

A 10-Year Retrospective of *Religious Education: An Interfaith Journal of Spirituality, Growth and Transformation*

Leona M. English, St. Francis Xavier University
Mario O. D'Souza, University of St. Michael's College
Leon Chartrand, University of St. Michael's College

Abstract: A content analysis of the journal Religious Education: An Interfaith Journal of Spirituality, Growth and Transformation was conducted for a 10-year period between 1993-2002 (Volume 88, 1—Volume 97, 4). A total of 325 articles (277 authors) were analyzed into 3 primary research directions (theoretical, qualitative and quantitative). Author institutional affiliation, religious identity, position, geographic location, and number of contributions were also computed. Implications for the Journal and the field of religious education are discussed.

Journal articles are the usual measure of progress, areas of interest, and quality of research in a field of study. Articles in refereed journals such as *Religious Education: An Interfaith Journal of Spirituality, Growth and Transformation* have been through a double-blind review process and screened by the editor, and as such ought to reveal the state of the current research in the field. *Religious Education* is in its 97th volume and as far as we can determine, an article has not been published, at least in the last 20 years, in which the journal contents have been analyzed. Our paper is an attempt to address this lacuna and in so doing, contribute to the scholarly direction of the field of religious education.

A review of the journal *Religious Education: An Interfaith Journal of Spirituality, Growth and Transformation* was conducted for a 10-year period between 1993-2002 (Volume 88, 1—Volume 97, 4). A total of 325 articles (277 authors) were analyzed into 3 primary research directions (theoretical, qualitative and quantitative). Author gender, institutional affiliation, religious identity, position, geographic location, and number of contributions were also computed.

Routine content analysis of key journals is a constant in most areas of education. Take for example the published research in *Career Development Quarterly* (Buboltz & Savickas, 1994), the *Adult Education Quarterly* (Blunt & Lee, 1994) and *Studies in the Education of Adults* (Hayes, 1992; Hayes & Smith, 1994). Content analysis helps in identifying themes, main research methodologies, institutional affiliation and gender of contributors, research interests of scholars in the field, and changes in research direction over time. Our intent in gathering the information reported in this article is to help in setting publishing policy and new scholarly directions for the field of religious education.

Background Information on *Religious Education*

The journal which is reviewed here was known as *Religious Education* up until the subtitle *An Interfaith Journal of Spirituality, Growth and Transformation* was added in 94 (1). The Journal has had a range of editors including Henry F. Cope, Frank G. Ward, Clifford Manshardt, Laird T. Hites, Joseph Artman, Leonard Stidley, Paul H. Vieth, John Westerhoff III, Jack D. Spiro, and Randolph Crump Miller (longest serving editor, term from 1958-1978). During the 10-year period that this paper covers, Hanan Alexander (then of University of Judaism, Los Angeles, CA) was editor for volumes 88 (1) up until Theodore Brelsford (Emory University, Atlanta) became editor in 96 (1). This Journal is sponsored by the Religious Education Association (REA) and the Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education (APRRE), both North American ecumenical and interfaith bodies.

We have chosen this journal because it is ecumenical (not single denomination or religion), peer-reviewed (not editor-reviewed only), and intended to be a vehicle for publishing religious education research only (as distinct from journals that include religious education, theology, and pastoral concerns, or some combination thereof). We were unable to identify another religious education journal in North America that met these criteria. We did not include book reviews in our analysis.

Policies of *Religious Education*

This journal has a policy of having all papers reviewed by at least two external blind reviewers before the paper is accepted (personal communication with T. Brelsford). The review board of the journal is selected by the editor and

is representative of denominational and religious traditions, as well as academic and research strengths. During the 10 year period under review, the Journal, with few exceptions (in volume 90, issues 3 and 4 were combined), published 4 times per year, with one issue per year being devoted to selected conference papers. Each of the 39 issues had a theme title (for 3 of the 4 issues, the theme was identified by editor), and the conference theme was used for the issue that contained conference papers (the theme was selected by APRRE's president). This pre-identification of themes makes it difficult to analyze what the main themes are in the research, since the titles and topics often follow the suggestions given, yet some effort was made to do this.

