that place the barriers up. We create the division, not the Catholic school system, not the principals, not your parents, not whatever.” She offered that “it’s not just race, its inferiority.”
More often than not, many of the students offered that racial or faith-based differences are not taken seriously, and jokes are made with minimal resistance or repercussions in both their school and personal communities. Most teachers and staff are respectful and handle discriminatory situations appropriately. However, peers are not so respectful as racist, sexist, classist, ableist or faith-based insults are flung out in varying degrees depending on their particular school settings. Philip was most passionate about the discrimination inflicted on English as Second Language students at his school. His personal experience of being on the receiving end of this discrimination was most poignant. Yet, students such as Simrin and Adriana offered together that “there is no discrimination on race [at their school], but students who are oppressed because of class issues become quiet in class. The uniform hides this type of discrimination to some degree.”

Simrin was a cautious, Grade 12, Roman Catholic female whose body language, upon first impression implied she was uncomfortable with the interview process. She did not make eye-contact during the first half hour of the interview, and I was to learn after the interview from her chaplain that she was not interested in participating in the interview that particular day, yet was obligated to do so at the request of her chaplain. She resolved to make her answers quick and succinct.

Simrin’s Indian parents wanted her to be raised Roman Catholic in a Roman Catholic environment and within this environment she has understood and internalized that “Religion is your denomination, but to be spiritual is to believe in yourself, to have faith in something that is of a higher power than yourself”. Simrin offered that she considers herself to be a spiritual person. She also views the Roman Catholic system as more disciplined, compared to a secular or non-religious system, and that students become “more aware with God in your life.” During the interview she offered repeatedly that the Roman Catholic system is more “strict” and less diverse than the public/secular system but she also thinks of the secular system as “teacher driven and regressive”. Simrin shared her interview with Adriana, a quiet Grade 9, Roman Catholic female whose body language also implied that she was cautious about giving answers. She indicated that it was her choice to come to a Roman Catholic school but also that her Indian father and half Fijian/half Indian non-Roman Catholic mother wanted her to attend a Roman Catholic high school. Adriana offered that she considers a religious education important because it affords discussion on topics that wouldn’t be brought up at home, such as social justice, poverty and
oppression. During the discussion on differences or similarities between the Roman Catholic and secular systems Adriana vocalized that “race is a big issue in the secular system”, while issues of class difference are more prevalent at her secondary school.

Most of the students showed pride in their racial or religious self-identity. They each put forth, to varying degrees, how comfortable they were in their particular Roman Catholic schools because of who they were allowed to be and who they wanted to become in the future. As Marian poignantly offered:

I’m not the type of person who looks at a teacher and think that they base their decisions because I’m black, I’m female. Of course it’s there. But I just tend to put it off and be ignorant, because it is just best for me that way. If a teacher does discriminate against me because of my race, it’s not going to stop me from doing what I do.

4.1.1 Finding identity in faith

An empowered identity appeared to emerge from some Roman Catholic school youth because of the environment being one of faith. The essence of Roman Catholic schools accepting diverse students in their classrooms promotes students to acknowledge and nurture that freedom beyond the school environment. As Marian suggested:

I think that’s the beauty of the Catholic school system, you’re able to kind of accommodate everybody, like I know I can go into university and not have a problem with any religion because of the fact that the Catholic school system has set me out, has given me some sort of platform to accommodate everybody.

The same positive sentiments were shared by Elisa:

After coming to a Catholic school, with all this diversity, and all of a sudden I go to a Sikh school, I would feel chained up, because . . . I respect Catholics the same as my religion, and they would expect me to be . . . a more Sikh kind of person. I need a diversity. You can’t really chain yourself to one religion. If I only go with Sikhs, I won’t have all other ideas. You have to be open. You can’t just follow one religion.

Other students reflected on the religious diversity of their school as a sense of strength that could inspire confidence in approaching different and new people more freely. Elaine commented that she found solace in attempting to engage peers through faith. She admitted:

I try to embrace their culture as much as possible, try to understand why they believe that, and try and incorporate it into my faith. I try to find connections from our religion to
yours; sort of helps you understand it more. Kind of makes them seem less unlike you, and more just as another person.

Vera expressed much the same, offering that she investigated the Islamic faith with her Muslim uncle by escorting him to his mosque for three days:

I was just happy that I got the experience. And, I think that’s the point for everyone to at least get that experience, and instead of judging or thinking that they know about the religion . . . it’s not necessarily the truth. You have to live it in order to understand it.

Further to the discussion on comparing and judging others, the students provided insight toward a more ecumenical approach to diversity by engaging in understanding and qualifying difference that is not an obstacle to equitable inclusivity. Elaine clarified that one cannot judge those that are different because:

It’s not their fault, they’re just doing what they’re taught, just like we’re doing what we’re taught. If my mother didn’t raise me Catholic, I wonder if I’d be Catholic. I don’t think I would be. We’re lead to believe this; taught to believe this. Persuaded to believe what we’re told. And, it all depends if you’re strong enough, or brave enough to leave that and find something else. But, most people don’t know enough about other religions to do that.

When asked if they felt comfortable expressing their religious/spiritual/other views in any of their classes, the surveyed students responded ‘yes’ 82% of the time. Yet, only 58% suggested that their religion is something talked about amongst their peers, with 36% sharing that they do not discuss their religion with friends. Six percent did not respond to the question. In a different question, asking if students felt comfortable expressing their religious beliefs with peers, 82% agreed, while 13% did not. Five percent did not answer the question.

An overwhelming 90% of the students offered that their beliefs were treated with respect from school teachers, guidance counsellors, vice-principals, principal and Chaplain, while 7% responded that they did not feel their school administration and support staff treated their religious beliefs with respect. Only 3% did not answer this question. When asked if the students agreed that their peers treated their beliefs with respect, 76% agreed, 21% did not agree, and 3% did not respond. One student offered as an aside that “not all but some” of their peers treated their beliefs with respect. The challenge to being comfortable with discussing religious or
spiritual views with staff or peers most often came from Roman Catholic students in general. The non-Roman Catholic students most often responded positively to discussing their views within the school environment. A breakdown of gender and the division between Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic students is located in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
<th>Comfort in Religious Discussion at School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Do you feel comfortable expressing your religion/spirituality/other views in your classes?</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Is your religion/spirituality/other talked about amongst your peers?</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Do you feel comfortable expressing your religion/spirituality/other views with your peers?</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Is your religion/spirituality/other treated with respect by school officials?</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Is your religion/spirituality/other treated with respect by your peers?</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Do you spend free time at school with peers who share your beliefs?</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this set of survey data, interview questions were designed to extrapolate if feelings, alliance or intentions were hidden or open in discussion during class or free time with peers. Most students initially reflected on how their peers responded to or treated others in classes or corridors before becoming self-reflective on their own actions or anxieties. Some students admitted to disclosing their religious or spiritual affiliation in class, or to friends, but it was visible markers in the form of ethnic or racial identification that appeared to cue faith more readily. Just as Randy honestly offered how he ethnically or racially labels students “by race alone”, he further clarified that, “I’m not trying to sound biased, but if you see an Indian, you can mostly guess, 90% of the time, that they are Sikhs.” Yet, both Shazia and Elisa offered that many
of their non-Roman Catholic friends go up to receive communion. Elisa further expressed her frustration with a peer whom she knows is not Roman Catholic, but who insists on taking communion out of conformity or self-imposed peer pressure. Marian reflected that Roman Catholic students, who see the regular practice of taking Communion as a meaningful act of their religion, as those who fall into the trap of conformity that is not necessary in today’s schools. She suggested that some of her peers choose to not always take communion as a reflection of their spirituality at that moment in time, and how, for them, spirituality outside of religion is not static but independently unique and evolving. Randy proposed that his school “teaches us to be tolerant, even though the Catholic Church tells us we should accept.” He supports church ideals by further suggesting that “we should be more accepting. There’d be less resistance in that sense.” He further put forth that if students were not forced to take Communion at their school, then more students might connect with the act in a way that is more meaningful to their personal spirituality or religion.

Mr. Alves, who has been a Roman Catholic educator for 15 years, was critical of envisioning youth who can display any conviction toward engaging issues of faith or spirituality in a sincere form. He offered that “students come to our classrooms as ‘blank slates and unaware’”, with the content being “irrelevant.” He further referred to today’s students as being part of what he calls a “Teflon society” where nothing sticks, and they do not make connections between school and church and social growth. Yet, Elaine challenged Mr. Alves’ perspective by offering how she is making connections within her faith identity toward self-acceptance and understanding. She offered that:

Before I started becoming really spiritual, really religious, I just followed everybody else, but I felt so empty. Cos without God, without my spirituality, without me being so open-minded, and loving, I think I would drop down and cry. And I already do feel like I just wanna crawl in a hole and just wait for myself to die. Cos it’s just frustrating being a teenager.

Elaine’s revelation was a common trend amongst the age group, toward trying to find a place of acceptance both in society and within oneself. Mr. Domitrovich, the Social Equity Officer for the school board, and a member of the Catholic school community for almost 30 years, further imparted that “something’s got to balance this ‘me’ generation. Something’s got to balance the message of materialism, and Internet communications, and I think faith is a good grounding in trying to remind them what’s real.”
4.2 Religious practice

From the survey data, youth put forth that within their personal lives, 82% practised their religion, 14% did not, and 4% did not answer the question. Fifty-six percent considered themselves spiritual, 38% did not and 6% did not answer the question. Twenty-four percent of the students offered they could discuss atheism or agnosticism at home, while another 24% offered that they could not discuss these topics at home. Over half of the students did not answer the question on discussions of atheism or agnosticism in their home.

When asked the frequency of participation in their religion, 31% of the students stated they practised their religion at home daily, 11% practised their religion at home 2-3 times a week, 16% practised once a week, and 32% practised their religion only at holidays. Ten percent did not answer the question. Of the 47 Roman Catholic students, 39 or 83% offered they practiced their religion. Of the 11 Christian (not identified elsewhere) students, 9 or 82% offered they practiced their religion. Of the four Sikh, two Greek Orthodox, one Adventist, one Baptist/Roman Catholic, one Muslim, and one Pentecostal students, all or 100% identified that they practiced their religion. When asked if they considered themselves spiritual, 27 of 47, or 57%, of the Roman Catholic students indicated yes, 6 of 11, or 55% of the Christian (not identified elsewhere) students indicated yes, and 2 of 4, or 50% of the Sikh students and 1 of 2, or 50% of the Greek Orthodox students also indicated yes. Each of the one Adventist, one Anglican, one Baptist/Roman Catholic and one Pentecostal students also identified themselves as spiritual.

Interestingly, the statistics display that Roman Catholic students are more apt not to practise their religion or consider themselves as spiritual compared to non-Roman Catholic students. Mr. Sullivan supported this view with “I’ve never had an issue with a kid resisting religion class who are non-Catholic kids. The few that I’ve had resisting (laugh) are in fact Catholic kids.” The students who did practise their religion offered that they practised their religion most often on a daily basis (33% of those surveyed). Thirty-two percent practised their religion only at holidays. Eleven percent practised 2-3 times a week, while 16% practised once a week. The consistency of practising religion by these students is quite notable as only 7 of the 71 students admitted to not practising at all. Of those seven, five students were Roman Catholic, one was aligned with another religion and one was agnostic/atheist.
Eighty-five percent, or 58 parents, of which 39 were female and 19 were male, offered that they practised their religion. Seven Roman Catholic parents, one Anglican parent and one parent who did not identify their religious affiliation admitted to not practising their religion. Parents were also asked if agnosticism or atheism could be discussed in the home, and 15% offered that these topics were discussed, while 31% suggested these topics were not discussed. Fifty-four percent chose not to respond to the question.

Although only 58 of a possible 68 parents responded positively to practising their religion in a previous question, 62 responded to the question on frequency of practising their religion. Forty-seven percent offered they practise their religion daily, with 4% practising their religion at home 2-3 times a week, 12% practising once a week and 27% admitting to only practising their religion at holidays. One parental survey offered that they practised both daily and just at holidays. Nine percent of parents did not respond to the question. Of those nine percent, or six parents, three were Roman Catholic, one was Anglican, one was another religion, and one did not identify their religious affiliation.

When asked how often parents or families attended a place of worship, 9% offered more than once a week, 35% attended once a week, 29% offered periodically, 19% only visited a place of worship during the holidays, and 2%, or one Roman Catholic female, never attended a place of worship. One other parent offered that they attended both periodically and just at holidays, while another parent offered both once a week and just at holidays. Only two parents or three percent did not respond to the question.

Overwhelmingly, the concept of religion was important on some level in the daily lives of 97% of the parents. Fifty-nine percent ranked religion as very important in their daily lives, 27% offered that it is somewhat important, and 12% suggested it was rarely considered. No parents offered that it was not a consideration in their daily lives. Only three percent or two parents did not respond to the question.

When asked of the importance of spirituality as separate from religion, again 97% responded and 3% did not answer the question. Showing a very similar response to the previous religion question, 57% responded with spirituality being very important in their daily lives, 27% suggested it was somewhat important, 12% suggested it was rarely considered, while one parent offered that they never considered spirituality in their daily lives.
Of the students interviewed, survey data provided a range of family and personal information on religious attendance, religious practice and dedication to Catholic schooling. Some of the students, such as Adriana, had parents in the home who do not practice the same religion. Adriana’s father self-identified as Roman Catholic and it was revealed at the time of interview that her mother was not Roman Catholic, but would rather be considered a non-practicing Christian. As a family, they attend church periodically, while Adriana’s father offered that he practises his religion once a week in the home. He qualified religion and spirituality as somewhat important in his daily life and it was the spiritual presence in education that affected his choice to send his daughter to the local Roman Catholic high school. Adriana’s father was educated in the Roman Catholic system but would not send Adriana to a Roman Catholic high school if the system became privatized.

Ashley, who self-identified as Christian, indicated that her religion is practised in the home only at holidays and that she does not identify with being ‘spiritual’. She expressed that she feels comfortable and respected in expressing her views on religion with peers and in her classes. Yet she does not spend free time with peers who share her religious beliefs. Ashley did not respond on the relevancy of religious or spiritual content in her classes, yet did offer that time spent on retreats or during mass were sufficient and she would be open to more time on either if afforded. Ashley’s mother self-identified as Christian/not included elsewhere and reinforced Ashley’s answer of only practising religion in the home at holidays. Ashley’s mother put forth that the family attends church periodically, yet did not comment on the importance of religion or spirituality in her daily life. She qualified that it is the image associated with Roman Catholic education that prompted her to send Ashley to a Roman Catholic school. She, herself, was not raised in a Roman Catholic school but would still send Ashley to one if the Roman Catholic school system became privatized.

4.2.1 Religion versus spirituality

Although the parents surveyed showed little distinction between the concepts of religion and spirituality, the students interviewed provided varied dialogue on the concepts. Jazmine articulated “you follow religion when you feel that that’s what you should be following. But spirituality, everybody has it no matter what religion. . . . Spirituality is more of you reflecting on yourself and how you feel as a person.” Vera, Simrin, Adriana, Elaine, Philip, Jodie and Harmeet
all echoed Jazmine’s sentiment, associating religion with common acts of belief, such as praying, whereas spirituality had more to do with feeling a connection to fate or a higher power not necessarily named God. Spirituality appeared to be a difficult concept for these students to articulate, beyond their assurance that it is not the same as religion, and if anything, is a concept more in the abstract and internally more all-encompassing.

Philip, a Grade 9 student identified the terms separately by suggesting that “one can be spiritual without being religious, but religion helps inspire spirituality; religion helps you focus.” Taras, also a Grade 9 student, comparatively alluded to the same understanding of the concepts by suggesting that someone can be spiritual without being religious, “through focusing on self, inner peace” which he explained is obtained through being religious. Interestingly Philip did not consider himself spiritual for he thought he was “too young.” “Spirituality is something you’ll grow into, a process” and grows with the person because they were religious first.

Randy, a senior student offered that:

I believe religion and spirituality can go hand in hand. But, I think when you are a spiritual person you’re more directed towards God ultimately. However, when you’re religious I think you can be caught up with meaningless rituals and practices, and you can be more quote, unquote fake just by being religious, and not spiritual. A spiritual person speaks more from experience, more from the soul, more from their heart.

For Elisa, a Grade 10 student, “the difference is that if you’re religious, or you have a faith, you live according to that. But, being spiritual is like you know there is life after, like you know that it’s not all fake, there’s meaning to life.” Marian, another senior student expounded that for her there was a big difference between religion and spirituality. As similarly offered by her peers across the school board, religion was associated with acts and rituals, where “spirituality is a lot more important in its way, very [sic] important than religion. And, I think it should be emphasized in a Catholic education system.”

Mr. Heysel, a Roman Catholic educator for 15 years, paralleled Marian’s thoughts with his reflection that today’s students “are becoming more spiritual” and he attempted to connect youth with spiritual concepts through meditation and discussions of personal freedoms. Mr. Donkor also reflected on the interest in meditation that his students exhibit today. Mr. Heysel further put forth, “but as soon as the identity of being Catholic comes up, they turn off.” He implied that Roman Catholic traditions were somewhat of an outdated Imperialistic agenda, and that it’s rare
for students to show any interest in definitively “Catholic” discussions. Mr. Donkor, who has been a Roman Catholic educator for 19 years, added further to Mr. Heysel’s thoughts by suggesting that students are more concerned with their relationships with each other. Yet he was also convicted in offering that every student is yearning or looking for something within/inside them, in an effort to forge a relationship with God. He did imply that today’s youth are looking for something other than themselves and their friends that is meaningful to their identities and future directives, yet that they are not necessarily interested in Roman Catholicism or Christianity.

Similarly, Mr. Kim shared how the use of the word ‘Christian’ in the classroom has negative connotations commenting, “Kids today do need to believe in something, such as faith which is very important, but religion is not.” Mr. Alves further purported that faith and religion are most “strange” to today’s kids because they’re ungrounded in the historical context, while the connotation of the spirit is personal and subjective. He acknowledged the secular changes that are taking hold of the Roman Catholic system, and insisted that “there should be a demand for students to define and separate the differences between faith, religion and spirituality.” All of these teachers hinted at the need for all youth to develop stronger values and appreciation for religious faith and spirituality. Interestingly, the survey revealed that 65% of the students offered that issues of spirituality were discussed as separate from the topic of religion in their classes, and 24% or 17 of the students indicated that spirituality and religion were not separate issues for discussion in their classrooms. Worth noting perhaps, is that 9 of those 17 students were in Grade 10, which is 38% of the entire Grade 10 population surveyed, and over half of the students who indicated religion and spirituality were not discussed separately. Eight of the 10 schools were also represented by those students who did not see the terms as separate. Eleven percent of the students surveyed did not respond to the question.

4.3 Roman Catholic schooling: modern images

Eighty percent of the students offered that their religion was talked about in a schooling environment, while 16% suggested that it was not talked about, and 4% did not answer the question. It is interesting to note that all four Sikh students originally revealed on the survey that their particular religion was not talked about at school. However, in a follow-up question that asked if the students’ particular religion was only talked about in religion class, two of the Sikh
students indicated ‘yes’. Interestingly, five Roman Catholic students offered that their particular religion was also not talked about at school, and these five students represented four different schools in the board.

The non-Roman Catholic students offered mixed revelations on personally discussing their denominational or religious affiliation during class time, or with peers, at school. Harmeet was one non-Roman Catholic student who offered that she was very comfortable revealing and discussing her Anglicanism with peers and teachers alike. During her Grade 9 religion class, her teacher even called upon her to share her religious difference with her classmates, according to her, in a positive and empowering way. Ashley, however, admitted she did not feel comfortable discussing her non-Roman Catholic affiliation within the classroom, but was quick to also confess that because she had been raised in Roman Catholic schools in Jamaica and Canada for most of her life, her peers thought she was Roman Catholic because “I know most of the answers for some questions, so they think that I’m Roman Catholic, but I’m not. My teacher knows that.”