In the case of the annual conference issue, the call for papers committee from the annual conference of the Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education is constituted as an ad hoc review panel and makes decisions on which conference papers will be published in that special issue. The issue dedicated to conference themes varies between issues 2 and 3 in any given volume year. The conference issues were 88 (3); 89 (2); 90 (2); 91 (3); 92 (2); 93 (3); 94 (3); 95 (3); 96 (3); 97 (3). In some cases, it was difficult to determine which issue was the conference issue since this was not always clearly indicated.

Methodology

The usual procedure for conducting a content analysis is to follow the methods used in previous content analyses of that journal. The new results can then be compared with prior results to identify trends and changes. We were unable to identify any such study of this Journal and for that reason we devised our own schema or categories of analysis. We chose to look for the following: information on authors, themes pursued in the research, and intended audience. A graduate student was employed to conduct the analysis.

Results

During the past 10 years, *Religious Education* has published a total of 325 articles (Volumes 88-97). As shown in Table 1, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of articles per volume with Volume 88 (issues 1-4 combined) containing 45 articles and volume 97 (issues 1-4 combined) containing 21. Although, there has been variation over time, the general trend is toward fewer articles.

Table 1: DISTRIBUTION OF ARTICLES/VOLUME

# Articles	Volume	Year
21	97	2002
37	96	2001
28	95	2000
27	94	1999
28	93	1998
31	92	1997
41	91	1996
29	90	1995
38	89	1994
45	88	1993
325		

Contributors

The names of contributors have been identified from each of the 325 articles. In total, there were 277 authors. Contrary to the usual content analysis practice of using a weighted system to count authors (e.g., 1 point for single authorship, ½ point for joint authorship, 1/3 point for triple authorship) we have given a full point to every author. No distinction was made among first and second and third authors, that is, no additional weight was given for being first author. Our practice works counter to the traditional strategy of devaluing collaborative work.

Table 2: Ranked Contributions, Volumes 88-97

277 Different Authors in 325 articles

# Articles	Author Name	# Collaborations
5	Wenh-In Ng, Greer Anne	0

4	Cram, Ronald H	0
4	Francis, Leslie J	2
4	Seymour, Jack	3
3	Boys, Mary C	2
3	Breaux Veverka, Fayette	0
3	Brelsford, Theodore	0
3	Crain, Margaret Ann	2
3	English, Leona M	0
3	Feiman-Nemser, Sharon	2
3	Hess, Mary E	0
3	Hinds, Mark	0
3	Ingall, Carol K	0
3	Miedema, Siebren	1
3	Mullino Moore, Mary Elizabeth	0
3	O'Brien, Maureen R	0
3	Proffitt, Anabel	0
3	Roebben, Bert	0
3	Siejik, Kate	0
3	Smith, W. Alan	0
3	Streaty Wimberly, Anne	0
3	Whelan, Winifred	0
3	Yob, Iris M.	0
2	<i>36 Authors</i>	
1	<i>218 Authors</i>	
<hr/>		
Total	277 Different Authors	

Table 3 shows the breakdown of authors by the country from which they are writing. Obviously, to anyone who knows the Journal and the contributors, it will be no surprise that the authors are primarily from North America. Some 76.9% identify themselves as being from the United States. Although there are some UK contributions (4.9%), these are limited. Similarly, the composite of international contributions is small.

Table 3: Geographical Region of Primary Author

	Number	Percentage
North America (268)		
<i>US</i>	250	76.9%
<i>Canada</i>	18	5.5%
Europe (27)		
<i>UK</i>	16	4.9%
<i>Not UK</i>	11	3.4%
Australia	7	2.2%
Other	20	6.2%
Unspecified	3	0.9%
	325	100.0%

We thought it useful to compare these statistics to the APRRE membership in 2003. According to the APRRE membership list (correspondence with Randy Litchfield, executive secretary) there are 304 members, 262 of whom are from the United States (see Table 3a).

Table 3a: APRRE MEMBERSHIP BY REGION

Region	Number	Percentage
North America (285)		
<i>US</i>	262	86.2%
<i>Canada</i>	23	7.6%
Europe (10)		0.0%
<i>UK</i>	1	0.3%
<i>Not UK</i>	9	3.0%
Australia	3	1.0%
Other	6	2.0%
	304	100.0%

A comparison of both tables (Table 3 and 3a) will show that the Journal contributors are generally from the same places as the members.

Gender Distribution for all Authors and Primary Authors, Volumes 88-97

One marker of a good journal is the degree to which it publishes and represents the work of women in the field. From Table 4 we see that *Religious Education* has published 40.8% females and 57.3% males (in 1.9% of the cases, the sex of the contributor was difficult to determine from the name). The 2003 APRRE membership list is somewhat more gender balanced. There are 130 men and 159 women (plus 15 whose sex is unknown). The gender breakdown on the APRRE membership list would suggest that women might contribute more to the Journal but this did not happen.

Table 4: Gender Distribution for 325 Articles

Gender	# Contributing Authors	% Contributors Authors	# Primary Authors	% Primary Authors
Female	148	40.8%	133	40.9%
Male	208	57.3%	184	56.6%
n/a	7	1.9%	8	2.5%
	363	100.0%	325	100.0%

Institutional Affiliation

We asked also which institutions are supporting the Journal, and which scholars are trying to keep the Journal alive and flourishing. Table 5 shows that Boston College is the lead institutional contributor, with Claremont School of Theology and Union Theological Seminary following behind. This result may be in part because of the doctoral programs that these schools sponsor.

Table 5: Top Contributing Institutions based on Primary Author's Affiliation

# Articles	Institutional Affiliation of Primary Author
10	Boston College
8	Claremont School of Theology
8	Union Theological Seminary
7	Bar Ilan University
5	Duke Divinity School
5	Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology
5	Gonzaga University
5	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
5	Lancaster Theological Seminary
4	Australian Catholic University
4	Fordham University
4	Loyola University of Chicago

4	University of St. Michael's College
4	Villanova University
3	Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
3	Columbia Theological Seminary
3	Florida Southern College
3	Free University of Amsterdam
3	Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary
3	Interdenominational Theological Center
3	Jewish Theological Seminary in America
3	Michigan State University
3	Princeton Theological Seminary
3	Saint Paul School of Theology
3	St. Bonaventure University
3	St. John's University
3	Stanford University
3	University of Wales
3	Wheaton College

Employment Positions

A common belief in religious education circles is that this Journal is intended for junior scholars in the field. Table 6 shows that faculty members contribute most to this Journal (86.5%). Among the faculty, full professors and professors emeritus also contribute to the journal, despite a perception that only junior scholars make research contributions in article format. Of the contributors, 71 out of 325 were at the full professor or professor emeritus level (25% of total).

Table 6: Professional Title of Primary Authors

Title	Number	Percentage
Faculty (281)		
<i>Prof/Prof Emeritus</i>	71	21.8%
<i>Assoc Professor</i>	62	19.1%
<i>Asst Professor</i>	62	19.1%
<i>Instructor</i>	15	4.6%
<i>Other (faculty related)</i>	71	21.8%
Pastor	11	3.4%
Student	14	4.3%
Other (non-faculty related)	19	5.8%
	325	100.0%

Obviously, most contributions are received from faculty. The low number of articles (4.3%) from students suggests that the Journal should encourage more research from students. To have senior researchers represented in the Journal is important, but to have students is equally important.

The Target Audience

We tried to find out in this study if the writers were directing their writing to any one religion or denomination. Our analysis in Table 7 shows that most contributors were writing to satisfy the needs of a general Christian audience (51.4%). We have separated Catholic from Christian for the purposes of this study.

Table 7: Primary Religious Emphasis of Articles

Religion	Number	Percentage
Catholic	38	11.7%
Protestant	167	51.4%
Jewish	41	12.6%

Muslim	2	0.6%
Hindu	0	0.0%
Buddhist	1	0.3%
Inter-religious	31	9.5%
Other	7	2.2%
Unspecific	38	11.7%
	325	100.0%

There were a number of writers who did not direct their writing to any group (11.7%) and there were a number who directed their work to a general Christian audience (51.4%). Those writing for an inter-religious audience were low in number (9.5%), as were those writing for the Jewish or Muslim audiences.