Of those students who identified that their particular religion was talked about in the classroom, 78% revealed that it was talked about daily, 9% suggested it was talked about 2-3 times a week, 11% offered once a week, and 5% suggested it was only discussed at holiday time. The non-Christian religions were only talked about at holiday time or not at all. Mr. Campbell, in his 31 years as a Roman Catholic educator, made note that the mode of delivery in conjunction to what is being taught is placing students in conflict toward absorbing or connecting to a place of religious or spiritual faith in society. He offered that religious education “is dictated to them as opposed to it being a discussion.” He affirmed that students saw religion as “full of “holidays” as opposed to “holy-days.” Mr. Domitrovich further imparted that:

To be truly Catholic means understanding anti-racist principles, having a bias-free environment, and fostering critical thinking skills. But as a system founded on exclusion and assimilation, one can also argue for the need to move away from the labels, titles and historical connotation with the prescribed system as we know it.

The implication and usage of language in education needs to evolve toward an inclusive and anti-colonial text.
4.3.1 Roman Catholic schools as progressive

Parental expectation, disciplinarian conformity and a safer, more academically sound environment were common themes initially offered by the students as to why they were in the Roman Catholic school system. Comments such as Marian’s were consistent throughout many of the interviews: “I was brought up to believe that the Catholic education system was a much better school system.” Elaine suggested that “Catholic schools tend to be more disciplined, so I guess you feel safer”, while Ashley’s response was that her parents “think it’s more appropriate to be in uniform than casual clothing.” As a fairly new member to the Toronto CMA community, Elisa’s remarks echoed those of both Mr. Domitrovich and Mr. Sullivan, in that “when we came here to this country, everybody told us that this school is good . . . don’t go to the public board, go to the Catholic board.” Several students offered that their parents, and/or they, had “heard good things” regarding safety and quality of education about the Roman Catholic system compared to the secular counterpart.

It would also appear that beyond the image, youth also choose Roman Catholic schooling for comfort and convenience. As Harmeet succinctly stated, “I just want to be with my friends.” Taras, who was Roman Catholic but witnessed his closest friends continue in their secular schooling experience, presented, “the Catholic school is closer to home and therefore more convenient.”

The opportunity for social awareness was another angle implied by the students as to their attendance in a Roman Catholic school. Elaine put forth that “it’s Catholic school’s job to tell us how to be better Christians, to touch students and get them to want to know their faith.” Adriana further imparted that issues of religion and spirituality are “important because of lessons in religious education as seen through parent’s expectations. Issues such as social justice, poverty and oppression would not be taught at home.” Jazmine highlighted the positive community links of her school, first offering the impact of a large-scale memorial set up in the front foyer of her school for a murdered youth outside of her local community, and one who attended a non-Roman Catholic high school. She was emotional in describing how it “widens your eyes” to the reality and need of compassion and reflection in/and between their communities. As Jazmine implied, Roman Catholic schools can grieve as communities-in-faith. Mr. Sullivan paralleled this thought
with the ability for Roman Catholic schools to celebrate as a “community-of-persons” in faith. He affirmed:

We can celebrate faith through religious celebrations in a way that public schools can not, and we can do it in unapologetic way... public schools can do it from a sociological or historical perspective, but not from a faith perspective.

Eventually, all of the students interviewed offered that it was their preference to be in the Roman Catholic system, even though 4 of the 15 did not come from the Roman Catholic elementary panel. Ashley, who identified with being Christian rather than Roman Catholic, expressed how she enjoys “listening and learning about Catholicism”, while, Harmeet who was not looking forward to taking religion when she first enrolled offered that she had had a great teacher and learned a lot about the Bible in Grade 9.

As the topic shifted to discuss pressures around faith or spirituality, the tone of the interviews also shifted from being upbeat to critical. The students were very discursive or eager to discuss how negative or unpopular these topics are amongst their peers and how youth are often under pressure to not hold any religious values or discuss faith/spirituality in any real or powerful way with peers. Peer pressure to avoid being religious or display any sense of spirituality is, as Shazia put forth, about how students “want to fit in. It’s all about fitting in.” Many students, in response, internalize their beliefs and hide their true religious or spiritual identity. Again, Elaine posited self-esteem as being at the root of being proud in faith and that “your faith does not have to be ‘uncool’.” Yet, she further remarked that the perceived “popular” kids do not engage in working with the Chaplain or with aspects of the Chaplaincy office. Elaine suggested that “students need to reach out to each other, but there aren’t enough students who are already in that position where they’re caring; there’re not many students who are already religious enough to spread that.”

During religion class, 44% of the students offered that their own personal religious beliefs were talked about, while 51% suggested it was not talked about at all, and 5% did not respond to the question. Interestingly, 45% of the students suggested that their religion was talked about in other classes outside of religion. Eight students (five Roman Catholic, two Christian, not included elsewhere, one Greek Orthodox) offered that their religion was talked about at school, but not in any classes. Three students (two Roman Catholic, one Sikh) offered that their religion was never talked about at school. Four other students (again two Roman Catholic, one Sikh, one
Christian, not included elsewhere) did not answer any of questions. The mixed results from these statistics might be aligned with Elaine’s assumption that “because … everybody’s not Christian or not Roman Catholic, you sort of feel, … that they’re sort of judging you like ‘How could you believe in God?’ That’s such _hocus pocus._”

Ashley and Harmeet also echoed Elaine’s earlier comment about being “uncool” when religious conviction was displayed openly at school. As Harmeet shared, “it’s not cool to be religious. Therefore students don’t act … very proud when they are religious.” Jazmine, who self-identified as part of the majority in her predominantly white, middle class Roman Catholic school community, offered that:

> In this community everybody has their religion, but nobody really displays it, puts it out there. Nobody gets mad if somebody’s not the same religion. Obviously things do go on, where people are making fun, or saying some mean things, but at the end of the day, it’s all just stupid high school games.

Interestingly enough, the adult educators interviewed interpreted students’ attitude to faith as apathy and to be expected. Mr. Sullivan remarked:

> The majority of kids don’t necessarily take their religious faith very seriously. In fact I would be concerned about students who are fifteen-sixteen years old who maybe do take religious faith very seriously…it’s a time of questioning, a time of rebellion for a lot of the kids, so I don’t think that that has changed, over the years.

The statistics from the survey afforded that only 52% of the students spent free time during their school day with peers who shared their religious beliefs, while 44% did not, and 4% again did not respond. One student offered as an aside “not really, I just spend my time with my friends.”

Elaine offered, “I think that we’re taught to be ashamed. I don’t know why? Because it’s different, probably, and, for some reason, different isn’t seen as good anymore.” Jazmine further suggested that youth internalize their fear to wear or publically embrace faith: “There wouldn’t be pressure from peers for them to hide it. It would be a pressure on themselves to think to hide it.” Mr. Domitrovich provided his own experience as both a student from a first-generation family to Ontario, and now as an educator in the Roman Catholic system toward understanding the fear of self-promoting one’s identity that may go against the social expectation of peers either as not “cool” or in the minority. He asserted that many non-Roman Catholic families were “not going to be the kind of group to stir the pot”, as “first generation, new immigrants they’re really
just appreciative of being in Canada, attending Catholic education.” Elaine echoed the same sentiment with her observation that non-Roman Catholic students are probably subdued about seen as different “cos we live in an area that is so multicultural. We’re used to being around different religions. They’re just like everybody else.” But Elaine was quick to follow up this particular thought offering self-reflexivity on her own Roman Catholic status in school by suggesting “that’s what we see. It’s hard.”

The majority of students, 65% of those surveyed, identified the religious content delivered in their classrooms as relevant. Sixty-one percent of the students agreed that the amount of time spent on retreats, attending mass, liturgies and so forth was sufficient, while 61% of the students also agreed to accept more religious or spiritual content in the classroom. Another 66% of the students were open to attending more retreats or having extended mass, liturgies and so forth during the school year. Thirty percent were not open to attending more or extended retreats, mass or liturgies. The gender breakdown of student opinion on religious content, and the influence or interest in the retreat program and celebrating mass is listed in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
<th>Religious Content in School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Do you consider the amount of religious content delivered in your classes relevant?</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Are issues of spirituality, as separate from religion, discussed in your classes?</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Do you consider the amount of time spent on retreat, attending mass, etc. sufficient?</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Would you be open to more religious or spiritual content in the classroom?</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Would you be open to more annual retreats, extended mass, etc., in the school year?</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.2 Representative diversity in modern Roman Catholic schools

As the statistics suggest, only two-thirds of today’s secondary level Roman Catholic school students identify as Roman Catholic. This proportional representation is both observed and echoed in dialogue during the student interviews, as ethnic and diasporic identities are diversified and multiple. During the interviews, Tiffany suggested that up to 50% of the students in her school were non-Roman Catholic with a noticeable Muslim population, and Randy suggested at his school maybe only 45% were Roman Catholic, with Sikh students being most visible. Randy’s school (which also enrolls Marion and Elisa) had the largest return rate for students with 14 of 30 surveys returned. Nine Roman Catholic, two Sikh, one Adventist, one Pentecostal and one Muslim student were randomly selected and voluntarily returned their surveys. The random generation of student respondents from this one school supports the larger statistical picture of the range in youth diversity for Toronto CMA Roman Catholic schools today.

How these youth embrace the level of religious diversity in their schools ranged however. Philip offered that a “more diversified student body does not strengthen Roman Catholic school community or faith with students.” He was very fearful of being converted to another religion because of his interaction with students of other faiths at his school. He put forth that his religious conviction was very strong, but Roman Catholic schooling should strengthen the faith amongst its own, and that students should “master the Catholic religion before being exposed to other religions.”

Parents were surveyed as to why they chose to send their child to a Roman Catholic school as opposed to a secular/public school and 54% identified the reason as the spiritual presence in education. Twenty-seven percent suggested that it was the image associated with Roman Catholic education, and how it can be viewed as more ‘proper’ and controlled. Six percent determined the reason to be the geographic location of the school in proximity to their home. One parent offered both the spiritual presence and geographic location as equally considered, as did one other parent who suggested both the spiritual presence and the ‘other’ option. Six percent optioned “other” for this answer. Voluntary options included “better moral values”, “relative told us to”, and “it is [their child’s] choice.” Only four percent, or two of the parents did not respond to this question. Table 6 outlines the parental religious affiliation and their response outlining why they chose to send their child to a Roman Catholic school.
Parents were also asked if they were educated in the Roman Catholic school system. Fifty-seven percent identified as being educated in the Roman Catholic system, while 40% did not. Three percent did not answer the question. Finally, when asked if they would still send their son or daughter to a Roman Catholic high school if it became privatized or was not equally funded by provincial tax dollars, 58% said they would still send their child to a Roman Catholic high school, while 35% would not. Seven percent did not answer the question. Four parents offered an explanation for their answer to this question, and all four offered that if they could afford the expense they would still send their child to a Roman Catholic school.

The educators who commented on the diversity in their schools suggested that it was the image of Roman Catholic schools over its spiritual presence that was most attractive to non-Roman Catholic parents. Mr. Domitrovich put forth that the immense diversity in modern Ontario Roman Catholic schools supported governmentally legislated open-access rules: “We have open access, and open access means all groups are welcome.” When questioned as to why non-Roman Catholic students might be attending Roman Catholic schools, Mr. Domitrovich suggested that:

Catholic education has a reputation in other parts of the world as being more solid; the adherence to the curriculum is strict. Whether this is real or not, I just know that on the South Asian continent, Asia, Africa, the respect for [Christian] missionaries in education has that reputation.

Mr. Sullivan echoed this same sentiment by stating that in his dealings with parents and students there was “a fairly consistent answer.” He qualified this comment with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Why did you send your child to a Catholic school?</th>
<th>Parental Response (%)</th>
<th>Roman Catholic</th>
<th>Non-Roman Catholic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12a. Spiritual Presence</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>28/45</td>
<td>10/23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12b. Geographic Distance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/45</td>
<td>2/23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12c. Image of being proper/controlled</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11/45</td>
<td>7/23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12d. Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/45</td>
<td>2/23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because we are a universal church, the reputation of the Catholic Church throughout the world, and especially in developing countries, is that if you want your child to have a really good education, you send them to a Catholic school.

It is interesting to note that of the 43 female parents that responded, only 23 were educated in a Roman Catholic school system, equating to just over one half. In contrast, of the 24 male parents who responded, 16 were Roman Catholic-educated, which was two-thirds of the population. Interestingly 34 of the 39 Roman Catholic-educated parents still identified as Roman Catholic, and five parents had either transferred their faith in adulthood, or were themselves non-Roman Catholics immersed in a Roman Catholic system as youths. However, it is to be noted that 63% of the female parents would still advocate for Roman Catholic schooling for their child, as opposed to only 50% of their male parent counterpart.

When asked if the students would be open to attending their local secular/public school if their parents agreed, only 37% said they would, whilst 58% would not be open to it, and 5% did not answer the question. Almost three-quarters of the Roman Catholic students were not open to the secular option. Of those that were open to attending the public/ secular system, 18 were girls and 8 were boys; 13 were Roman Catholic, 4 were Christian (not included elsewhere), 3 were Sikh, and the remaining 6 were each one of Greek Orthodox, Adventist, Anglican, Muslim, Other or Agnostic/Atheist.

4.3.3 Roman Catholic versus secular schooling

Mr. Sullivan, a 29-year veteran of the Ontario Roman Catholic school system, qualified the ability to celebrate faith in the Roman Catholic board as the most distinct issue separating the two school systems in the province. He supported this distinction by describing what he calls the Roman Catholic “worldview” in accordance with the works of Groome (2002). The Roman Catholic worldview is a holistic system of delivering, interpreting and absorbing all aspects of society and understanding our identity within that society. This worldview is “the biggest thing that sets Roman Catholic education apart from secular/public education.” Mr. Sullivan further stated that “if we are just public schools that offer religion, have crucifixes on the wall and wear uniforms, then we should loose our right to exist.” He concluded that as a Roman Catholic school system:
We allow people to express their religious beliefs even if they’re not Christian within the culture of our schools, because we get it, we understand it. . . . And we don’t just get it just on a superficial level. . . . It creates a bond among people because religious faith is very deep in people and when you are a person of religious faith there is a connection that we just get.

Certain ritualistic practices in Roman Catholic schooling, however, influence youth in different ways. Taking Communion or participating in the celebration of mass aroused strong emotions in some of the students. Both Ashley and Jodie, who each identified as Christian, offered that they did take part in mass, but only to accept a blessing. For Elaine, however, those Christian students in her school who took the blessing without motioning properly with their arms and hands prompted her to judge: “It’s not good.” Elisa remarked how she often hears classmates blurting out how bored they are during mass, while Marian reflected that it was a deeper issue than just the act of participating in Communion that is discouraging youth. Marian suggested that some students “don’t see the meaning in it, and this shows a fine line between religion and spirituality, because Roman Catholics and non-Roman Catholics might not go up, but they’re still spiritual and respectful. It shows a lot about religion and its practices.” Roman Catholic students, Elaine and Shazia broadened this thought by describing how taking Communion “is more like another chore you have to do.”

Marian further commented on the apathy of Roman Catholic school youth, because “the importance of religion isn’t felt every day. Classes can be redundant, repetitive, with little spiritual depth, and I think that is why a lot of students have lost interest.” Even the retreat experience can provide mixed insights as to the relevancy of the Roman Catholic or Christian experience in modern schools. Jodie was one student who appreciated the retreat experience as “fun” and an opportunity for students to “learn about love, relationships, spiritual relationships, compassion and affection. They not only stay on one topic about God and stuff.” Tiffany echoed Jodie’s sentiment by offering that the retreat experience was grounded in reality and allowed for youth to connect to the gospels with personal experiences coming from the retreat leaders that “make it more real.” Yet Randy, Marian and Elisa were each more critical of the retreat experience at their school. Marian and Elisa agreed with Randy’s suggestion that retreats did not provide students with any real connection to religion or faith at his school and the point of the retreat was lost because “people don’t know why they’re going, to talk about God or spirituality or religion, in that sense.” Marian remarked: “I’ve never thought a retreat had meaning to it, to
tell you the truth. I just thought it is just a religion class trip.” Elisa confessed that the students had not seemed to care about the retreat experience during her last semester. Yet, she further explained that only after the retreat leader began to offer personal “lived” experiences connecting his family and friends to his spiritual growth, that she started to become engaged and excited about the experience.

Mr. Sullivan did not deny the school board expectation to participation in Roman Catholic events and ceremonies. As an administrator who meets with new families considering enrolling their child in a Roman Catholic school, he was very clear about the expectations of all youth entering into this system:

This is a Catholic school, it’s about world view, it’s not just about a religion class. If I notice that a family is hesitant, then what I would say to them usually is ‘We will take you, this is an open-access school, we will take you, but I am recommending that you have a family meeting first, and that you discuss among yourselves if you can live with these expectations. If you can, we will gladly take your students here. If you cannot, than we will gladly make arrangements for you to have an interview in a public high school where these expectations are different.’ And so far everybody that I’ve interviewed has agreed to come here, has agreed to the terms and conditions that we impose on them.

Yet, as Mr. Sullivan further noted:

This environment is generally working, but what do you do in a religion class when a teacher is talking about sacraments and sacramentality and forty percent of the kids sitting in front of you have no experience of sacrament or sacramentality. We can no longer assume that our students understand the language.

One positive and progressive difference that the secular/public system appears to have over the Roman Catholic system is their ability to have open discussions on topics such as teen pregnancy and abortion, which Catholic schools find difficult because of the Catholic Church’s teaching on these subjects. As Marian purported, “I know a lot of public schools, they have a lot of health classes, sex ed., type of things, and they educate people.” She became very animated during this discussion and summarized her feelings with, “I think we’re kind of killing our community by not educating them!” Some students did appear to acknowledge and appreciate other inclusive aspects of their Roman Catholic schooling experience. Jazmine suggested:

Catholic schools are more open with religion . . . they are not afraid to talk about different religions and stuff like that, we’re all open. I don’t really see public schools bringing different religions to the school . . . and being free to talk about different religions.
Vera found a sense of solace and comfort in her faith-based schooling environment, when she reflected on her one day experience at a secular public school. Her impressions of the “other” school were that:

They don’t have religion and when I was in my classroom for that morning, no nothing, no cross. Like not to say public don’t believe in God, they do, but I didn’t see anything like here. And then when I went to [the Roman Catholic elementary school] right in the morning, we prayed, and I’m like okay, I’m home again.

One of the most poignant and emotional revelations about a Roman Catholic school environment came from Elisa. She passionately stated:

Being a non-Catholic and not even a Christian, I’m a Sikh, I wouldn’t come to a Catholic school if I was just religious, I would go to some Sikh school. But, I come here because I think there’s spirituality in every religion, and that’s what I connect with here, that’s why I come here.

The students varied in the strength of their disdain for the public system, but the most consistent remark revolved around the level of perceived violence and aggression associated with racial, religious and class-based differences in the public school system. Taras expressed that he was more relaxed with religion in his life, and described that his Roman Catholic high school was more community oriented with and acceptant of diversity and “respect amongst the people”. Comments like Shazia’s were not unique in describing how comfortable she would be in the secular high school: “I don’t feel safe in that school, and just like different cultures.” Adriana, who self-identified as Fijian and Indian, offered that “race is a big issue at the public school” and that is why she wouldn’t be happy there. Yet, Simrin who self-identified as Indian, offered in rebuttal to Adriana, “but, there is more diversity at a public school”, although it is teacher driven and in her words “regressive”, yet “here [italics added] there is the Catholic ‘strictness’.” Randy, Marian and Elisa each put forth that the local secular public high school in relation to its Roman Catholic contemporary was not as diverse as their Roman Catholic environment. Each also made note of probably being just as comfortable in the public system, as long as their faith and the spiritual dimension to practise each day was respected. Each hinted, however, that their faith would probably not be respected to the same level as they currently experience in the Roman Catholic school environment.

Philip offered that he enjoyed being in the Roman Catholic system because it did not have the same “gang” impressions as the public system. But as a student who was very comfortable
within his faith, he observed that most of his Grade 9 peers did not enjoy being in a religious school. Philip was perplexed over those Roman Catholic youth at school who appeared to not be interested in revealing any religion or faith within their identity. He asked, “If you’re Catholic and not interested, what’s the point of being here?”

The issue of diversity within modern Roman Catholic schools was a topic all of the educators involved with this research were keen to expound on. Many had done their own form of random survey at their respective schools, and offered a range of approximately eighty to ninety percent Roman Catholic students at some of the schools in the region, compared with 30-40% non-Christian student population at other schools. Mr. Sullivan questioned the progress of this level of diversity in the school board. He suggested that open access has had a huge impact on all of the Roman Catholic secondary schools in Ontario, and that the continued increase of non-Roman Catholics in Roman Catholic schools “could in fact be problematic.” But he was quick to offer praise toward the open access system, for it added a “certain richness to our schools.” He maintained that:

In spite of the challenges, and there are challenges to publicly funded Catholic schools with open access, if Catholicism means here comes everybody, and you’re closing the doors to everybody, then are you really Catholic? I would maintain that we are in fact . . . more responsive to the Catholic call of inclusion than other schools.

But Mr. Sullivan also offered that the government needs to give Roman Catholic school boards the right to control open access as a means to regulate the impetus of Roman Catholic youth as the majority, rather than having open access in control of the schools who will only focus on numbers. Mr. Domitrovich offered a slightly different lens when providing that everyone is welcome in Roman Catholic secondary schools and stating, “I believe the Catholic model should be open: open arms, open door policy, and welcome spiritual development.” He acknowledged that amongst the superintendents of the school board, there was a “genuine openness of understanding and appreciation” that at the secondary level there can be a continuing healthy expansion because of the non-Roman Catholics coming into the schools. For him the essence of offering and maintaining a Roman Catholic school education is not one of controlled diversity. He suggests:

The role of education is to create critical thinkers, and we hope that to socialize will create critical thinkers. So even in the Catholic environment, theology shouldn’t be
rammed down their throats. It should be offered to them so they can critically think about their environment.

Students and educators in the current Roman Catholic secondary school system in the Toronto CMA are possibly no different in their views, outlook and interpretations of education and identity than any other school community across Ontario. But all voices and experiences are unique and particular. The information provided here is none-the-less rich and revealing.
Chapter 5
Student Voices – What Can We Learn from Their Words?

5 Introduction

Youth are very intuitive. Their language and expressions are forthright and genuine. They want to fit in. They want to be respected and appreciated as individuals. They want to share their stories, their beliefs, their concerns, fears and joys. They want to learn and develop skills that will ensure a successful professional and progressive home life. School is a natural space for youth to expand and manoeuvre their lived experiences and emotional growth toward achieving these goals.

The youth involved with this research provided revealing and passionate stories on their identity, space and acceptance in modern Ontario Roman Catholic schools. The youth immersed in Ontario’s Roman Catholic schools are diverse and representative of all socio-economic, political, and racial identities in Canada today. Within the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area, 10 Roman Catholic secondary schools volunteered to participate in research on youth identity and youth identity in faith. A random sample of students and parents within these schools generated results that identified one-third of the population as non-Roman Catholic and one-tenth as non-Christian. These families had lived in the Toronto CMA anywhere from a year to 45 years, with an average number of years being 14-15. Many of these families had always had the option to choose between the equally funded public secular secondary school system and the Roman Catholic secondary school system. Notably one-third of parents in Ontario currently choose the Roman Catholic school secondary option (Ontario Government, 2006).

The noted enrolment increase of Roman Catholic schools across Ontario since the mid-1980’s, suggests a population that determines a greater benefit to education in a faith-based environment. The parents surveyed for this research supported this inference, with just over half offering that it was the spiritual presence in a Roman Catholic school that determined the enrolment of their child over the secular public system. One-quarter of parents also suggested it was the ‘proper’ or ‘controlled’ image associated with Roman Catholic schooling that determined enrolling their child. Whether local Roman Catholic schools provide a distinct difference in schooling or not, the perception of standards in quality of education, comfort or safety in a faith-based space, or
the illusion of conformity associated with uniform and prayer, now entice parents to enrol their children in a Roman Catholic secondary school in greater numbers than ever before.

A 2007 report by the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE), stated that today’s Ontario Roman Catholic schools are distinctive because they represent religious freedom and the opportunity to engage and share in faith traditions and celebrations within a wider community: “[Roman Catholic] schools allow for space, time and reverence for the sacred” (p. 3). But this compiled report, representing contributions from approximately ten thousand individuals including Roman Catholic school council members, parents, trustees, school board staff, students, members of the Roman Catholic Women’s League and Knights of Columbus, clergy and other members of the Roman Catholic community, highlights what a Roman Catholic voice might be expected to report on the state of their schools and future directions. The most informed voice in Roman Catholic education, that of the students, both Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic in Ontario schools, is overshadowed and marginalized by the dominating voice of the Roman Catholic adults.

The racial, cultural and religious diversity of modern Ontario Roman Catholic schools appears to not be a consideration for interpreting schooling conditions, delivery or expectations as laid out by the ICE (2006, 2007) documents. Non-Roman Catholic student voices in schools and the reality that Roman Catholic schools in the Toronto CMA are now extremely diverse and representative of a range of Christian and non-Christian participants needs more exposure within and outside of the Roman Catholic community. The greatest modern flaw within the Roman Catholic system reflects the ignorance on the part of its educators toward disavowing the privilege of their place and space within the system. Educators have to admit their biases, their subject-position and be reflective of how they will no doubt influence all youth and the families they encounter in their classrooms and work spaces. On issues of faith and education one must be doubly respectful of personal location and lived experience, incorporating an understanding of the human spirit and how it will hold a unique interpretation and presentation by all individuals. As Shahjahan (2005) suggests, educators need to understand their bias and knowledge production limitations to be in a position to answer the questions and needs placed in front of them by their community:
We need to interrogate our social locations and to ask ourselves whether those whom we wish to serve are being served with the intention to serve them or the intention to serve ourselves. While both are interconnected, it is important for us to be cognizant of what people want, rather than what we think they want. (p. 689)

Educators universal often use their personal educational experiences to guide their pedagogical practices in the classroom. Without engaging in self-reflexivity as an educator, the marginalizing aspects of one’s own personal experience will be replicated and further recycled into the learning process for each new generation. This reproduction and enforcement of negative discriminatory knowledge follows, in the least, a political agenda and commodifies productive processes at its greatest (Farahmandpur, 2003). For teachers who themselves were educated in the colonial classrooms of Canadian schools, their learning and understanding is moulded and formulated within Western European pedagogy and practice. Their language, actions, interpretation of lived knowledge, space and identity are based within a colonial agenda of homogeneity and assimilation toward an accepted societal norm. For all educators who were either raised in the pre-equal-funding Roman Catholic school separate system, or those raised in the equally Eurocentric secular public system of education, their own colonial marginalization and assimilation growth experience needs to be unpacked, decoded, and deciphered through a lens of equitable objectivity and revelation.

What is needed in education today is an inclusive action, with the contribution of equitable voices from the local community toward learning and the dissemination of knowledge. The pre-eminent voice of local youth should initiate discussion, intervention and action on the part of educators and researchers toward critically initiating research on schools and schooling. Just as Mulligan (1994) imparts, educators should enact a “hermeneutics of critique, suspicion and retrieval” as a means to see through the “taken-for-grantedness of assumptions and ideologies in discourse, institutional strategies and institutional life, and to retrieve the voice and experience of the neglected and forgotten other” (p. 98).

Moreover, if modern Ontario Roman Catholic schooling works within the space of promoting and taking action on social justice issues as part of the mandate in their delivery of knowledge and lived/living experience, then a deconstruction of education through a lens of liberation theology needs to occur. As all forms of theologies of liberation emphasise deliberate distortions of Christianity that have been perpetrated to maintain the existing relationships between
oppressor and oppressed through lending sanction to the status quo, the question is begged as to why and how Roman Catholic schools can continue to manipulate knowledge delivery and acquisition within some of the colonial parameters still in existence.

This research begins to investigate the identity of modern youth in Roman Catholic secondary schools across the Toronto CMA and it affords youth a voice and a platform to engage the public with the reality of their identities and identities in faith. Within an anti-colonial framework of analyzing the words of youth in modern Ontario Roman Catholic schools, this research dissects how students have been taught to understand and manipulate identity within a religious and spiritual framework. The lived experiences of youth and their interpretations of faith in the Ontario Roman Catholic system need to be brought to the forefront of discussion on the equitability of modern Ontario Roman Catholic schooling. Modern Roman Catholic school youth openly acknowledge the colonial parameters that still bind educators and the education system. They are questioning of the system because it appears inflexible and rigid toward embracing diversity publically and within their own halls. Therefore, do Roman Catholic school educators and representatives acknowledge their continued colonial control when speaking in a paternalistic voice on behalf of the “other” inside their communities and schools? Do Roman Catholic schools afford equitable representation and voice to those who sit outside of the Roman Catholic faith in their schools? Do Roman Catholic schools afford all the youth in their halls an opportunity to be proud and free of a false identity that is not curtailed by the community’s idea of an accepted race, culture or religion? Finally, through a theology of liberation, can Roman Catholic schools and school communities deconstruct and recreate a method of knowledge delivery and acquisition that elevates the lived experiences and histories of those oppressed in the system? By offering voice to the youth of modern Toronto CMA, educators, researchers and theologians may now know the plight of today’s youth toward finding acceptance and space in an identity and spirituality that sits outside the shackles of the colonial Roman Catholic past.

5.1 Challenges and miscues

Fifteen youth were interviewed for this research. Their voices are genuine and critical to understanding the lived perspective of faith and Roman Catholic schooling. However, this small representative proportion of Ontario Roman Catholic secondary schools speaks to either the apathy of the generation, shyness of self-exposure to teachers and the school community at large,
or fear that exposure of religious diversity or environmental dissatisfaction might prompt a public outcry to reconsider funding, equal status or legitimacy of the system to the provincial public. Students, who are willing to discuss personal and emotional issues in an open dialogue with a perceived stranger and person in a position of authority, take a chance on having their voice regarded as valuable. Having a voice is only made critical when heard, and it has to be stated that 229 students who were included in the original sample did not feel comfortable, the need, or make the time to have their voice heard on these topics.

Are students truly that disinterested and apathetic toward religion or faith-based dialogue? Are students too unsure of themselves to want to offer their voice to these types of discussion? Or as Elaine, Ashley and Harmeet suggested, some students may be too afraid of being seen as “uncool” if they admit to participating in anything revolving around issues of faith. Those students who did come forward may have offered a biased perspective on issues of religion and spiritual identity, but their voices are still voices of the knowing, living each day in an institutional environment that systemically quantifies religion as an important aspect of identity. Much like an unidentified Roman Catholic school student remarked in Mulligan’s (1990) research, “We need to educate the students that it’s not uncool to believe” (p. 170).

The voice from surveys can provide a good overview of the topics at hand. They are a research tool that can offer insight that will offer valid and reliable evidence and open doors to future research. But this quantifiable evidence can also be seen as static and not exhaustive. For the reality of survey evidence is the nature of how questions are worded and the context that has led the participant to follow the line of questioning in front of them. Survey questions lead participants down a particular path of questioning toward getting to the crux of the research objectives. In the minds of the subjects, survey questions are formulating and interpreting, and are therefore answered within that context.

Surveys can also expose discrepancies within answers. As seen through the series of questions pertaining to religious discussions at school (questions 12, 13, 14 & 15), contradictory, or at least questionable, answers came forth in the statistics. For instance, all of the Sikh students initially offered that their religion was not discussed at school; however one of the students in the follow-up question offered it was only talked about as the major holidays approached. In the next question inquiring if their religion was only talked about in religion class, two Sikh students
contradicted their earlier answer pertaining that their religion was not talked about all, by now suggesting it was only talked about during religion class.

The best way to strengthen the validity of surveys is through follow-up dialogue extrapolating on the initial questions broached. An interview can either confirm or raise questions about the authenticity of survey data interpretation. In the case of this research, some survey questions were not answered accurately or with what appears to have been without care. Once in dialogue with the students, the survey results certainly did not do the voice of the students justice toward individual interpretation and internalization. Knowledge can be abstract and not always personal, but it can certainly be empowering and can take on personal ownership that enforces a communitarian ideal of spirituality in life and faith in religion, or one’s “church.” If adolescents are to own their faith, they must do so freely and without persuasion or judgement, accepting an identity that is valued in society.

5.2 Naming social acceptability and difference

Initially, it must be said that modern Ontario Roman Catholic school youth are representative of their generation. Teenagers are teenagers no matter where they go to school. They each generally envision a happy, prosperous future with fruitful careers and joyous relationships that are safe and secure. Yet, a primary focus in their daily negotiations of place and space in school revolves around their perceived image by others, and if that image will “fit in” with the societal expectations of their peer group. They are conscious of how they look, how they act and what they say at all times. Concerns of “fitting in” dominate their minds and actions.

Female youth are most vocal on their perceived and moulded identity within their peer group. Elaine discussed mockingly how “fitting in” with her social community revolves around image first. The social interaction of youth was highlighted with judgemental undertones, initially beginning with the manner of dress. Wearing shoes which “aren’t cool” or “wearing your kilt up here [motioning above the knee] is ‘cooler’” appears to be regular dialogue and inference between secondary youth. Roman Catholic secondary school youth appear to pride themselves in challenging the conformity of the dress code and in turn qualify themselves as being more socially acceptable. The words “fitting in” and the importance of being seen as “cool” were quoted by three-quarters of the students interviewed, on the topics of clothing, hair, make-up, musical choices, as well as language and peer association. The influence of the entertainment
industry and media-based images in the modern social arena cannot be overstated with youth. But, the use of the uniform is not only being manipulated based on social media expectation. Youth use the uniform as a first line of defence in establishing an identity that resists conformity and assimilation. The uniform is also a manipulative tool.

Youth use the uniform to judge others, and those judgements qualify status within the forums of social class and social acceptability. The image judged and imposed on youth, by other youth, names an identity that is either approved or relegated in the social culture of schools. How youth internalize or play into this naming game, however, fluctuates and evolves with time. Freshmen and junior students appear to be more aware or take on the heavy burden of their image as a named judgement in contrast to their older peers. The senior students interviewed, be it in response to their academic status as seasoned veterans of the secondary system, or because they are more mature, did not place as much concern or forethought into their image as a named identity, but acknowledged the stigma of its existence within the generation. The natural transition and display of importance that Ontario Roman Catholic school youth place on their outward image, however, does not work outside the parameters of all youth at this age. Teenage angst over image and social acceptability is nothing new nor beyond the reality and expectation of each generation. As well, Roman Catholic secondary schools are not the only spaces where youth are mandated to wear a uniform. Yet, for those youth in Roman Catholic secondary schools who participated in this research, the issue of image is highlighted because of the uniform.

Moreover, the use of the uniform has deeper implications within anti-colonialism. The conformity of a dress code masks diverse identities in race, class and religion. The students recognize this mask, but live with the conditions as set forth by the paternalistic system attempting to promote unification of the populace. The uniform helps mask the socio-economic “classes” as Simrin and Adriana suggested, and provides a freedom through convenience to not have to achieve the standard of social expectation or criteria for judgement as noted by Vera and Jazmine. The senior level girls put forth that doing well in school and having better options in the future were more important priorities at this time in their lives than worrying about what to wear or how to wear their uniform each day. By surrendering to the assimilation of the uniform, youth begin a process of masking identity and difference. By Grades 11 and 12, youth focus on the
more academic issues of schooling, and have forgotten the mask that hides the diversity amongst their peers.

The expectation of the uniform gives way to acceptance over the span of secondary schooling, as older students recede in using it as a tool for “fitting in.” To be judged and to judge how one conceives and wears the uniform places parameters around who is deemed acceptable and valued in Roman Catholic secondary schools. The mask of the uniform transfers judgement from conformity to equality in the minds of youth. Vera and Jazmine, both senior-level, Roman Catholic students whose families had lived in the Toronto CMA for generations, equated the conformity of the uniform with how everyone at their school is “treated the same.” Their own identities, as part of the accepted racial and faith majority of their school, provided interpretation of equality between peers, without understanding the struggle the minority endure toward sitting comfortably in an identity and faith that fits outside the socially acceptable majority. This interpretation of how the “other” is just “like everyone else” was common amongst the European diasporic Roman Catholic students interviewed.

Youth interpret and judge their surroundings through past experience and the directional influence of peers, parents and adults in their communities. Perception is internalized based on one’s own subject-position and conditioning from social status and placement in their communities. Youth, just like educators and researchers, “must be careful not to allow our intentions to verge into outright projection by substituting a fantasy of global seamlessness that is blinding rather than just colour-blind” (Williams, 1997, p. 6). The reference to being colour-blind in this instance could be replaced with any discriminatory blindness associated with social class or religious faith. Youth need to be taught to understand that their own lived experience is a formula for interpreting, judging and naming their own space and the place of others in their communities. Roman Catholic school youth are immersed in a system that applauds blindness; just by the fact of the school uniform alone. The uniform metaphorically represents a named image of both the person being perceived and the person imposing the perception. The Roman Catholic system, by having a voice to name that image, implies power and privilege. Succumbing to the voice in expectation and follow-through implies subservience, marginalization and silence. As the Roman Catholic school system persists in presenting homogeneity through the uniform, the system in turn creates a society of blindness. Youth are blind to those that identify as different. Acceptable and unacceptable youth also remain hidden to
their peers, and the adults in schools and in the community. If an assumed standard of expectation is internalized by youth, in this case pertaining to the uniform, then an assimilation of image is just as forgone as the mind. The presentation of youth who equate everyone as equal is a reflection of the Roman Catholic system projecting a parallel image of the youth in their system. To educate youth on perception and naming, the system must undergo a method of decoding itself.

5.2.1 Visions of the ‘Other’ school

A process toward understanding interpretation and judgement starts with a mirror being placed on one’s community, including school, peer groups and family. The influence of family, especially parents, was noted amongst the students of Bibby’s (2001) work as extremely important and poignant in decision making and life choices. Indeed, how the family and local community influence decisions imposed and chosen by youth cannot be overlooked. Student voices from this research initially offered that it was parentally expected, decided or applauded for them to continue their secondary level education in a Roman Catholic environment. The visible presence of religion in the home, compounded with the positive image of Roman Catholic schools in the Toronto CMA, orient the parents and families in this community toward taking pride in the option to enrol in a Roman Catholic school system. The families of the youth involved in this research had chosen to belong to a Roman Catholic school community, regardless of their own religious or spiritual background. The weight of promoting this system from community and household into the mindset and identity of Roman Catholic school youth is a reality. Youth internalize their parental and community sentiments of the Roman Catholic system being the “better” system. If youth have never been enrolled in the public secular system, their negative opinions in comparison might be unfounded, and more aligned to reactions moulded by parental experience in the secular system a generation or two ago or by present media attention that is unflattering and criticizing.

For those youth without prior lived knowledge of the secular system, their choice of Roman Catholic schooling appears to be influenced by paternal Roman Catholic dictation or parental influence. Shazia’s comment that she would not feel safe in the secular system, because of the “different cultures”, and Adriana’s offering that “race is a big issue at the public school” exposed that a deeper lens of discrimination and ignorance had been planted into the minds of youth by
schools, home, or even community. The students portrayed a repeated image of the secular system as being less safe, even though each student acknowledged that some level of gender, sexual, racial, ability or faith-based tension existed within their own schools. The issues of safety in the secular school for today’s youth imply a lack of respect or freedom to promote a racial and faith identity that is different from the accepted majority. Some level of protection from the discrimination that haunts all other aspects of society including the secular school system, either imagined or perceived, exists within the Roman Catholic school system according to today’s youth.