Of even more interest is the educational level to which the writing is directed (Table 8). To the degree that it was clear, we were able to identify that 50.8% of the articles have no specific educational audience in mind. Most of the articles were of a general nature and were not directed to any one audience. This suggests that most writers were either unconcerned about the audience or they wanted to appeal to a general audience. This data may be reflective of the many and varied audiences in North America and the reality that religious education writers work at different levels, ranging from philosophical and theological to practical. This finding becomes a little problematic when one considers that the Guidelines for Contributors to the Journal specifically name the venues or audiences for whom the contributor might write—“education in houses of worship, schools, informal programs, and institutions of higher learning involving adults, youths, children, and families.”

Table 8: Educational Level Target

Educ. Target	Number	Percentage
Schooling	77	23.7%
University	20	6.2%
Graduate	24	7.4%
Adult	35	10.8%
Unspecific	165	50.8%
Other (fem)	4	1.2%
	325	100.0%

Research Methods

Educational researchers generally distinguish between research journals and professional journals. Research journals are those that report original research in which the methods, strategies, data collection, analysis methods and sources are clearly indicated. Original research would apply to research strategies as diverse as historical, textual analysis, or qualitative research. Professional journals are those that contain opinion pieces, essays, or no clearly delineated research methodology. Because so few of the articles in this Journal, at least for the 10-year period under review, contained any statement of research method or purpose, the delineation of specific research categories was difficult to determine in most cases. Therefore, we chose to focus on the amount of theoretical (loosely defined as anything that was not empirical) and empirical research, both qualitative (usually data collected from interviews, focus groups or observations) and quantitative (usually data collected from surveys or statistical analysis) that is published in the Journal. The data in Table 9 show that for the 10-year period under discussion (1993-2002) 87.1% of the research in this journal has been theoretical in nature. This is somewhat problematic given that upwards of 60% of the research in most education journals is empirical.

Table 9: Type of Research in Articles

Type	Number	Percentage
Theory	283	87.1%
Qualitative	16	4.9%
Quantitative	26	8.0%
	325	100.0%

Collaborative Work

Social scientists often work collaboratively to do research and publication, whereas humanities scholars often work alone. Given that at least one line of thought is that religious education is a social science, we thought it important to find out the degree to which this Journal published collaborative work. We found that 90.5% of the work published in this journal is single authored, and that the rate of collaboration is low (9.5%) (see Table 10 and Table 2). The number one collaborative author is Jack Seymour.

Table 10: Multiple Authors per Issue

	Number	Percent
1 Author	294	90.5%
2 Authors	23	7.1%
3 Authors	7	2.2%
4 Authors	0	0.0%
5 Authors	1	0.3%
Total Articles	325	100.0%

Themes

According to the Guidelines for Contributors, this Journal covers the following list of topics: educational theory, theology, and education; tradition and trends; policy and practice; models and methods; moral, value and character education; sacred texts; and the spiritual, cultural and social issues in education. This varied menu of topics is reflective of our field's inability to define itself, even in the most general way. Diversity of views on what ought to be included in religious education is reflected in the terms used to describe this field of study. Some researchers use the term "religious educator" deliberately, realizing that terms such as "catechist," "Christian religious educator," "Christian educator," and "religious instructor" could also be used, but not with the same meaning (see Groome, 1980, pp. 23-26; Lines, 1992, pp. 10-14). We can see this variety represented in the themes in the Journal, especially when the extremes of the field's boundaries are used (note the theme issue on child abuse 89, 4).

Nevertheless, we began by examining all the 39 issues by the themes given to them, either by the president of APRRE or the editor of the journal; clearly all of the topics from the Guidelines have been addressed in one form or another. Yet, this did not tell us enough about the actual content of the issues. So, we decided to categorize all 325 articles using the 7 categories listed in the Guidelines. Given the lack of systematic reporting, looseness of structure, it was difficult to do this in any more than a very general way. The findings are given in Table 11.

Table 11: Distribution of Articles by Educational Topic

Topic	Number	Percentage
Educational Theory	51	15.7%
Models & Methods	90	27.7%
Moral, Value, Char Educ	11	3.4%
Policy & Administration	4	1.2%
Spiritual, Cultural, Social Issues (87)		
<i>Article without "spirituality" in titles</i>	72	22.2%
<i>Articles with "spirituality" in title</i>	15	4.6%
Sacred Texts, Scripture	6	1.8%
Tradition	76	23.4%
	325	100.0%

Obviously, there is a noticeable absence of research or debate on public policy. Given that a number of contributors are from Canada, Australia and the UK, where there is at least some degree of state sponsored religious education, it is surprising that more attention has not been given to policy issues. There is also a noticeable absence of attention to moral, values and character education, as well as to Sacred Scripture.