It is this lens of protection over freedom that would enlist a theology of liberation to tempt the Roman Catholic system to investigate further their “safe” image as one of reality or fiction in the hallways and corridors of their schools. For parents and youth to embrace an environment as a choice of the “better option” only because of safety and not because of the message that the environment is delivering, then the community must question and challenge the difference they would endure in an environment, which is “free” of racial, ethnic, class or religious discrimination and tensions. All of the students interviewed offered their schools were not free from some form of discrimination or tension amongst and between peer groups, yet for the most part their conviction to remain in the Roman Catholic system is one of comfort in identity and alliances.

The response of youth who sit outside the majority in schools is to align with an identity that attempts to empower the self. As youth get older, the sense of self appears to strengthen in image, life goals and faith identity. Yet, the fear of alienation or silencing is still a factor for youth in schools. Youth seek out alliances that reinforce their sense of self as a minority, and in turn noticeably segregate themselves in the larger community. Elaine described how peers section themselves off into alliance groups at her school and do not “interact with other races.” Marian further described how it appeared “natural” for youth to be “drawn to certain races” in casual settings, but clarified that she, herself, would not stop from still becoming friends with peers of other races. Youth in Roman Catholic schools react to issues of difference much the same as Yon’s (2000) students do in public schools. He refers to these types of alliances as a theory of “roots versus routes” for youth. Healthy relationships are those that share in the struggle for identity and voice. In this case, race and faith are seen as qualifiers in expectation and understanding. When trapped in a diverse religious framework, students’ observations may
demonstrate how race and faith move back and forth between being aspects within social relation and/or essentialist concepts (Yon, 2000, p. 86). As only half of the students offered on the survey that they spend free time with peers who share in their religious affiliation, one can infer that an identity in faith is neither as visible nor promoted as that of race. Students initially choose to infer from race with whom to form alliances but as identities shift and adapt to community changes and fluctuations, so too do alliances. Qualifying associations that are safe and protected become just as transparent as the impressions of the secular system being spaces of segregation and the Roman Catholic system being safe spaces of integration. Aspects of community or family influence how one names the other; and how one, in turn, is named within one’s own community can become essentialized if not given the freedom to decode the knowledge base. For these youth, the level of freedom from racial, class, gender, sexual, ableism, or faith-based persecution at the Roman Catholic school justifies their enrolment. Since the majority of parents identify that it is the spiritual presence in Roman Catholic secondary schools that direct enrolment of their child, it appears for youth that the image of faith translates as freedom to assume an identity that is more protected and respected.

5.2.2 Freedom of identity

Why does there appear to be a fissure between parental expectation and student reality? What is being talked about at home if youth are under the impression that the parental choice of enrolment in the local Roman Catholic school is by reason of safety over spiritual growth? Parental experience and opinion transpose into pressure and expectation in the lives of youth. Lived and learned knowledge can predetermine judgement and bias both image and named identities. Issues of ignorance, power and control are a part of the routine in schooling. From the ideas of “everyone being treated equally”, to “we are drawn to the same”, youth sit in a place of using their environmental influence and personal experience to organize, manipulate and name their space and place in schools. Colour blindness for some is colour over-exposure for others, namely those who sit outside the expected majority. For those youth who accept a personal identity that is different from the societal expectation of the Roman Catholic school system, drawing attention to their difference will enforce peers, parents, teachers or community elders to form judgement based on image or expectation. Parents will express safety concerns with their offspring, but when it comes to offering statistical data on their placement in the separate system,
they are quick to accept the “privilege” of attending the perceived “better system” by offering what is expected for research on religious identity.

Mr. Domitrovich suggested that non-Roman Catholic families are “not going to be the kind of group to stir the pot”, as “first generation, new immigrants they’re really just appreciative of being in Canada, attending Catholic education.” In turn, non-Roman Catholic students internalize a sense of difference and although their Roman Catholic peers, such as Elaine, might suggest that they are “just like everybody else”, non-Roman Catholic students will accept a level of “faith-blindness” to avoid marginalization or alienation. With blindness to difference comes an imagined space of privilege.

Roman Catholic students within Roman Catholic communities further exact a privilege of dominance and power to name the “others” in their schools. As Mr. Domitrovich suggested, “There’s a culture of supremacy in the Roman Catholic environment. So to shed a spotlight on the fact that you are not part of the dominant group goes counter to the need for youth to belong.” Non-Roman Catholic students remain hidden to their Roman Catholic peers if not provoked to self-identify. Their identity is left to be interpreted and accepted because of the societal inheritance of Roman Catholic supremacy in separate schools. Roman Catholic youth also enact the privilege of acceptance by offering resistance toward the establishment as noted by Mr. Sullivan who offered that he “has never had an issue with a kid resisting religion class who are non-Catholic kids. The few that I’ve had resisting are in fact Catholic kids.” Indeed, five of the seven students who admitted to not practising their faith on the survey, self-identified as being Roman Catholic.

The act of resistance toward the system from within, highlights the fact that only Roman Catholic youth feel secure enough in their identity to voice dissention. Their faith identity is expected and not hidden within the institution. However, the resistance on the part of Roman Catholic youth within the Roman Catholic system suggests concerns over how the system is offering religion as an educational framework or worldview to modern youth. While non-Roman Catholic youth hide to avoid persecution in the secular system and in turn accept the compromise of faith identities, Roman Catholic youth challenge the colonial redundancy and smothering of their system that devalues modern individualism and diverse aspects to identity.
For a system that promotes social justice at its core values, the Ontario Roman Catholic educational system might be proud that it has inspired a generation of youth who can reflectively offer insight into the weaknesses of their own system. Indeed, one might say they have brought it on themselves. Yet, with that knowledge and offer of insight, the system should transcribe those voices into its own learning objective toward dismantling the colonial image and replacing it with one of liberation. It is through the lens of liberation theology as a movement which unites theology and socio-political concerns in “a dynamic, ongoing exercise involving contemporary insights into knowledge (epistemology), humankind (anthropology), and history (social analysis)” (Webster, 2007, p. 686) that schools and school communities will provide youth with a more likely chance at freedom from oppression and discrimination.

With students commenting that taking Communion is seen as a “chore”, religion classes are “redundant and repetitive with little spiritual depth”, and the retreat experience provides little meaning because “people don’t know why they’re going … it is just a religion class trip”, the Roman Catholic schooling experience currently fails to inspire faith identity for some youth. On the real issues that affect the community, such as teenage pregnancy, sexual diseases, physical health, and life choices in society, again I refer to Marian who poignantly suggested, “I think we’re kind of killing our community by not educating them!” The Roman Catholic Church, caught up in dictating conservative principles, is in turn ignoring the reality of the liberalism that is taking hold of its communities. How can Roman Catholic schools nurture a “religious literacy as expressed within the Catholic faith as well as to the religious attitudes and life skills related to a religious worldview” (ICE, 2006, p. 2), when it intentionally remains blinded to the social conditions and influences of its population?

As Anderson (1989) suggests:

A persistent criticism of educational critical theory is its tendency toward social critique without developing a theory of action that educational practitioners can draw upon to develop a “counter-hegemonic” practice in which dominant structures of classroom and organizational meaning are challenged. (p. 257)

Roman Catholic theologians, administrators and educators are not adapting the system fast enough to ensure faith conviction in its youth, but are rather pushing youth away from wanting to learn anything further because of the system’s inability to self-reflect and acknowledge the lived reality and histories of its clients. The system is also fearful and resistant to the challenges of a
liberal society, even though it exists within the confines of a society that is more liberal in ideology and epistemology. Overcoming the fear of change to attempt to bridge an ecumenical relationship with a more modern liberal society is a directive that Ontario Roman Catholic school educators and institutions must engage.

The essence of control plays out in schools and school communities through the educators who assess that youth are not interested in religion or spirituality and question the appropriateness of youth when they do embrace spiritual faith. Such is the case of Mr. Sullivan with his comment: “In fact I would be concerned about students who are 15-16 years old who maybe do take religious faith very seriously.” What type of religious or spiritual routine are Roman Catholic schools then inciting? All of the students interviewed offered that they do engage in some form of religious or spiritual routine each day that is personally meaningful to strengthening their conviction in faith. Much like Houston’s (2007) criteria for those who identify with a Christian spirituality, the act of prayer “within an awareness of life lived in the present before God” (p. 1140), qualifies as a sense of religious faith that the faithful could undertake. Some students, such as Randy, offered that reflecting in the school chapel each morning is crucial to nurturing his faith, while other youth, such as Shazia, participate in weekend youth groups and have opportunities to experience, live and develop their faith through larger community events. Prayer was common amongst many of the youth interviewed. Prayer in the modern era can involve music or personal reflection through journal writing. The students equated these actions with pertaining to acts of spirituality more so than religion.

If students do not have a connection to their community through fellowship alliance, which Houston determines to be another criterion for maintaining Christian spirituality, are they negated of appropriating this title? While the non-Roman Catholic Christian students did offer participation in youth groups outside of school, the other students did not offer wider group connections. Does the appropriation of possessing religion or spirituality therefore become coded based on titles, association or conviction? The denominational expectation of titles is rife with underlying assumptions implicit in power and privilege. Those who dictate the name, hold the power to identify the participants. Therefore, as educators, it becomes extremely important to listen to the voices of our clients. Roman Catholic theologians, educators and researchers need to listen to the choice of words and context of directional emotion of the students being served to deliver “what people want, rather than what we think they want” (Shahjahan 2004, p. 689).
Youth react and respond to the dialogue of immersion and context of power invoked from the dialogue. For the community to place parameters around an identity that is deemed unacceptable or warranting concern only implies supremacy and control on the part of the community.

5.3 Resistance to a false identity

For non-Roman Catholic students to discuss their identities and manipulated spaces in modern Ontario Roman Catholic secondary school corridors, identifiers of race and class, as seen earlier, become interwoven points of note. Just as Elisa merged faith and race in a discussion on community judgement “in the aftermath of “9/11”, students acknowledge skin colour as a signifier of race, and in a Roman Catholic school setting it also signifies religious identity. Randy was honest in offering that “if you see an Indian, you can mostly guess, 90% of the time, that they are Sikhs.” In contrast, the projection of white and European infers Christian, and more specifically Roman Catholic. For other youth, race is not as clear cut in determining religious identity. The conformity of religious identity, accepted or otherwise, appears to them to be a subtext intertwined with observations of the “Other.” Yet, as Elaine suggested, if one’s resistance to the conformity can overshadow the colonial identity placed on oneself by family and schooling, then an opportunity exists to expand personal conviction within a faith identity. Liberation theologians would embrace this action as a means to connect an oppressed identity to the spirit of liberation. Marian has chosen to resist the conformity and confines of an expected identity in faith through “ignorance”, yet she has chosen not to remain quiet when the concept of difference wavers toward an imposed hierarchy of self-identity unbefitting the body being named. Her reference to “ignorance” in this case works to the advantage of the minoritized youth, in providing a resistance to the imposition of racial and religious supremacy within the system. Marian tenuously suggested that at her school she did not think that “people do it intentionally”, referring to segregating themselves from other racial identities. She places blame on the community, parents and youth, for inspiring discrimination, inferiority and “barriers” in school and society. Yet, the identity that is placed on her by peers and teachers is “not going to stop me from doing what I do.”

Peer discrimination was highlighted in the dialogue with Philip. As a Roman Catholic, Philip is fearful of religious assimilation because of the level of faith diversity in his school. He offered that a “more diversified student body does not strengthen Catholic school community or faith
with students.” He put forth that his religious conviction is very strong, but “Catholic schooling should strengthen the faith of its Catholic students first, before offering knowledge of other religions.” The vocalization of his fear was explained through a discussion of his lived experience in South Korea up until two years ago, where his Roman Catholic identity made up a small minority in a quarter Buddhist, quarter Christian and fifty-percent atheist population. Claiming a lived experience of religious persecution in his South Korean school provides diasporic insight into Philip’s stance. His fearful voice is that of the colonized and also one who is not exposed to a theology of liberation that can be brought forth in Roman Catholic communities. He has brought the fear of continual ancestral oppression with him to the Toronto CMA and his Roman Catholic schooling experience. He represents the historic resistance of the Roman Catholic struggle for equality in the Ontario political, social and economic arenas. He further aligns himself with other Asian students who are convicted in their Roman Catholic faith much like himself. The strength that he receives from this alliance supports his directive to resist assimilation by the Other in his new school. Non-Roman Catholic students, however, would offer the opportunity to exist in a shared and safe ecumenical schooling environment because of their own personal histories in religious persecution is a laudable pursuit and encourages their strength as Other. The creation of a system that applauds diversity, offers liberation through a religious or spiritual identity, and overcomes fear of assimilation or change, both within itself and within its student body, is necessary for any schooling environment to flourish. Students who are exposed to the paths taken and the paths put forth for all those in a community-of-faith can only broaden self-esteem and identity with an awareness of lived and living knowledge. Their support and strength as a unified whole will nurture a spiritual community of progress.

In the case of Ashley, however, her diasporic roots do not offer strength and space conviction in faith. Ashley, whose faith and race fit outside the majority at her Toronto CMA secondary school, expressed how she feels most uncomfortable discussing her non-Roman Catholic status in school, especially amongst or in front of her peers. Her rationale, in response to students like Philip, is in parallel with Marian’s assessment of the community putting up barriers signifying difference, and in turn creating a polarity of supremacy and acceptance in race and religion. Within Dubois’ double consciousness theory (Harrison 1990), Ashley quantifies her previous knowledge base from a Roman Catholic elementary experience in Jamaica even though she self-identifies as Christian, and not Roman Catholic. Her upbringing within a Roman Catholic
primary experience makes it easier for her to be perceived as belonging within a Roman Catholic environment, as one of the “accepted.” Her identity as the ‘Other’, both in faith and race, compound her need to fit in and feel accepted. She chooses to “ignore” the call for self-identification out of fear of exposure and reprisal.

Elaine offered a similar but more exasperated plea as a student who is Roman Catholic in name but embraces the concept of spirituality outside of Roman Catholicism more directly. Elaine identifies as a youth of mixed race who does not “fit anywhere. I fit with the other mixed people, but they’re all different too.” Elaine affords herself concessions in transcending race to find faith connections, or at best acceptance, with peers. She reflects on the importance of her grandfather in moulding her identity in younger years, and chooses to be an active agent in defining her identity, as opposed to playing a simple victim. Ashley does not appear to have captured the same support mechanisms as Elaine within the empowerment of peers who share in her diversity or otherness. However, both students appeared to be aware of their spatial allocation in a transitional context: between representatives of a specific faith-based cultural context and being racialized spiritual agents in a representative space of global hybridization.

Both girls exhibit an injury of the spirit, much like Williams (1987, 1991) describes in relation to how one who is marginalized constantly battles within oneself the right to be accepted. The contradictions and complexity of these identities are constantly in motion and evolve daily in the lived experiences of these youth. Ashley and Elaine each use their knowledge of their Roman Catholicism to mask a true identity but each struggles to find a solid space of accepted freedom and liberation from colonial and societal expectation and conformity. For youth to portray an identity that is ‘religious’, they must impart the illusion of “fitting in” with a mask of imposed faith.

5.3.1 Describing faith

Issues of religion, spirituality or faith can prove to be uncomfortable discussions for anyone in the modern era. Yet the students who offered their words for this research, albeit some shy, some unconvinced their comments would not be used against them, and some eager to talk about their commitment to faith, were all students who volunteered their voice and experience on the topic. All of the youth interviewed put forth that possessing a religious or spiritual identity was personally important or relevant. Eighty-two percent of the surveyed students connect with
religious practice, while 56% identify separately as also being spiritual and that this topic is discussed in their classrooms separate from religion. These numbers are only slightly higher than the statistics offered by Bibby (2001, p. 254) which suggest nationally that 76% of teens identify with a religious or spiritual group, and 48% identify as having spiritual needs. Youth present that religion or spirituality is a positive aspect to their identity, albeit each student interpreting this aspect of their identity in a personal and unique way.

Youth, whether they internalize a positive religious identity or not, associate religion with stereotypical expectations, laden with routine. The concept of being “religious” is plagued with conforming ritualistic acts and students either embrace the security of routine or are quick to name it as burdensome and smothering. The onus associated with religion and religious concepts appears to disappoint and discourage students’ attempts to discuss their understanding or impressions of faith. As Randy suggested, “when someone is religious you feel that they have to say certain things; they’re biased. They think a certain way just because they’re taught to be that way.”

Furthermore, students appear to associate a pressure to conform in an imposing and devaluing way when Roman Catholicism is broached in classroom discussions. The educators involved in this research all agree that the term Roman Catholic or any use of the Catholic religion with students instantly results in negative feedback and resistance to further discussion. As Randy suggested, “when you’re religious I think you can be caught up with unmeaningful rituals and practices, and you can be more quote, unquote fake just by being religious.” The students supported the need for schools to move beyond denominational dialogue and incorporate a language that is more holistic and spiritual in context and not infused with an institutionalized and systemic Church approved vocabulary.

The concept of spirituality appears to mean something different from religion for these students. There is an appreciation of the concept of spirituality outside of religion. As Randy suggested, “when you are a spiritual person you’re more directed towards God ultimately.” The tone changes within discussions of spirituality, with a sense of the ethereal or lived emotional connection being verbalized by the students through statements such as Elisa’s, “…being spiritual is like you know there is life after, like you know that it’s not all fake, there’s meaning to life” or Tara’s reflection that spirituality outside of religion focuses on “self, inner peace.”
Reflections by Philip, Simrin and Adriana did not separate spirituality from religion, and they each suggested the terms were coterminous and interwoven. Spirituality has different meaning for different people, but youth do interpret it as a last destination of religious pursuit. In accordance with Dei et al. (2000), youth offer that “religion is part of their understanding of spirituality in that religion and religious values help mould personal character” (p. 62). As Philip implies, having religion helps inspire spirituality. Yet, being religious does not equate to being spiritual. Religion can be perceived as a code or instructions for living one’s life, while spirituality is the act of living according to the interpretation of that code:

Educators must distinguish between doctrine and enforcement of religious norms and values, on the one hand, and the enunciations of values, norms and beliefs that guide a people’s sense of self, personhood, individual and collective actualization, as well as relations with each other and their environments. (Dei et al., 2000, p. 63)

5.3.2 Interpreting the language of faith

When asked if they felt comfortable expressing their religious/spiritual views in any of their classes or with peers, the surveyed students responded ‘yes’ 82% of the time. When asked if their beliefs were treated with respect by school teachers, guidance counsellors, vice-principals, principal and Chaplain, the students responded overwhelmingly positive 90% of the time. Unfortunately, the youth suggested that their beliefs are treated with respect by peers only 76% of the time, and in turn only half of the students offered that their religion is a topic of discussion in peer groups.

The distinction between offering religious discussion during class time compared to discussion during personal time suggests that students are acknowledging an expected agenda of time and place to talk about their faith, and outside of the classroom is not approved space. Although the directive of religious or spiritual education is to encourage development of religious language, concepts and ideas within the Roman Catholic faith and worldview (ICE, 2006, p.2), the impact outside of the religion classroom appears to lose its meaning and application in the corridors of Roman Catholic secondary schools.

Dennis Murphy (2003) suggests the role of a Roman Catholic teacher is to challenge and assist youth to look at the world and understand or interpret their sense of lived space and identity
through a lens of faith. This interpretation on the part of youth is to be reflected in all they do, see and say. The challenge, according to Murphy is to:

Make the language of the school and the classroom a language that resonates with sounds of community, of society, of social responsibility and social solidarity. . . . It is a language which stands at an oblique remove from the individualism of our time. (p. 21)

Murphy, along with other theologians such as Thomas Groome (2002) and Ronald Rolheiser (1999), has suggested a transition in language from that of religious to something more ‘spiritual’ in modern schooling and Roman Catholic community dialogue. The language needs to adapt to not only engage youth more readily toward making connections with faith, but it also needs to appreciate the diversity in lived histories and experiences that equally represent the clients being served. A more ecumenical language that incorporates liberation theology and stresses the incomprehensible mysteriousness of the reality of God as the spirit may provide such direction. Moreover, when a language that further shifts the onus toward acknowledging a spiritual entity throughout the course of human history in stories of oppression, alienation and struggles for survival, which evolves outside a Church of one religious faith and embraces an identity that is inherently spiritual, will youth be offered a more valued and valuable education.

Bibby’s (2001) research suggests that modern youth are expressing interest in spirituality and spiritual needs and that the language in school, church and community needs to adapt to the will of their congregations. Some 40% of females and 35% of males report that their friends are interested in spirituality, while 55% of females and 40% of males say that they personally have spiritual needs; one-third identify spirituality as very important (Bibby, 2001, p. 121). Asked what they have in mind when they think of “a spiritual person”, a Roman Catholic youth suggested a spiritual person “helps others by being around them and being their friend. It has nothing to do with church” (Bibby, 2001, p. 121). The sense of organized religion is separate from the concept of spirituality for this youth. Possibly the gap that has formed between today’s Roman Catholic school youth and embracing church and religion is partially in relation to how static religious education has operated for decades. As the students admit to not attending church regularly, and the emphasis on attending church is vacant in the home, many youth impart that schooling “is” church. The work of Bibby (2001), ICE (2006, 2007), Mulligan (1990, 1994, 2005) and Murphy (2001, 2002, 2003) can each confirm that this interpretation appears logical.
With this reality present in Roman Catholic schools, Roman Catholic literacy becomes a growing and systemic problem to keeping the focus on faith in classrooms.

As Lois Sweet (1997) remarks, “Religious literacy is not just knowledge of one’s own beliefs, but is also a capacity to encounter and analyze respectfully the religious views of others, to see the enterprise as personally worth while” (p. 228). Many of the young people sitting in Roman Catholic classrooms today have little knowledge of the history of church faith. Literacy and language in faith are two predominant aspects of modern Ontario Roman Catholic schools. But will a change in language encourage students to adopt an identity that possesses literacy in/of faith? This research suggests it is more than just a case for a change in language. With any language, the underlying notion is the intent of the spokesperson. In this case, the Roman Catholic Church dictates and dominates the notion of language delivery and acquisition. With a colonial direction at its core, youth acknowledge the inherent flaw in the system which is flawed based in history, based in power and control, based in maintaining a status quo that is fearful of change.

A spiritual transition in language and literacy will require self-reflexivity into the historical epistemology of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada, especially if that spiritual transition embraces a more prominent theme based in liberation theology. This should be brought about initially as a re-working of how to present core ideals in a manner that is reflective of the respective lived and living space/spaces of all members of Church, school and home communities. This ecumenical approach might start with language, but the heart of the matter would require much more “soul” searching on the part of all Roman Catholics, and how they identify as a community. The need for Roman Catholic schools to accept their own subject position in society, where pre-conceived stigma, ridicule, corruption and oppressive hierarchical power come with the title, is necessary given the true identity of students in their halls. Roman Catholicism is heavily laden with an historic colonial language empowering the Roman Catholic elite over their subjects, and within this case study, teachers and theologians over students, and Roman Catholic peers over non-Roman Catholic others. Modern Roman Catholic schools need to embrace this legacy and accept its reality. To move outside of a language that is restrictively Roman Catholic is a progressive evolution that youth are calling upon in modern Ontario secondary schools.
5.4 Communities in faith

From the research presented here, one-third of all students today in Roman Catholic secondary schools across the Toronto CMA are non-Roman Catholic. Within that one-third of non-Roman Catholic students, one-tenth further aligns with a non-Christian religious or spiritual identity. This level of diversity reflects the reality of modern Ontario Roman Catholic schools across the Toronto CMA, and is noted by previous demographic research (Ornstein, 2006; Strategic Research Statistics, 2005; White et al., 2005). The students immersed in the schools themselves note the level of diversity. Tiffany observed that “up to 50%” of the students in her school are possibly not Roman Catholic, noting a distinct Muslim population, while Randy presented that “possibly only 45% of the students at his school are Catholic”, with a diverse range of Christian and Sikh students making up the majority. Randy’s school (which also enrolls Marion and Elisa) had the largest return rate for students with 14 of 30 surveys returned. Of these 14 randomly selected students, 9 were Roman Catholic, 2 were Sikh, 1 was Adventist, 1 was Pentecostal and 1 was Muslim. The myth of only Roman Catholics attending modern Ontario Roman Catholic secondary schools, and the stereotype of those Roman Catholics being white and of European ancestry is perpetuated to the detriment of rejoicing in the diversity that “adds a certain richness to our schools” according to Mr. Sullivan.

According to non-Roman Catholic youth, their schooling environments are not always comfortable spaces for expressing an Other identity. Being exposed as different in faith highlights a system that is not homogenous. Not “fitting in” with the accepted majority results in some level of ridicule or alienation. Even though some students do not internalize the stigma associated with being different, other aspects of one’s identity strengthen the flaws in the system. Harmeet, whose family has lived in the Toronto CMA for generations, and who identifies as white at a predominantly white school, admits to being singled out to discuss her non-Roman Catholic religion in class, but does not offer the same level of stigmatism associated with her public revelation as Ashley revealed earlier. Race and roots appear to be interwoven into publically vocalizing faith identity and conviction in the case of each of these girls. It is the juxtaposition of these two girls that insight liberation theologists to expose those students who already enjoy the rights and privileges of society at the expense of those youth who are denied and deprived those same rights and privileges because of race, ethnicity, religion, gender and so forth. As diversified as the schools are across the Toronto CMA, the delivery of knowledge and
experience needs to start with the self and identifying one’s place and space in that corridor of privilege to oppressed. Roman Catholic schools and school communities have a strong battle toward overcoming their own perceived history and modern vision of what the Church represents and continues to offer.

Promoting not only a different faith, but even a Roman Catholic faith, has negative social connotations in modern day Roman Catholic schools. Elaine offered: “I think that we’re taught to be ashamed if one is proud of their religion or spirituality. Because it’s different and, for some reason, different isn’t seen as good anymore.” Peer pressure to avoid being openly religious or display any sense of spirituality goes against the expectation of, as Shazia put forth, “fitting in.” In response, many students internalize their beliefs and hide their true religious or spiritual identity. As Harmeet shared, “it’s not cool to be religious. Therefore students don’t . . . very proud when they are.”

As today’s youth struggle to express a faith identity that is truly representative of self-experience and lived history in a colonial educational system, some youth do express that their self-identity is empowered within the system. Marian offered, “I think that’s the beauty of the Catholic school system, you’re able to kind of accommodate everybody.” The same sentiments were shared by Elisa who proudly aligned herself with being Sikh, but prided herself in wanting to share in the diversity of her community, both to offer difference and to accept the difference in others. For Elaine, the “spirituality” and “open-minded” aspect that she internalizes through her life in a Roman Catholic school provides strength and hope in the midst of being a confused teenager. Each of these girls strongly insisted that faith, as opposed to a defined denominational identity, was an aspect of self worth displaying and sharing, not as a means to assimilate others, but to offer true aspects of who they are in their schools and in their larger communities.

The historical connections to certain words and phrases that youth imbue without knowing their roots is also worth noting, such as Elaine’s friends questioning her proud spiritual conviction and belief in “such hocus pocus”. The origin of the term ‘hocus pocus’ is speculated to have been based on a perversion of the Latin words spoken at the time of the consecrations, (the sacrament of Holy Eucharist) from the Roman Catholic mass, Hoc est corpus meum, meaning “This is my body” (Harper, 2010). From this reference it is thought that 15th Century English prelate John Tillotson referred hocas pocas as an invocation used in tricks by magicians or royal court
jugglers to “blinde the eyes of the beholders” (Harper, 2010). Even words that appear to be secular in modern meaning are referenced hundreds of years after the fact to challenge one’s belief in the Roman Catholic Church and its rituals and routines.

Some students internalize empowerment by being enrolled in the Roman Catholic system, yet others transcribe the experience with a stricter lens of critique. Randy was quick to suggest that his school “teaches us to be tolerant” as opposed to “accepting”, and this in turn incites resistance by students. He insists for the need of less ritual and routine to inspire a religious or spiritual identity that is empowered and free. Mr. Campbell echoed Randy's sentiment. As a 31 year veteran Roman Catholic educator, Mr. Campbell differentiated between modes of curricular delivery as the root to disengaging youth toward embracing a positive faith or spiritual identity. His offer of dictation of religious content qualifies the resistance offered by some youth on participating in class discussion or learning about religious concepts in general.

Roman Catholic educators need to mould a system that embraces what Mr. Domitrovich imparts as “truly Catholic, i.e., nurturing anti-racist principles in a bias-free environment through the development and fostering of critical thinking skills.” The adoption of a theology of liberation would also work to assist in the development of critical thinking skills as it would expose identities toward nurturing a faith that heals spirit injuries incurred from alienation and marginalization of the accepted group. It is irresponsible to censor the truth and deny the critical capacities of students in this crucial aspect of the human experience while expecting the same critical capacities to be active in other areas of study. (Sweet, 1997, p. 197)

But as a system founded on exclusion and assimilation, one can also argue for the need to move away from the labels, titles and historical connotation within the prescribed system as we know it. The implication and usage of language in education needs to evolve toward an inclusive, liberationist and anti-colonial text as a community that respects all religious identities. Both Groome (2002) and Murphy (2001) suggest that individual contributions to one’s society are important but it is the sociological offering of a community-of-persons that provides the global Roman Catholic community with the call to teach and to learn together as one. Youth need to be active participants in engaging their Roman Catholic school community toward achieving a respect and appreciation in religious beliefs and faith identity. Youth offer hope that Roman Catholic school communities are spaces that can empower identity and faith/spiritual
development. Frey et al.’s (2004) study on self-efficacy and life scheme provides insight into Roman Catholic school youth in the United States who do show strength in an identity that is positive and a faith identity that is empowering. The Roman Catholic school experience in this study suggests that the immersion in a religious environment provides incentive to embracing an identity that is accepted by a community in faith, a community with similar goals and directions. Yet, just as the ICE (2007) report spoke for the voices of known non-Roman Catholic youth in today’s Ontario system, Frey et al.’s (2004) quantitative study does not offer the perspective of the non-Roman Catholic voice within its results.

Frey et al.’s (2004) study supports the work of ICE, in suggesting that faith inspires an identity that is self-accepted and self-respected. Roman Catholic educators, such as Mr. Sullivan, might use this data toward qualifying the legitimacy of the Ontario Roman Catholic system as a valuable alternative to the secular system because as a community:

We can celebrate faith, through religious celebrations, in a way that public schools can not . . . we can address issues like Ramadan in ways the public schools are not free to do so. Public schools can do it from a sociological or historical perspective, but not from a faith perspective.

Mr. Sullivan promotes the concept of the Roman Catholic world view as a theory integrated into everything Roman Catholics do and are. The Roman Catholic worldview brings about hope. Hope is embraced as a community of unified acceptance of identity in faith and spirituality.

One could argue that it is the aspect of community that is one of the strongest positive elements in defining the uniqueness of the Roman Catholic system. Just as ICE (1998) suggests, “The Christian vision regarding the value of the human person and his/her journey is passed on only through community” (p. 18). Yet, an inclusive community would not reflect the religious elitism that appears predominant in the Toronto CMA Roman Catholic schools as so noted by the youth within the system. Indeed the Muslim and Sikh survey respondents identified that their faith is only talked about at holiday time, if at all. Roman Catholic secondary schools appear to be in a contradiction toward appreciating the “rich diversity” of people that make up their halls, with the reality of not affording equal value or voice to those identities that sit outside the Roman Catholic expectation. The time has come to re-interpret the gospel through a spiritual lens of liberation that sits outside the confines of colonial Roman Catholicism. Opening Roman Catholic schools to diversity was the first step in a process of truly envisioning a community-of-persons-
in-faith. Now comes the time for embracing that difference and valuing identity because of its diversity, as Mr. Sullivan suggests:

My Christ, the Christ that I adhere to, would sit down at a bias-free table, with homosexuals, Muslims, people with disabilities, all those who are marginalized and not only would he sit down with them, he would call them to his table, he’d seek them out.

5.4.1 The Roman Catholic school system needs to take stock

Mulligan’s (1990, 1994) work and the ICE (2007) report depict Ontario Roman Catholic school youth as struggling for acceptance in an increasingly secularized society. Youth are under continual pressure to conform to society’s materialistic individualism. Bibby’s (2001) ongoing research across Canada paints a picture of youth who are influenced by an increasingly technological and media-based world, yet who hold hope for the future through a sense of the spiritual. Over the last 20 years, youth have highlighted their main life concerns as pertaining to personal self-image, professional opportunities, and strength of alliances with family and peers. The research data presented here supports the work of Bibby, Mulligan and ICE on these fronts.

However, this research contradicts Mulligan’s investigations and the ICE report where issues of faith and spiritual identity are concerned with youth. Mulligan’s work suggests that the interest and direction for today’s youth in claiming an identity in religious faith or spirituality has eroded and become secularized, much like the society in which youth are growing and developing. However, the research data presented here aligns with Bibby’s findings showing a convicted voice in today’s youth toward possessing and nurturing faith and faith identity. Modern youth voice consistently positive references to their interpretation and internalization of faith and faith identity, albeit not necessarily within the context of any particular religion, but often as a unique and personal conviction. The work of Mulligan and ICE are correct in diagnosing a disinterest of Roman Catholic school youth in the Roman Catholic religion, but are not accurate in projecting that the denominational disinterest is toward secularism. Modern youth are desirous of a more holistic form of faith, one that is more spiritual in nature.

Institutional education, as we currently know it, is fraught with inaccuracies imbedded in curriculum materials, pedagogical relations and assumptions about communities. Multiculturalist discourses and the desire for inclusiveness produce a theory which suggests that if one has logical knowledge of the Other’s culture, then one can know how to accommodate them, join
them, or stay away from them. When conceptualization of what it means to know cultures is made rigid in this way, it is stripped of ambivalence or questions and yet, as we have seen through this research, the ways individuals see themselves in relation to their religious and cultural representations are full of ambivalence, questions and conflicts. Public education is being eroded because it is not meeting the needs of a new Canada.

The youth interviewed in this research described their Roman Catholic school experience as “disciplined”, “safer”, or “good”, and that it inspired them to be “better Christians” and exposed them to issues of “social justice, poverty and oppression”, that they otherwise might not have appreciated in the same vein. Yet, a language reflecting a religious literacy is void. Modern youth are desirous of connecting their education and their learning with their lived experience, histories and identities. Modern youth adopt the language of the time that has evolved beyond a religious literacy basking in colonial dictation and rigidity. Youth are demanding a more realistic and sophisticated language to properly name their experiences and who it is they wish to be and wish to be seen as. Without discussing societal relevant topics such as racism, homophobia, classism, ableism, gender or faith-based discrimination through a lens of self-reflexivity, the Roman Catholic educational system is depriving students knowledge and understanding of the myriad of ways in which humans express themselves. Roman Catholic schools, in order to adapt within an increasingly secular and individualist public agenda, are tightening the colonial directive toward dictating an inflexible and paternal agenda of supremacy. Yet the attitude of nurturing a blind Roman Catholic worldview appears prevalent to the detriment of the system and depriving the youth within school corridors.

In much the same way as Elaine referred to “self-esteem” as the root of youth toward nurturing a healthy spiritual identity, this research posits that it is the place of Roman Catholic schools and educators to nurture that identity. One could argue that it needs to happen through the voice of teachers. Youth, however, identify as being at a crossroads toward achieving a desired identity and being guided toward understanding how that identity fits in with the larger community. The role of educators and a positive alliance with community, community elders and family is critical to support and facilitate learning for youth. Today’s youth need role-models who will inspire life-long learning in faith development, in an effort to embrace a valued self-identity within a community-of-persons. Randy, a senior Roman Catholic school student interviewed for this research, stated, as a matter of fact, that the success of Roman Catholic education falls onto the
teachers to enforce. For Randy, teachers need to practise, model, and believe in Roman Catholicism as a way of life. Classroom teachers engaging youth everyday need to embrace their faith in a manner that is inclusively respectful, sincere and spiritually driven. Pedagogy in this case is framed by theology within a denominationally specific environment. But how will youth embody self-esteem, adopt life-long learning and faith development strategies when they are immersed in a system that devalues difference and applauds silence?

As members of an age where religious and spiritual epistemologies and ontologies are interwoven within all aspects of society, it becomes necessary to regard the salient voices of those searching for a respected and valued identity in faith that exist among and within us. There is very limited space in the global arena where no form of religious or spiritual dimension is at play. Therefore, to educate youth and to awaken an awareness and appreciation for diverse forms of interpreting the world will benefit the creation of a global community of persons, a global community of hope, a global community of peace. Just as Parpart (1995, p. 17) qualifies that post-modernist thinkers reject universal, simplified definitions of social phenomena, because the phenomena essentializes reality and fails to reveal the complexity of life as a lived experience, educational theorists and theological educators need to provide an equitable space for all in their midst. Dei (2000, p. 45) calls for new and alternative ways to acknowledge the history, loyalty, commitment and interdependence among peoples within and between communities as lived, valued and empowered forms of knowledge. In turn, it is the identity of peoples that affect lived experience and shape how we create and acknowledge ourselves. Spirituality is an integral part of the self, personhood and collective identity. Liberating the spirit and finding identity outside the shackles of oppression, marginalization or discrimination for all youth, Roman Catholic or non-Roman Catholic, embraces the progressive directive of growing as a global community-in-persons. Spiritual knowing embraces difference, respects lived knowledges and experience-strengthening alliances within communities and inspires interaction that is free, liberating and empowering.

For youth to support and promote an identity through learning, spiritual knowledge must be acknowledged as socially constructed and that it changes as new knowledges and understandings are generated (Dei, 2000, pp. 82-83). The development of a self-reflective spiritual conscience can also help students understand the relationship between the self and the community. Teachers need to incorporate a language and opportunity for faith development that is holistic and
nurturing of the self as an equal and integrated part of the whole of community. As Dei (2000) further suggests, “Developing a sense of community is the cornerstone for effective teaching and learning to promote change” (p. 52). Re-centering the curriculum through the words of Groome (2002), Murphy (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005) and Mulligan (1990, 1994, 2005) could renegotiate spiritual knowledge as a valid and real way of knowing oneself within a community of indigenous, diasporic and diverse peoples. Re-centering the curriculum through the words of Cone (1969), Gutiérrez (2004) and Haight (1985) on the diverse visions of liberation theology could bring a lens of anti-oppression ideals and dialogue that would strengthen the sense of an Ontario Roman Catholic community as it rebuilds its sense of self. The restructuring of the Roman Catholic school system to embrace and actively put in motion a philosophy of family/home-based prior learning and community education will anchor a broader definition of education that encompasses an emotional and spiritual dimension, parental and community advocacy, and youth empowerment.
Chapter 6
Conclusion – The Wisdom of Youth

6 Overview

Education is politically and historically rooted in positions of power. Who delivers knowledge, how that knowledge is delivered, and what knowledge is ignored, altered or glorified epitomize the nature of schools and schooling. The history of public education in Canada reflects the manipulation of colonial power toward invoking crown patriotism. Even with the development of an extremely diverse and pluralistic society such as in modern day Ontario, the educational system has been slow to evolve, acknowledge and take pride in the diversity of lived histories and experiences that exist within its schools.