Over the 10-year span, the Journal concerned itself with a number of social issues, which generally have been recorded in the section Spiritual, Cultural and Social Issues, though they are not confined to this category. Some of

these issues are globalization, literacy, racism, holocaust, social toxicity, ecology, child abuse, parenting styles, business ethics, AIDS, bullying, disbelief, multiculturalism, pluralism, gun war, and violence. Leaving aside the question of whether there was an educational, or even a religious educational, focus to these articles (there often was not), one wonders what the selection of these issues says about the world view of our field: is it primarily negative? Is our stance primarily reactive?

Issues for Discussion

The 97-year history of *Religious Education* is an indication of its enduring value and the esteem in which it is held. The fact that it is the only multi-denominational and interfaith, refereed journal devoted solely to religious education in North America also makes the Journal significant for the field. Yet, there are a number of issues arising from the data, which we believe to be relevant to the long term viability and relevance of the Journal. To begin with, the Journal is doing very well on several counts. It has been successful in including women and men in its list of authors, and it has also published a number of collaborative works, certainly more than many theology journals. *Religious Education* has been successful in consistently publishing four issues per volume and of ensuring that the research presented at the annual conference of APRRE is considered for publication. The decline in the number of papers per issue is another point in favor of the Journal. The latter point indicates that there is closer scrutiny of the research and that the Journal is being more selective in what it publishes.

The Journal has been a vehicle for authors and researchers from North America to write, publish, and have their work refereed by other scholars. Books, the mark of scholarship for academic studies in the humanities, often are not refereed, and because of the amount of time for preparation and publication, generally do not report cutting-edge scholarship or research. Therefore, refereed journal articles are important for all scholars in the field, regardless of professorial level or publication record. The high incidence of contributions from some institutions in religious education research, and from all levels of the professoriate, shows a commitment to these standards and to the challenge of rigorous academic work in the field. This is to be commended and encouraged.

Yet, there have been challenges. Given the open-ended guidelines for submission, the resultant articles and abstracts often do not make the research methodology clear, nor do they make the sources and the data apparent to the reader. It is very difficult to distinguish essays from research reports, and from perspectives pieces; furthermore, the Journal categories of Forum, Research and Practice are not consistently used. To strengthen the Journal we recommend the listing of keywords for each article, and a higher level of clarity of purpose, sources, and findings in the abstracts. As well, the conference issue needs to be more clearly noted.

Although there are repeated names in the author list and some authors have published a great deal in the journal, it is obvious that there are many missing voices. Doctoral students are not well represented in these research findings, nor are some of the more recognizable academics in religious education. While it might be argued that many professors are busy writing books in denominational presses, it could also be argued that the field needs these professors to contribute articles as well, and to go through the refereed process to ensure that their work is constantly vetted and held to the same standard as other scholars. We encourage those who have not published recently in this Journal to consider it as a future venue.

Finally, the paucity of empirical work in our field as reflected in this Journal, is of concern. One wonders how we can continue as a field if we do not work on the cutting edge and keep pace with those doing general educational research. In privileging theoretical or thought pieces in our field, we run the risk of not asking important questions of practice. Will religious education continue to speculate on what it might be or can the field use the tools of the social scientist to investigate what is, in our schools, graduate centers, and congregations?

We invite responses and commentary to our article.

References

Blunt, A., & Lee, J. (1994). The contribution of graduate student research to *Adult Education/Adult Education Quarterly*, 1969-1988. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 44 (3), 125-144.

Buboltz, W. C., & Savickas, M. L. (1994). A 20-year retrospective of the *Career Development Quarterly*. *Career Development Quarterly*, 42: 367-381.

Groome, T. (1980). *Christian religious education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*. HarperSanFrancisco.

Hayes, E. (1992). The impact of feminism on adult education publications: An analysis of British and American journals. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 11 (2), 125-138

Hayes, E. R., & Smith, L. (1994). Women in adult education: An analysis of perspectives in major journals. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 44 (4), 201-221.

Lines, T. A. (1992). *Functional images of the religious educator*. Birmingham AL: Religious Education Press.