As youth grow and develop into the leaders, parents and professionals of tomorrow, it becomes the responsibility of their communities to nurture healthy and proud individuals. Schools, like home, become the space of knowledge acquirement and knowledge interpretation. The safety, security and support any child feels in the environments of their daily routine will influence an identity that places itself within the understanding of knowledge delivery and lived experience. Who youth become will depend on the combination of all factors in their community. As educators, acknowledging the influence we hold in the lives of all those in our communities, especially our classroom clientele, should determine the emphasis we place on nurturing the whole of identity in both the roots and routes our youth take.

Reflections on history must also pre-acknowledge the essentialist understanding of what it is to be Roman Catholic in modern day Ontario. Both the struggle for equality and the power maintained as a religious community are aspects of Roman Catholic roots that cannot be minimized in any debate as to why Roman Catholic schooling exists as a popular option today. Essentially, the legislation in Section 93 of the 1867 BNA, delegated responsibilities to the uniform common school system of Ontario to accept the majority of youth into its schools with a directive to incorporate all minority or indigenous cultures and languages into an all pervasive Protestant Euro-centric system. The separate Roman Catholic school system, although legitimized within the BNA Act, isolated Roman Catholic youth and communities from their Protestant neighbours. The constitutional formation of schools wove a bond between
Christian/Roman Catholic churches and the state. Yet for youth in the separate Roman Catholic school system they were delivered their own assimilationist language and racial and cultural dictums as communities-in-faith separated from the mainstream.

The BNA Act of 1867 constitutionally solidified the rights of Roman Catholics in Ontario to establish, manage, and control their own schools while receiving a proportional allocation of government funding. The strength of Roman Catholic communities allowed for their educational system to prosper through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, even through various legislative changes to curriculum, teaching standards, and reductions in funding and status as separate schools across the province. It was not until 1984, when the Davis government enacted Bill 30, that the Ontario Roman Catholic system affirmed its status as an equal option for youth to enrol and receive quality education compared to the contemporary secular public school system. The open-access policy within Bill 30 provided equal funding to Roman Catholic schools but did so under the fair exchange of making access available to anyone who lived within school board designated boundaries. Roman Catholic secondary schools in Ontario are now accessible to all youth in the province, Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic alike.

Today, the Ontario Roman Catholic school system is the educational choice of many religiously diverse families. The option to develop and learn in a Christian environment appeals to one out of two Ontario families, many of whom may sit outside the Roman Catholic faith. Yet today’s youth, both Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic, are not experiencing the complete freedom of an identity that is unique and valued in their schools. They describe the Ontario Roman Catholic school system as if it is still an agent of colonial forces, maintaining imperial power through denominational religious elitism. Youth saliently acknowledge marginalization and the need to hide their true identity and faith through discursive voice and action within the corridors of Roman Catholic secondary schools. They demand a change in the system to modernize in both form and method of knowledge delivery and content toward acknowledging the diversity of racialized and religious bodies in the corridors.

6.1 Links between identity, schooling and knowledge production

Roman Catholic school youth verbally interlace their layers of identity, as named by themselves and as seen and named by others. Superficial masks of identity, pertaining to clothing and media influences reveal both areas of acceptance and conformity as well as representations of
resistance. Students use the mandated uniform to fit in and be seen as equal in the Roman Catholic school setting. Non-Roman Catholic youth can particularly hide behind the uniform as a means to not be identified as different. In contrast, Roman Catholic youth challenge the system more readily, as they already are members of the “expected” community. Uniform and dress become the initial stage for some youth to make their challenges toward the system of conformity, while for others it is the primary affront to remaining hidden as a member of the unexpected member of the community.

Youth of the past, as well as those of the modern era, highlight a first level of identity through body image, particularly clothing. Statistically, youth appear to show an evolution that has not changed dramatically since Bibby began his research some three decades ago. Youth identity is still fluctuating and is based on relationships with family and friends, the images they see as positive and progressive in the media, and the need and desire to be successful and happy going into adulthood. Aspects of a growing individualism as well as secular influences are visible in his work with youth, but as Bibby (2001) implies, today’s youth are overall no better or worse off than their parents were a generation ago. As Yon (2000) and Harrison (1992) allude, fashion, just as music, language, and peer association, is a signifier and metaphor for race, culture and religious affiliation. Race, culture and religion are then seen as qualifiers in expectation and understanding. Roman Catholic school youth qualify themselves to their peers based on dress, race and language. The actions and assumptions of youth reflect the society in which they live, and these attitudes have changed very little since Bibby and Posterski (1985) first conducted their research into Canadian youth some three decades ago.

Just as the research of Bibby (2001) presents, the identity of modern youth is shifting toward a more open and appreciated acceptance of diversity and diverse ways of knowing oneself and one’s place in society. Although youth still take pride in achieving quality education and are hopeful for success as adults in both their personal and professional lives, they are, as youth of today, strengthening awareness and encouraging pride in difference, especially racial and faith-based difference, across Canadian communities. Challenges to strengthening one’s pride come about in various discursive forms, such as simply wearing a school uniform.

The majority of Ontario Roman Catholic school secondary students belong to a uniformed community. Most Roman Catholic and some public schools offer a dress code and standard
uniform that all students are expected to don each day when on school grounds. Students challenge the system through alteration and manipulation of this dress code but the strengths and weaknesses of these alterations fluctuate. The form of resistance observed through uniform violations is inconsistent and overall extremely limited in its effect. Moreover, clothing, like most superficial masks, hides the true self, in race, faith, class, and so forth, while conforming to a standard established by those wielding power. Clothing, just as titles and language, aligns peers with those who strengthen identity through diasporic or indigenous roots. But alliances can be more strategic for safety than for exhibiting freedom of choice in naming an identity that is prided.

Roman Catholic school youth, like all youth, transcend the outer image of changing identities, toward an internal struggle that is directed and controlled by a need to ‘fit in’ with the community. Alliances with peers are most crucial for youth at this stage in their development and they rely on the support networks within and outside schooling environments to legitimize their chosen and diverse identities. As body image is racialized and religiously defined, interactive associations are also categorized and exported to reveal or hide discursive identities. Youth find comfort, security and empowerment when aligned with those who share similar roots and routes in life. Students interweave religion and race to make judgements about identity. Youth suggest that visible markers mould their ability to name and associate identity to others, such as Randy’s suggestion that if one appears “Indian”, they are therefore probably Sikh. While those same visible markers provide signals to approved association within groups of youth who possess the “same” racial affiliation. These same judgements based on image support societal expectations and naming criteria. Yet, image does not always define identity.

Even as titles swirl in classrooms and corridors toward describing actions of peers that are racist, sexist and ignorant, there is growing acknowledgement that plurality is a positive movement in society. Yet, underneath the appreciation of difference, youth still struggle toward understanding how individual identities can be negotiated toward safe and free spaces in schools. Discriminating and discursive titles are negotiated by youth to empower or to hide their true identity and definition of self and others. Even in the spaces of Roman Catholic secondary schools where both students and parents afford an image of safety and decorum, the representative identities youth portray shift and take shape according to who has delivered the images and who is listening to their interpretation.
Both secular and faith-based school communities can work to empower value in identity and relationships. Yet secular school communities in Ontario promote knowledge acquisition that has secular conditions and parameters at its core. Roman Catholic school youth welcome a level of safety and freedom in their schools that they offer would not be so forthcoming in the secular system. But these same youth still struggle to express their identity at its fullest and seek discursive strategies to socially “fit in” with peers. Roman Catholic secondary schools appear to offer a combination of discipline, conformity and safety for youth, each descriptor receiving variable praise and condemnation by today’s youth.

As schools are sites of power and knowledge production, the community influence on shaping youth identity will also be formulated through delivery of a prescribed text that is colonial and assimilationist in the least. As youth develop under the influences of life outside their schools, respect for information and understanding within the larger elder and family community is crucial to providing balance to the text delivered in schools. As Roman Catholic schools in theory and in practice work to bridge the community influence with schooling dictum, there is an opportunity for knowledge production to influence its youth in a self-empowering manner that prides a faith identity. Roman Catholic schools appear to mould a more positive reflection on schooling as a means to externalizing a valued identity, while internalizing a sense of safety and support in the community. The work of Frey et al. (2004), and their cognitive spirituality and hope index supports the youth in Canada in co-offering a positive outlook toward one’s self and the future.

Yet, youth still question the level of empowerment they internalize within their schooling and educational experience. They rank the Roman Catholic system as one that provides more opportunity to manoeuvre personal and unique identities, but they also allude to the parameters placed around that level of security and strength. They question the knowledge delivered and attained cautiously. They recognize the inconsistencies in the messages delivered with the reality of the diverse society in which they live. They challenge the doctrine, rituals and routine with the request for something more holistically spiritual and inclusive of difference. The modern Roman Catholic classroom is not only victim to who is delivering the message and how that message is being delivered, but is also victim to the rigidity of the message itself. Today’s youth call out the Roman Catholic school teacher and administrator as those who are also wearing uniforms to hide their true identities. Youth question the identities and roles of their educators who are in
positions of wielding individual as well as community power yet who resist or hide behind the cloak of Roman Catholicism in order to protect the longevity of the institution. Youth appreciate the religious environment that they have chosen to attend, but are more critical of that environment’s inflexible nature. Educators in the name of the Church do not consistently deliver a message that is ontologically representative of the diversity in clientele and their understanding of faith. In essence, as Marian put it, “we’re kind of killing our community by not educating them”.

6.2 Different voices: convergence and divergence

Roman Catholic youth question the inspiration they receive to develop a Roman Catholic identity that sits outside of the Church’s doctrinal expectation. Their internalization of what it means to be “Roman Catholic” is not so forthcoming. The message from older youth especially, appears to be one of uncertainty as to how Roman Catholic schooling is really different from public schooling. The obvious superficial criteria of conformity to the dress code and the rigidity of religion class attendance each year are noted. But students, both Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic alike are mixed when comparing the perceived quality of education currently offered in the Roman Catholic system to that of the secular system.

While the older students questioned the “Catholicness” in their Roman Catholic education, the younger students were more secure in submitting to the system as it is, without knowing exactly how to question it or if it needs to be questioned at all. As younger youth who might be new to the larger community or might identify as non-Roman Catholic, their sense of challenging their right to be educated in a religious environment was not vocalized. Just as the Social Equity Officer suggested, those who are different within the system will remain quiet so as to not expose themselves as different. Yet, those who were Roman Catholic or senior students did question the system and its rights and privileges to formulate learning and knowledge acquisition. The diversity in self-identifying markers or level of self-acceptance within the four years that it takes to receive a secondary education in Ontario appears to cover some of the most variable introspective years of one’s life. How youth manipulate and internalize the knowledge and image of self and the world during these years can fissure identity beyond repair and reproach. If educational environments nurture students who are unsure of themselves, and whom do not trust or find support in the system, the community will remain fractured. The whole
community needs to acknowledge the wounds of Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic youth and engage in a process of direct healing with compassion and empathy. The voice of youth exposes the flaws and highlights the strengths in the system. What good is a system if its clients can’t both take pride in self-learning while calling out the weakness or failures in empowering identity?

Taking pride in attending a Roman Catholic school was identified by some as resulting in the diversity of its student body and the freedom to expose one’s true self within schools. Yet, other youth were quick to highlight how they feel ‘safer’ in a Roman Catholic environment and responded fearfully to the level of diversity in the public schools. All the youth involved in this study suggested that there is a vision of segregation implying conflict in the public schools where youth groups battle each other more openly or forcefully than witnessed in the Roman Catholic system. The image of security or safety in the Roman Catholic system and yet not in the public system is disconcerting. Youth in the secular system are not void of religious identity; they are not raised or supported by different, distant communities. Yet, there is something within Roman Catholic school youth that suggested an imagined or perceived level of comfort and freedom that would not be felt in the public system.

The Roman Catholic system, however realistically more safe, provides this image of security and ease of segregated tension. Possibly the uniform assists with this image, masking diversity and in turn masking a fear of perceived difference as identified by and between youth. Yet, this perceived level of violence or confrontation between the public and Roman Catholic systems can also be an image that society nurtures: a visual image of good versus bad and all youth (and adults) regardless of race, faith, age or gender can be deceived and tricked into assigning identity based on image. Yet, the youth involved with this study did try and put forth that a sense of self identity that they would feel denied in the public system was afforded to them in Roman Catholic schools.

Most prominently presented in overall discussions with both Roman Catholic and the non-Roman Catholic youth in the Roman Catholic system was the freedom within schools to name individual identities and lived experience as valued and real. Roman Catholic schooling inspires and instills as a community a self-identify that is named under the lived experience of faith, gender, age, race, culture, language, ability and sexuality. By providing space for youth who take
pride in their faith identity, modern Roman Catholic secondary schools, by their very existence as equal publically funded institutions, are promoting a liberation theology as part of their foundational framework. For the youth of this research to clearly question and name their internalization of religion, religious beliefs and spiritual connections, as well as reveal the spirit injuries of which the system is responsible, exposes the strengths and weaknesses of not only the system, but the conviction to self-possess a respected and valued identity that each youth today is most desirous of naming and promoting within oneself. These youth are empowered by the ability to talk about their schooling experience and how it aligns or misaligns their sense of self in the past and present. The persistence of belonging to a community identified through a faith label implies an identity that most students appear to appreciate.

The youth compared their experiences in the Roman Catholic system to the non-denominational public system with a language that encompassed their understanding of schooling as “community.” They all felt connected to their space and place in their school community, regardless of their internal struggle to align with a spiritual faith identity that they could name. They implied a shared sense of goal expectation and routed inspiration in Roman Catholic education. They suggested that the separation of oneself from community in turn may fracture their identity, and the pursuit of valuable common goals. Without a human potential that moves to accept a need for community, there will be an implosion toward a fractured individuality combined with continuing spirit injury and self-devaluation. Educational communities need to nurture youth as reciprocal learners who receive and deliver knowledge which values self-identity and an identity in faith.

6.3 The importance of a spiritual identity

Many of the concepts and titles woven through this research, “faith”, “religion”, “spirituality”, have been coded and misused within language, so that no consistent definition or single understanding can be extrapolated from dialogue with youth. Although some youth noted the interwoven context of religion and spirituality as similar entities sharing many visions and common goals, it was the distinctions that afforded interpretation into how youth define their identity in faith. For them, faith is seen as a divine gift, and is expressed through different beliefs and expressions for every person, and typically works through community relationships. Faith is also shaped by the relationships we have with other people and this in turn shapes our identity.
Religion is what you do, such as charity work and social justice action, whereas spirituality is more broadly aligned with representing who you are and who you are becoming, and is a perspective or identity to work towards.

Both Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic youth are critical of religion and religious institutions. Although they are immersed in an environment that promotes a Roman Catholic culture as a “sacramental culture with a certain emphasis placed on signs and rituals that call to mind the immanence of God” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 58), youth struggle to confidently embrace and display with pride the ritual signs of the Roman Catholic religion. Younger youth offer that religion can be seen as the shell that encapsulates a personal faith or spirituality. Older youth challenge the connection of religion and spirituality, prompting a move away from history and into the modern era of unique and natural connections within faith.

The emphasis by some Roman Catholic theologians, such as Groome’s (2002) depiction of the Christian Story as a vocation that should be adopted by both Roman Catholics and Protestants toward becoming a unified community offering charity, “inclusivity and the openness of mind and heart” (p. 10), seems lost in the delivery to Roman Catholic school youth. Whereas Ignatius of Loyola, almost five hundred years ago, proposed that it is imperative to maintain the integrity of a unified identity that is spiritually Roman Catholic within shifting political and social identities, modern youth interpret a separation between Roman Catholic identity and spiritual identity. Especially for today’s Roman Catholic youth in Roman Catholic secondary schools there appears to be a fissure between today’s Church, the message being delivered in schools, and the reality of their existence in the community. Youth appear disillusioned with the historical context of Roman Catholicism to see beyond it and accept a spiritual identity that can still be proudly Roman Catholic. Yet the message in schools is not always one that nurtures a spiritual side to faith that is all-encompassing and holistic in body, mind and soul, as one that addresses the needs and evolution of youth who are negotiating identities in discursive and divisive environments.

For youth today, immersed in the dogmatic routine of Roman Catholic schooling, there appears to be a call to question the links between religion and spirituality. Some younger youth interpret the connection as mutually supporting their growth and development. Older senior students, having spent more time in the system, question the links between religion and spiritual faith. Just
as society has evolved to question the traditional institutions that have moulded and manipulated political and economic arenas, existing institutions need to evolve to accept and embrace the changes that could strengthen their identity in new and future generations. Adopting new names and titles is only reflective of superficial change. Systemic self-reflexive and dismantling action needs to be addressed toward breaking the stigma and dissention in educational communities.

Schooling communities, as communities in faith, need to embrace the sense of the spirit, both inside the human body and within the environment that humans occupy as parts of a whole community. Delivering knowledge is the basic role of all educators, but empowering youth to acknowledge and accept a spiritual self identity should also be a result of knowledge delivery in education. Using the lens of liberated spirituality to educate minds as active agents in self identity, youth can further embrace visions of an inclusive community identity. As youth identity forms within spacial parameters, a spiritual identity can support and nurture hope and value in lived and living experience. For schooling environments to take on this challenge of empowering respectfu\n
### 6.4 Spirituality as a valid way of knowing and resistance

The youth in this study equated an identity in faith with a sense of hope, peace and connection of personal spirit to one’s accepted space in the direct community and global network. The younger youth, although not as convicted, suggested that spirituality is something that grows with time and connection to faith, space and self-identity. The older youth embraced the concept of spirituality as a unique and personal form of internalizing, naming and wearing their faith. It was this ability to categorize within the self that youth were more apt to acknowledge within spirituality as opposed to that of Roman Catholicism.

Denominational faith, for some, was weighted down with oppressive history and language. It is with the sense of the spirit that an identity in faith can be free from persecution, marginalization and alienation. However, as society and Roman Catholic schools do not yet nurture, consistently,
a spiritual identity for those youth who identified with the concept as separate from a denomination identity, their need to resist naming it as something other than the spirit is constantly challenged. For those youth, they are caught between an archaic oppressive system that demands conformity and acceptance of the traditional beliefs of the Roman Catholic spirit and a modern, unoppressive, free-formed personalized concept of a living spiritual identity.

Resistance to conformity is prided by some youth through their uniform, their choice of friends, their body movements and language. Aligning with a non-conforming faith can be more discursively hidden, yet more emotionally and internally valued and cherished. For youth who demand the sense of spirituality in their routine, they resist with their lack of attendance at Sunday service, but by also choosing to attend the Roman Catholic over secular school system.

For educators, however, the vision of resistance is not so forthcoming. Educators are slow to recognize that the inability of youth to challenge them directly in class about church history or expand on dogma is a form of resistance to the traditional message, regardless of how untraditional some teachers may think they are delivering the message. Providing forums for youth to explore the sense of spirituality in individual spaces, while proudly acknowledging roots and routes, will empower the voice of youth and fend off the historically marginalizing tendencies of Roman Catholic schooling. When diverse ways of seeing and learning are understood and accepted within educational activities, teachers and students together can go one step further and begin to define the purpose of schooling:

> Hopefully, encounters with indigeneity will induce educators and their students to answer such a question in a way that keeps in mind issues such as cultural humility, a reconsideration of the meaning of development, reflections on identity formation and consciousness construction, and an awareness of the power of difference. (Semali & Kincehloe, 1997, pp. 46-47)

Education should pursue an agenda to teach all youth critical awareness skills, to increase perception toward asking relevant questions and to becoming intrinsically aware of self and of the world.

Religious knowledge is one frame of reference or lens that people use to make sense of the world, even though this form of knowledge often receives contempt, and religious schools are often considered sites of intolerance (Sweet, 1995). In Ontario, Roman Catholics have been both oppressor of Indigenous communities and oppressed by the Protestant majority. Yet just as
Deborah Post (1995) conveyed earlier how public perception firmly determines her racial identity because of blind judgment, Roman Catholics might argue that they are straight-jacketed into being rigidly oppressive Roman Catholics because the status quo does not understand the range in diversity, opportunity and multiplicity of this identity. The Roman Catholic Church, through its schools in Ontario, can provide a new lens of identification with an exposure of self that the province has not yet seen. The Ontario Roman Catholic school system could promote the level of diversity that currently exists within its schools to help expose their evolution toward an inclusive ecumenical approach to schooling and nurturing a positive school community. Roman Catholic theologians and educators in Ontario could self-reflect on their history of oppressor versus oppressed and transpose that history toward understanding how they continue to use a colonial empowered voice in their classrooms.

The adoption of this approach to school and schooling could be further supported and developed through a lens of liberation theology. As a form of viewing, engaging and reinforcing knowledge with youth, a theology of liberation would deliver learning and text through expression embracing the salvation of all of humanity, past, present and future (Webster, 2007). Liberation theology, as a way of life, would present to Roman Catholic school youth a doctrine to become the agents of their own destiny and to aid the poor and socially maligned as brothers and sisters, equal in their place of communal stewardship of the earth, much like loving one’s neighbour equates with loving God (Webster, 2007). For youth to engage learning through an anti-colonial lens, instructed in a message of liberation theology and nurtured with respect of a religious or spiritual identity, injured youth and privileged youth would heal and grow in schooling and school communities.

Questions of the spirit should be encouraged and pursued. Educational facilitators should advantageously influence the lives of today’s youth with provision of a legitimate voice and valued identity in a world that culturally bombards them and maligns their sense of self and sense of spirit. All schooling should work toward providing youth with an understanding of their place within the larger socio-political network, with a goal of fostering collective responsibility and large-scale ecumenism or unity within all levels of global society, beginning with the local community. Roman Catholic schools can redirect learning through fostering a modern sense of self that is valued and legitimate in name and faith.
6.5 The strength of community

Educational Roman Catholic communities across the province of Ontario are unified toward encouraging a positive, progressive and inclusive system by role-modeling Roman Catholic evangelization of its teachers and staff (ICE, 2006). Without direction of the powerful role of educator that is in tune with the systemic agenda of the institution, little success will come about toward maintaining a separate denominational existence. Therefore, the nature of knowledge production and acquisition in Roman Catholic schools must begin to discuss the inherent nature of power and privilege in education and the role of educators toward perpetuating colonial voices of paternal conformity. For Roman Catholic schools to act as foundational points within a community, which deliver quality education without inflicting spirit injury on the identity of youth, there needs to be a call upon all parents, elders and community representatives toward acting as a community-of-persons in spiritual faith with inclusive directives. It is dangerous, however, to imagine inclusiveness by imagining away the obstacles. All members of the Roman Catholic community must acknowledge the weakness and obstacles that lay in the path of respecting others in our classrooms and hallways. The populace should also recognize the strength that is already inherent in a Roman Catholic system that is attempting to offer an inclusive schooling environment. Students need to belong to a community working in unity. This unified community should provide a social justice framework accepting of difference, and relishing in one’s own sense of spirituality. With an acceptance of understanding and supporting spiritual inclusivity, educators should be in a position to expand their own continued learning, both professionally and personally, as spiritual beings themselves.

Community can also bond together to break the perceived image that youth and adults interpret as good or bad. Where the uniform masks diversity it also shrouds fear of difference. Communities need to embrace diversity and difference both in image and in identity as separate, exclusive, yet interwoven, sites of identity. To empower the individual will in turn empower the community and if that is a community in faith or spirituality, then that sense of self in the spirit will be free from the conformity of an identity that is Other. For communities to exist as such, a need to acknowledge equally the lived histories and identities of all those in the community should be nurtured as a spiritual-community-of-persons embracing a liberation from oppression, marginalization and discrimination.
6.6 Lessons to be learned

The unassuming nature of dissecting the evolution of Roman Catholic education does not come about easily, or as a neutral or value-free presentation outside of its own resistance to the larger society. The struggle of Roman Catholics toward establishing and maintaining their own school communities is a topic wrought in social and cultural politics. As a minority group in pre-Confederation Canada, Roman Catholics were publicly condemned by Protestants as the Other and were marginalized in mainstream society. Their schools were also sites of violence and assimilation under the guise of civilizing the masses. Roman Catholic schooling across Canada has historically held dual titles as both ‘oppressed’ and ‘oppressor’. Two hundred years after becoming entrenched in Ontario society, Roman Catholic schools are still sites of oppression and assimilation for the youth in their halls, while condemnation of the system continues in political, social and economic arenas throughout the province.

Youth are very wise in their articulation of experience, growth and connection in a faith-based system. Their points of view have not changed much since James Mulligan first interviewed Ontario Roman Catholic students in the late 1980’s. He suggested then that “the vision and philosophy that were part and parcel of the education charism of a religious community are rapidly disappearing in the Catholic high school” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 39). But, youth are reflective of all they learn and internalize from home, community and school. Without adaptation and an understanding of power, privilege and influence, schools and school communities will assume society’s role in weakening their hold on the populace, without admitting their own role in encouraging the weakness.

Martin Royackers (1988, p. 23) supports this train of thought with his demand that the work of Roman Catholic schooling should be directed toward providing youth with the skills to work within today’s world, and not so much through a lens of faith. Roman Catholic schools need to be communities of liberation, nurturing a strength in identity of spirit and spiritual identity. In an era of perpetual secularization, modern students do express the need for more meaning to their lives, and a need to be accepted and confident in their religious and/or spiritual beliefs. Roman Catholic and other religious schooling environments are not in err for continuing to exist, but they are in err for not evolving as society has evolved. Faith and having an identity that is
spiritual is important to today’s youth. To deny them that aspect of lived reality and personal history is not inclusive, equitable or accepting of difference or diversity in a pluralistic society.

For those researchers and academics who challenge aspects of human difference, and attempt to quantify faith outside of emotion or something ethereal, the words of youth should prompt reconsideration of whose needs are truly being served within the current systemic agenda of schooling. Religion and spirituality are real aspects of one’s identity, and for the time being the majority of the Toronto CMA population aligns with this reality. It is a fault of social science researchers to present social phenomena as structural forms, thereby downplaying the human element and dimensions of emotionality and intuition (Dei et al., 2002, p. 53). Youth find safety and security in a religious environment, and they find cognitive hope in their membership as having a valued identity in their community.

The connections between the Roman Catholic struggle toward equality and legitimacy in Ontario and the similar and parallel struggle of Francophone communities must not go unnoticed. Language-based educational delivery has also struggled just as long and forthright across historical French and Acadian Canadian communities. Funding and legitimacy have paralleled the Roman Catholic school condition, and in several cases has interwoven the conditions with the struggles of Roman Catholic Francophone schools. The persistent continuity by Roman Catholic and Francophone speaking communities to maintain their cultural and ethnic identity on all levels of society has been, and continues to be, very vocal across not only Ontario but the nation as a whole. The questions and dialogue raised here with research into youth identity in Ontario Roman Catholic secondary schools will likely open up further future debates on religion, language and ethnic challenges for all members of Ontario society.

Therefore, recommendations from this research would direct all educators, theologians, or social science researchers to learn to listen to youth, not just within the context of the discussion but the precise words and heartfelt meaning imbedded in dialogue. Language is the root of all power, control, resistance and freedom. Yet, the language of self-awareness and social justice is not exclusive to Roman Catholic schools. Both the Ontario public secular educational system and the Roman Catholic educational system, at their historical roots, are products of colonial knowledge production. Their text, connotation and implication are entrenched with assimilation and supremacy-laden doctrine, rituals and routines. The colonized indigenous and victimized voices
have been placed at the margins of obtaining access to equitable education and acceptance in the school systems of Ontario. The voices of the spiritual non-Roman Catholic students remain unrecognized as sources of valid and real ways of knowing and living in the separate system, while the voices of all faith-encompassed student identities receive little to no acknowledged presence in the secular system.

As religious or spiritual youth remain hidden in the public secular system, similar youth are manoeuvred by Roman Catholic control and dominance in the separate system. For non-Roman Catholic youth and their parents, they accept this sense of domination out of fear of being found out as different, and to avoid segregation or persecution. The essence of separate schooling is notable and positive in its attempt to create community and foster inclusivity as a system of difference. However, language, fear and ignorance still exist in the system and will ultimately lead to a breach of confidence in the extreme pluralistic society that is growing around the Toronto CMA. Changes need to come about both within the separate and secular systems toward, first and foremost, creating critical pedagogical standards that embrace faith identity as a legitimate and valid way of knowing oneself and representing oneself in all factions of life. For Ontario to take plurality and social equity seriously, an environment needs to be fostered that accounts for the needs of racial, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity in identity. Youth need to develop and nurture pride in their identity as unique and equally contributing individuals within their life community and as representatives of diverse faiths in their school communities. Space must be left for other interpretations, other voices and other lived knowledges to provide strength or challenges to the interpretations of modern Roman Catholic environments and envisions of marginalized facilitation. Without engaging in self-reflexivity and acknowledging the need for change in the basic theoretical framework toward decoding colonial supremacy, the Roman Catholic school system in Ontario could face serious challenges in the years to come.

As educational communities adapt and adopt an educational philosophy that embraces liberation and anti-oppression knowledge delivery and acquisition, youth in all schools can be further incorporated into research projects that continue to question the security and freedom of identifying with a religious or spiritual identity that is valued in society. It is the voice of youth that will be the strongest source toward understanding how religion and religious beliefs shift, evolve and erode as society progresses down a more liberal or alternative path. Broader philosophical conceptual implications of this work would entail tracking the change in faith-
based school/schooling opportunities for families and youth, both politically and socially, as our communities continue to expand with representatives of diverse religions, cultures, languages and races. Broader questions arise such as: How is youth identity of faith challenged or nurtured in faith-based or secular schooling environments?; Are schools acknowledging the role and importance of spirituality in schooling, knowledge production, and in claims of Indigenity and resistance in colonizing education?; Are our cultures today continuing to be threatened by the absence of community? These questions can be further expanded to continue providing voice to youth and in exposing the reality of religion and spiritual development or injury in schools and schooling.

The facts remain. Many of today’s youth do acknowledge religion and spirituality as an aspect of self-identity that is both valued and empowering. The diversity toward how and why that connection should exist, however, is unique and individualistic to everyone. Yet, the essence of language and the need to fit in for this generation of young people has become interwoven in epistemological ways of knowing and living for all youth today. However, those in Roman Catholic schools in particular, play a difficult game of juggling faith identity on top of all the other titles that get laden upon their bodies.

Identity definitions, in the way of race, class, gender, linguistic, sexual preference, ability and faith, are real and prescribed ways of knowing, as well as how one is perceived, accepted and or marginalized in schools and society. The Ontario school system needs to grow in its maturity toward acknowledging all of these sites of identity, within an equitable and inclusive framework built upon critical pedagogical methods and strategies. Morgan (2001) argues, “Legislation designed to foster innovative approaches to education and to resolve existing inequities simply cannot be permitted to calcify out of abstract and unsubstantiated fear” (p.72). Both the public secular and Roman Catholic separate systems need to acknowledge for whom the system was originally designed and how exclusive the existing system still is. Both systems need to address the plurality of their student populations and the communities in which they exist. Schooling today needs to be rebuilt embracing and promoting space for the voice of all diverse individuals who are investing their present and future in achieving a valued identity in Ontario society. Schools need to redesign knowledge production and acquisition in the twenty-first century, acknowledging that religion and spiritual identity are real aspects within oneself that deserve freedom of expression. Overcoming the fear of religious discussion and religious diversity in
modern society, and embracing the true direction of a theology of liberation have to be the first steps taken toward truly deconstructing the current educational system and reconstructing sincere inclusive schooling in Ontario.

For Roman Catholic schooling to proceed in the province of Ontario, it must separate its own validated identity from one that exists because of constitutional privilege. Roman Catholic schools need to perpetuate those principles that make them unique and justifiably valid in offering an alternative form of education that speaks to youth and community growth beyond the reality of the secular system. Roman Catholic schools should work beyond the approach of individualism, as a community of persons; “community” being the distinctive learning environment that makes everyone valid and empowered as parts of a whole. Roman Catholic schools need to acknowledge the words of their youth who are saying that Roman Catholic schools are safer places to grow and develop. However, equal time and attention must be paid to the fact that many Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic school students continue to hide behind the uniform, through peer alliance or accommodating the language and ritual of the Roman Catholic system, in an effort to hide their identity as Other.

Roman Catholic youth echo the words of some Roman Catholic theologians in that the language needs to change to accommodate a more liberal generation. Language needs to incorporate a spiritual dimension to accommodate the diversity of faith that is internalized with youth today. Overarching all of these revelations is that the Roman Catholic school system might offer an alternative to a secular system, but by the very nature of its colonial assimilationist routine, it will eventually drive its clientele away. The Ontario Roman Catholic school system needs to embark on self-reflexivity through an approach aligned with liberation theologians to thereby acknowledge its bias and historical position as oppressor within the defence of being oppressed. With these actions, the voices of our most valuable clients, the youth in schools, will continue to become empowered and valued as fully respected voices of identity from the past, in the present and for the future.
References


Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange* 17(4), 63-84.


Murphy, D. J. (2004). *Unity in our schools*. Toronto, ON: Catholic Registrar.


Murphy, D. J. (2002). *Catholic schools: the next challenge*. Toronto, ON: Catholic Registrar.

Murphy, D. J. (2001). *Catholic education at the crossroads*. Toronto, ON: Catholic Registrar.


Appendices

Appendix A

University of Toronto Ethics Review Committee Approval

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
Office of the Vice-President, Research and Associate Provost
Ethics Review Office

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #18743

December 20, 2006

Prof. George Dei          Ms. Terri-Lynn Brennan
Dept. of Sociology & Equity Studies in Educ. Dept. of Sociology & Equity Studies in
Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
of the University of Toronto of the University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West 252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6        Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Dear Prof. Dei and Ms. Brennan:

Re: Your research protocol entitled, “Spiritual Diversity in Modern Catholic Education: A
Case Study”

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: December 20, 2006
Expiry Date: December 19, 2007

We are writing to advise you that the Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to
the above-named research study, for a period of one year. Ongoing projects must be renewed
prior to the expiry date.

The following consent documents (revised November 30, 2006) have been approved for use in
this study: Letter to Homeroom Teacher, Parent/Guardian Consent Letter, and Letter to School
Administration. Participants should receive a copy of their consent form.

During the course of the research, any significant deviations from the approved protocol (that is,
any deviation that would lead to an increase in risk or a decrease in benefit to participants)
and/or any unanticipated developments within the research should be brought to the attention of
the Ethics Review Office.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Bridgette Murphy
Ethics Review Coordinator

xc: Prof. A. Cole (Chair, Education REB)
Appendix B

Letter to school board principals and chaplains requesting participation in research

Dear [representative school board] Principals, Chaplains and Guidance Dept. Administration Assistants:

I am sending this letter to introduce myself and to inform you of a research project I am hoping to pursue in your school. I am a student in the Sociology & Equity Studies Department at OISE/UofT pursuing my Doctorate of Education with a focus on the level of spiritual and religious diversity within [representative school board] Schools. I am also a full-time guidance counselor at [a school in the representative school board] and familiar with the level of diversity amongst our students first hand.

Of the 23 secondary schools within our board, I am looking for participation from 8 to 12 schools. Principals, Chaplains and Guidance Dept. Administration Assistants need to discuss the interest in having this research performed in their school. The Chaplain will be my liaison with the students and primary contact at your school. I hope to begin my research in December, 2006.

Within those participating schools I will request through guidance personnel a list of student numbers. From these student numbers, I will randomly choose 30 numbers, in which I will then contact guidance personnel to correlate those thirty numbers with student names. I will ask the Chaplain to distribute anonymous surveys to those thirty students through their home-room teacher. On the outside of those envelopes I will post a brief disclaimer to inform the homeroom teacher and student of the project, and to request that they return sealed envelopes back to the Chaplain within two weeks. After I have tabulated the survey information, I will then come to your school in the spring and conduct group interviews with two to four students from the thirty initially surveyed who represent a range in the diversity shown at your school. An attempt will be made to conduct a single interview that will take no longer than two to three hours. If a subsequent interview is needed, than this final interview will not exceed three hours. I will rely upon Chaplains to arrange for a safe and private setting for these interviews to take place.
As nothing like this has ever been conducted before within any Catholic board in the province, I am looking for more qualitative information to come out of the interview, as opposed to quantitative numbers from the survey. Hence, the numbers are low for participation. A maximum of 360 students will be surveyed and 48 students interviewed.

In the internal courier I will forward a copy of my full proposal, and the Research Application as reviewed by the [representative school board] Research Committee, and their approval letter to conduct the research. [The Director of Education], and the [Social Equity Officer], have both reviewed the proposal and personally passed on their approval. Once discussion has resulted in the approval to proceed or not proceed in your school at this time please inform me of your decision. I am requesting that you forward me a response no later than December 15th, 2006.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at your earliest convenience.

Thanks you for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Terri-Lynn Brennan, BA., BA. Honours, MSc., BEd.
Doctor of Education Candidate
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Department of Sociology & Equity Studies
12th Floor, 252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6
416-923-6641
Appendix C
Introductory/assent letter to students/families

Dear Ms. /Mrs. /Mr. ______________________________,

I am a student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, who is pursuing research into the level of spiritual development and religiosity within [representative school board] secondary school students and their families. I am also currently an educator within the [representative school board] Secondary School community. This research entails a survey and interview process of which both you and your daughter/son have been randomly selected to complete. The survey and interview questions are designed to investigate the nature and level of religious/spiritual development within [representative school board] youth. Spiritual development is in essence more of a holistic understanding and connection between oneself and ones environment, community and family, beyond one’s denominational faith or religion. Your personal participation and that of your daughter/son in this research will provide current understanding on issues of religion and spirituality in the Ontario separate school system. This evidence will then allow for further implementation of curricular and school-wide adjustments/changes toward ensuring the acceptance of spiritual diversity in all of our schools. This research also hopes to continue fostering a spiritual environment for today’s youth to grow and learn as prosperous members within a Catholic community, regardless of personal faith or denominational commitment.

Please find along with this letter a student survey and a parental survey. At the completion of each of the surveys there is a request of consent for your daughter/son to participate with a follow-up interview. Thirty students and families from your school have been randomly selected to complete the survey component. Only two to four students from those returned, completed and signed surveys will be requested to participate in the interview process. The interview will be conducted on school grounds, during school time, (preferably during lunch periods) in a secure environment as designated by the Chaplain and/or Principal of the school. An attempt will be made to conduct a single interview that will take no longer than two to three hours. If a subsequent interview is needed, than this final interview time will not exceed three hours. Therefore, the length of time your daughter/son will be involved in the interview process will be
no longer than six hours over a period of two to five months, depending how the rotation cycle of my visits to the participating schools. Interviews will begin in the spring of 2006.

The participation of your daughter/son as well as yourself is entirely voluntary. You or your daughter/son may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. As well, you or your daughter/son may decline to answer any of the survey or interview questions at any time. Please note that all interview answers and discussion will be recorded on an audio recording device. You or your daughter/son may refuse to such recording at any time. Refusal to participate in any aspect of this research will not jeopardize you or your daughter/sons relationship with school or school authorities in any way. If you have any questions in regards to the research process please contact myself, or the Ethics Review Office at the University of Toronto, 416-946-3273.

All information obtained from this research will respect the privacy and confidentiality of those participants. Tape recordings of the interview process will be made available to my academic supervisor, Dr. George J. Sefa Dei, Professor, Chair of the Department and Departmental Graduate Coordinator, Sociology & Equity Studies in Education, OISE/University of Toronto. However, the anonymity of the voices on the recordings will be ensured. All information obtained from either the survey or interview process will be held in the sole care of this researcher in a private facility. All names will continue to remain anonymous when the final thesis is submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, OISE/University of Toronto. A copy of the final thesis will be submitted to the [representative school board], and also be made available for publication. This information will be reported within a time-line of three years. The final thesis will then be made available for the general public either through the [representative school board] or the University of Toronto library system containing doctoral theses. All tape recordings will be held in the sole care of this researcher for up to a period of five years, at which time, the tape recordings will be destroyed to further maintain anonymity of all participants.

As the Chaplain will be the liaison between myself and the students involved, I respect that the Chaplain may act as a source of strength and support for those students who may have concerns about their participation in this research before, during or after their contribution. I will endeavor to ensure that the relationship between student and Chaplain is understood, while reaffirming that
the goal of this research is to strengthen or improve acceptance or respect for spiritual or religious diversity amongst and within youth in [representative school board] schools.

If you choice to participate in the survey process please place the completed documents back in the envelope and seal it before delivery back to your daughter/son’s homeroom teacher. If both you and your daughter/son have given consent for an interview a copy of the signed survey consent form will be presented to your son/daughter (if so chosen) at the time of the interview for their reference.

I appreciate the time you have given to consider this research and anticipate your survey comments. If you require further information please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Terri-Lynn Brennan, Ed.D. Candidate
Department of Sociology & Equity Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West – 12th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6
416-923-6641 x. 2499
Appendix D

Student survey

[Representative school board] Student Survey Questions & Informed Consent to Interview Participation Request

Note: All information is held in the strictest confidence and privacy.

All information gathered is strictly for the sole use the researcher.

Only answer those questions applicable to you.

You may choose not to answer any of the following questions.

Demographic Information (Please circle where applicable)

1. Name: ________________________________________________________

2. Gender: F M 3. Age or Date of Birth: _____________________________

4. Which school do you attend? ______________________________________

5. Grade: 9 10 11 12 Other

6. How many years have you been going to your present school? ______________

7. Denominational Affiliation:

   a. Adventist  i. Jewish  q. Christian (not included elsewhere)

   b. Anglican  j. Lutheran  r. Protestant (not included elsewhere)

   c. Baptist  k. Muslim  s. Other Religion

   d. Buddhist  l. Pentecostal  t. No Religious Affiliation/Agnostic

   e. Catholic  m. Presbyterian  u. Atheist

   f. Greek Orthodox  n. Salvation Army  v. Spiritual (not necessarily religious)

   g. Hindu  o. Sikh

   h. Jehovah’s Witness  p. United
Spiritual Questions (Please Circle or Write Your Answers Were Necessary)

8. Do you practice your denominational religion?  
   Y  N

9. Would you consider yourself a spiritual person?  
   Y  N

10. If you claim to be agnostic or an atheist, can you discuss this choice at home?  
    Y  N

11. If applicable, how often do you practice your religion at home:
    a. daily  b. 2-3 times a week  c. once a week  d. just at holiday’s

12. Is your religion/spirituality/agnosticism/atheism talked about at school?  
    Y  N

13. If applicable, how often is your religion/spirituality/agnosticism/atheism talked about at school:
    a. daily  b. 2-3 times a week  c. once a week  d. just at holiday’s

14. Is your religion/spirituality/agnosticism/atheism only talked about in religion class?  
    Y  N

15. Is your religion/spirituality/agnosticism/atheism talked about in other classes?  
    Y  N
    If so, which classes: ________________________________

16. Do you feel comfortable expressing your religious/spirituality/agnostic/atheistic views
    in your classes?  
    Y  N

17. Is your religion/spirituality/agnosticism/atheism talked about amongst your peers?  
    Y  N

18. Do you feel comfortable expressing your religious/spirituality/agnostic/atheistic views
    with your peers?  
    Y  N

19. Would you say that your religion/spirituality/agnosticism/atheism is treated with respect
    by school teachers, guidance counselors, vice-principals, principal, Chaplain?  
    Y  N

20. Would you say that your religion/spirituality/agnosticism/atheism is treated with respect
    by school peers?  
    Y  N

21. Do you spend free time at school with peers who share your religious/spirituality/
    agnostic/atheistic beliefs?  
    Y  N
22. Do you consider the amount of religious content delivered in your classes relevant?  Y  N

23. Are issues of spirituality, as issues separate from religion, discussed in classes?  Y  N

24. Do you consider the amount of time spent on retreat, attending mass, etc., sufficient?  Y  N

25. Would you be open to more religious or spiritual content in the classroom?  Y  N

26. Would you be open to more annual retreats, extended mass, etc., in the school year?  Y  N

27. Would you be open to attending your local public school if parents agreed?  Y  N

28. Could you be contacted further to participate in an interview process on the issue of spiritual needs in modern secondary school education?  Y  N

This research is a beginning point in which to look at the spiritual and religious diversity of the [representative school board]. The potential utility of this research is to provide the Ontario educational system with a better picture of religious or spiritual diversity in the Catholic school system. To help strengthen the data provided through the survey, I am requesting your participation in an interview with other students from your school. An attempt will be made to conduct a single interview that will take no longer than two to three hours. If a subsequent interview is needed, than this final interview time will not exceed three hours. Therefore, the length of time you will be involved in the interview process will be no longer than six hours over a period of two to five months, depending on the rotation cycle of my visits to the participating schools. Interviews will begin in the spring of 2007.

** If you consent to the interview process, please sign and date below:

NOTE: You will not be contacted if parental consent is not given on the accompanying survey.

_______________________________________  ______________________________
Student Signature                  Date

29. Can your participation in the interview process be recorded on an audio device?  Y  N

** If you consent to the recording of the interview, please sign and date below:

_______________________________________  ______________________________
Parent Signature                  Date

Thank you for your participation in the survey. Please return the completed surveys back in the envelope provided seal the envelope and return to your homeroom teacher.
Appendix E

Parent Survey

[Representative school board] Parent Survey Questions & Informed Consent to Interview Participation Request

Note: All information is held in the strictest confidence and privacy.

All information gathered is strictly for the sole use the researcher.

Only answer those questions applicable to you.

You may choose not to answer any of the following questions.

Demographic Information (Please circle where applicable)

1. Name: ______________________________________________________________________

2. Gender: F M

3. Age or Date of Birth: ______________________

4. How many years have you lived in [representative school board] region? ______________

5. Denominational Affiliation:

   a. Adventist
   b. Anglican
   c. Baptist
   d. Buddhist
   e. Catholic
   f. Greek Orthodox
   g. Hindu
   h. Jehovah’s Witness
   i. Jewish
   j. Lutheran
   k. Muslim
   l. Pentecostal
   m. Presbyterian
   n. Salvation Army
   o. Sikh
   p. United
   q. Christian (not included elsewhere)
   r. Protestant (not included elsewhere)
   s. Other Religion
   t. No Religious Affiliation/Agnostic
   u. Atheist
   v. Spiritual (not necessarily religious)
Spiritual Questions (Please Circle or Write Your Answers Were Necessary)

6. Do you practice your denominational religion? Y N

7. If you claim to be agnostic or an atheist, is this discussed at home? Y N

8. If applicable, how often do you practice your religion at home:
   a. daily    b. 2-3 times a week    c. once a week    d. just at holiday’s

9. How often do you or your family attend church or a place of worship?
   a. more than once a week    b. once a week    c. just at holiday’s    d. periodically    e. never

10. How important would you rank religion in your daily life? (please circle)
    4 = very important  3 = somewhat important  2 = rarely considered  1 = never considered

11. How important would you rank spirituality in your daily life? (please circle)
    4 = very important  3 = somewhat important  2 = rarely considered  1 = never considered

12. Why did you choose to send your child to a Catholic school?
    a. Spiritual presence in education
    b. Geographic distance
    d. Image associated with Catholic education is more ‘proper’, controlled
    e. Other: _________________________________________________________

13. Where you educated in a Catholic system? Y N

13. Would you still send your child to a Catholic high school if it became privatized or was not equally funded by your provincial tax dollars? Y N

14. Would you give consent for your son or daughter to participate in an interview process? Y N
This research is a beginning point in which to look at the spiritual and religious diversity of the representative school board. The potential utility of this research is to provide the Ontario educational system with a better picture of religious or spiritual diversity in the Catholic school system. To help strengthen the data provided through the survey, I am requesting the participation of your daughter/son in an interview with other students from their school. An attempt will be made to conduct a single interview that will take no longer than two to three hours. If a subsequent interview is needed, than this final interview time will not exceed three hours. Therefore, the length of time your daughter/son will be involved in the interview process will be no longer than six hours over a period of two to five months, depending on the rotation cycle of my visits to the participating schools. Interviews will begin in the spring of 2007.

** If you consent to the interview process for your daughter/son, please sign and date below:

_______________________________________  
Parental/Guardian Signature  
_______________________________________  
Date

15. Can your daughter/son participation in the interview process be recorded on an audio device?

Y  N

** If you consent to the recording of the interview, please sign and date below:

_______________________________________  
Student Signature  
_______________________________________  
Date

Thank you for your participation in the survey. Please return the completed surveys back in the envelope provided seal the envelope and return to your daughter/son’s homeroom teacher.
Appendix F

Student Interview Questions

Interview questions for [representative school board] students:

**Note:** *All information is held in the strictest confidence and privacy.*

*All information gathered is strictly for the sole use of the researcher.*

*Your anonymity will be maintained when this research is either published or discussed in the future.*

*Only answer those questions applicable to you.*

*You may choose not to answer any of the following questions.*

1. Who decided to send you to a Catholic school? (Do you know) Why? If it wasn’t your decision, why didn’t you object?

2. How is attending a religious-based school important or relevant to you? What is the role of religion or spirituality in your school/how does your school enforce Catholic ideals? How can your school make issues of religion or spirituality more important/relevant/exciting for you?

3. How would you define the difference between the terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’? How can someone be spiritual without being religious?

4. How was religion or spirituality important during your elementary years? How has this changed during your high school education?

5. What types of religious or spiritual activities do you engage or how do you display your religion or spirituality? What is most meaningful to you about religion or spirituality?
6. How many friends or acquaintances do you socialize with from other religious-based schools or the public/secular school system? How comfortable would you be in another religious-based school or the public school system? What do you see as different between your Catholic schooling versus other secondary schooling experiences?

7. How are you aware of non-Catholic students in your school (i.e., Muslim females wearing a head scarf/hijab, Sikh males wearing a sheathed sword/kirpan, Jehovah Witnesses not standing for the national anthem, etc.)?

8. What kind of racial, gender, class, ability, or sexuality issues are caught up with religious identities in your school? How comfortable are discussions of different religions between you and your peers? How casual or comfortable are religious, racial, class, sexuality, gender or ability discussions between students, teachers/administrators, and the Chaplain at your school?

9. If being resistant is described as someone who does not follow the status quo or someone who does not alter/deny their true identity to avoid conflict or confrontation by peers or teachers/administrators: How is religious or spiritual resistance noticeable at your school? How is religious or spiritual resistance hidden at your school?

10. How are students made to feel by peers, by teachers, by administrators, and the Chaplain, when they resist or challenge the status quo in a classroom or hallway’s of your school?

11. Is there anything else on the topics of religion or discrimination that we haven’t touched upon, yet you would like to share?
Appendix G

Introductory/assent letter to school board teachers/administrators

Dear [representative school board] Employee:

Thank you for participating in the interview process and for providing your honest opinion and experiences as a member of the [representative school board] community. These interview questions are designed to investigate further the nature of religious and spiritual development available to [representative school board] youth today. Your personal participation in this research will provide current understanding of religious and spiritual issues in the Ontario separate school system. The personal dialogue you provide will be used to assist the Catholic school system to continue accommodation and respect of the diverse and varied nature of spirituality and religion within its student population.

I want to reaffirm again that your participation is entirely voluntary and this research will respect your privacy and confidentiality. As part of protocol I will make my thesis text available to you for review prior to submission to the University of Toronto. If at that time, you feel that my understanding or interpretation of your comments or quote is misdirected you can request removal of said reference from the final product. You may, at that time, also enhance or qualify your comments to strengthen my research and analysis in the areas of expertise you provide.

My intended completion date is set for the spring of 2008. At that time I will offer my thesis to you for review. All names will continue to remain anonymous when the final thesis is submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, OISE/University of
Toronto. A copy of final thesis will be submitted to the [representative school board], and be made available for publication.

If you have any questions, please ask them. If you have any concerns or issues surrounding the questions or interview process in general please express them to me. I appreciate the time you have given to consider this research and anticipate your participation in the interview process.

Sincerely,

Terri-Lynn Brennan, Ed.D. Candidate
Department of Sociology & Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
12th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6
416-923-6641 x.2499
Appendix H

School board teachers/representative interview questions

Interview questions for [representative school board] staff:

Note: All information is held in the strictest confidence and privacy.

All information gathered is strictly for the sole use of the researcher.

Your anonymity will be maintained when this research is either published or discussed in the future.

Only answer those questions applicable to you.

You may choose not to answer any of the following questions.

1. How many years have you been active within the [representative school board] community (either as a student, parent or employee)?

2. If you were an employee before the 1997 government funding changes to open the doors of Catholic secondary education to all in the province of Ontario, have you noted any changes to student attitude, representation or diversity with that funding change? Or have you noted changes in students in other ways (specifically surrounding issues of faith) since that time?

3. How does your position directly engage issues of faith development or religious diversity with students, families or colleagues?
4. How enthusiastic are discussions of religious diversity by directors or administrative associates in the board office, your school or school community? What is the level of emphasis toward acknowledging, accepting, or promoting non-Catholics within the school board?

5. How often do you directly engage students or families that offer their affiliation to a non-Catholic faith? And, if applicable, usually under what circumstances, i.e., a student is discussing where they live or racial affiliation as the primary crux of a discussion, and their religion is offered as a secondary point.

6. As an educator either in the classroom or with youth through other avenues, how do you interpret the difference between Secular public education and Catholic education in the day-to-day workings of a school?

7. Does your position require direct interaction with a local priest? How would you describe the level of activity between your local parish and the school or administrative community you engage through your position?

8. Is there anything else on the topics of religion or discrimination that we haven’t touched upon, yet you would like to share?
Appendix I

Interview key words and code system

Coding for interviews

**Student**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S – Student Identity -</th>
<th>Coding text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.1 – Positive connections defining school identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.1.1 – relevancy..................................</td>
<td>accept, accepted, belong, include, inclusive, positive, solidarity, strong, unique, visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.1.2 – inspiration................................</td>
<td>cool, encouraged, meaningful, popular, respect, respected, self-esteem, strength, strengthen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.2 – Positive connections within group actions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.2.1 – relevancy..................................</td>
<td>celebration, comfortable, freedom, harmony, safe, secure, security, support, supported, supports, treat, treated, treats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.2.2 – inspiration................................</td>
<td>affection, celebrate, comfort, compassion, embrace, happy, inspire, inspired, interest, love, proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.3 – Negative connections defining school identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.3.1 – personal challenges......................</td>
<td>accommodate, insecure, hide, hides, uncool</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
S.3.2 – environmental subjectivity
aggressive, alienate, discriminate, ignorant, ignored, ignores, isolate, race, secluded, unnoticed

S.3.2 – systemic subjectivity
alienated, control, discrimination, hidden, marginalize, oppressed, oppressive, prejudice, racial, segregated, segregation, stereo-type

S.4 – Negative connections within group actions

S.4.1 – personal challenges
adapt, afraid, caution, defend, fear, frustrate, hard, hurt, insecure, mad, persuaded, questioning, resist, resisting, scared, struggle, teased, tolerate, uncomfortable, weak, weakness

S.4.2 – environmental subjectivity
bad, bullying, conflict, confrontation, discipline, disciplined, hostile, negative, pressure, rebellion, ridicule, tease, threat, threaten

S.4.3 – systemic subjectivity
assimilation, bias, brainwashed, conform, conformity, judge, judging, resistance
Religion/spirituality

R – Religion/Spirituality in Schooling

Coding text

R.1 – Personal Identity

R.1.1 – with religion.............................. Catholic, Christian, Muslim, non-Catholic, Sikh

R.1.2 – with spirituality........................... spirit, spiritual, spirituality

R.1.3 – with context................................. faith, public, private, religion, religious, secular

R.2 – Connections

R.2.1 – symbolism................................. Bible, church, cross, gospels, heaven, hell, parish, scriptures

R.2.2 – representation............................. Bishop, chaplain, clergy, God, Jesus, Mary, Pope, priest

R.2.3 – sacramentality............................ baptism, baptized, communion, confirmation, mass, pray, prayed, prays, retreats, worship
Environment

E – Environmental Influences on Religion/Spirituality - Coding Text

E.1 – Symbolism

E.1.1 – with image............................... choir, clothes, clothing, dialogue, fashion, media, message, music, nature, symbols, television, uniform

E.1.2 – with actions.............................. culture, environment, geography, joke, jokes, language, natural, rituals, social

E.2 – Sway

E.2.1 – on epistemology.......................... attitude, beliefs, believe, ethics, expectations, experience, identify, identifies, impression, moral, morals, practice, practices, taught, teach, teachers, value, values, worldview

E.2.2 – on ontology............................... conversion, diversity, homogenous, integrate, identity, identities, image, open, power, relationship, relationships, responsibilities, responsibility, voice

E.3 – Significance

E.3.1 – person..................................... aunt, brother, dad, family, friend, friends, kids, mom, parent, parents, peer, peers, sister, student, students, teacher, teachers, uncle, youth

E.3.2 – space....................................... class, course, home, school
Coding amalgamation for interviews (colour-coded at the time of analysis)

1) Positive influences/actions/emotions

(On identity) accept, accepted, belong, cool, encouraged, include, inclusive, inclusivity, meaningful, popular, positive, respect, respected, self-esteem, solidarity, strength, strengthen, strong, unique, visible

(On actions) affection, celebrate, celebration, comfort, comfortable, compassion, embrace, freedom, happy, harmony, inspire, inspired, interest, love, proud, safe, secure, security, support, supportive, supported, supports, treat, treated, treats

2) Negative influences/actions/emotions

(On identity) accommodate, aggressive, alienate, alienated, control, discriminate, discrimination, hidden, hide, hides, ignorant, ignored, ignores, insecure, isolate, marginalize, oppressed, oppressive, prejudice, race, racial, secluded, segregated, segregation, stereo-type, uncool, unnoticed

(On actions) adapt, afraid, assimilation, bad, bias, brainwashed, bullying, caution, conflict, confrontation, conform, conformity, defend, discipline, disciplined; fear, frustrate, hard, hostile, hurt, insecure, judge, judging, mad, negative, persuaded, pressure, questioning, rebellion, resist, resistance, resisting, ridicule, scared, struggle, tease, teased, threat, threaten, tolerate, uncomfortable, weak, weakness

3) Faith-based titles/categories

(Personal identity) Catholic, Christian, faith, Muslim, non-Catholic, public, private, religion, religious, secular, Sikh, spirit, spiritual, spirituality
(Connections) baptism, baptised, Bible, Bishop, chaplain, church, clergy, communion, confirmation, cross, God, gospels, heaven, hell, Jesus, Mary, mass, parish, Pope, pray, prayed, prays, priest, retreats, scriptures, worship

4) Neutral influences/actions

(Tangible) choir, clothes, clothing, culture, dialogue, environment, fashion, geography, joke, jokes, language, media, message, music, nature, natural, rituals, social [center] [justice], symbols, television, uniform

(Impressions) attitude, beliefs, believe, conversion, diversity, ethics, expectations, experience, homogenous, identify, identifies, identity, identities, image, impression, integrate, knowledge, moral, morals, open [minded] [access], power, practice, practices, relationship, relationships, responsibilities, responsibility, taught, teach, teaches, value, values, voice, world view

5) Community

aunt, brother, class (room), community, course, dad, family, friend, friends, home, kids, mom, parent, parents, peer, peers, school, sister, student, students, teacher, teachers, uncle, youth