

The Melbourne Scale

Based on the work of Professor Lieven Boeve, the Melbourne Scale identifies four school 'types' or options in the context of today's secular, pluralist culture where connection with long established Christian traditions and foundations is increasingly being lost. These 'schools' are theoretical and do not necessarily exist in pure form. The descriptions identify tendencies that may be found in an actual school or in individual views about the way a school should operate in today's culture. Elements of all 'types' may be found in a particular school with one, or more, type dominating. These types have been called Institutional Secularisation, Institutional Reconfessionalisation, Values Education in a Christian Perspective and Recontextualisation (Identity formation in a plural context). In the survey participants indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements that correspond with the different types. There are two sets of questions: factual (what my school is like) and normative (how I'd like my school to be).

Institutional Secularisation

This 'type' of school has become completely immersed in the surrounding secular culture. It has lost, or is in the process of losing, its connection to the Catholic Tradition. The school's Catholic ideas, beliefs and values expressed in rituals, practices, structures and symbols are disappearing or have been rejected. Normative statements (how I'd like my school to be) for this category included:

- I'd prefer to go to a school where Christianity isn't too obvious.
- Religion doesn't belong at school.
- In the type of school I'd prefer, classes of religious education, prayers, sacraments and Eucharistic celebrations would be abolished.
- My ideal school is a neutral institution in which neither Christianity nor any other religion is of any real importance.

Institutional Reconfessionalisation

This 'type' of school is seen as a Catholic counter-cultural haven set apart from and, in some cases, actively rejecting the surrounding culture. Its operations are marked by deliberate strategies that reinforce and strengthen the school as a 'Catholic club'. Normative statements (how I'd like my school to be) for this category included:

- I'm all for the traditional Catholic way of life being actively promoted at school.
- Students whose knowledge of the Catholic faith is poor should be taught so that this is addressed.
- I long for a school that wants to be purely Catholic again, just like old times.
- We must ensure that schools that are traditionally Catholic, remain so in the future.

Values Education in a Christian perspective

This school 'type' emphasises values and norms that are commonly shared by the general population. The Catholic/Christian inspiration for these values may not be emphasised. An emphasis is placed on ethics, 'doing good', and this may lead to a 'flattening' of the Catholic faith into no more than a (commonly shared) morality. Normative statements (how I'd like my school to be) for this category included:

- My ideal school shapes its Christian school identity in the first place by striving to have all school members relate to one another in a moral way.
- The common basis for Catholic school identity may be formed by 'Christian values', shared by everyone.
- My ideal school promotes an ethical way of life, because this is the way for students to discover God in their lives.
- My ideal school wishes to offer its students a Christian moral education. Hopefully the students discover the Christian faith that way.

Recontextualisation (Identity formation in a plural context)

This theoretical 'type' of school rejects neither the Catholic tradition nor the surrounding culture. The school's goal is to bring the Catholic tradition and the secular culture into dialogue. The school accepts the plurality that exists within its population as a gift and opportunity to enrich its identity while, at the same time promoting and presenting the riches of the Catholic church's teaching, tradition and culture as an invitation to dialogue and an aid to identity formation. Normative statements (how I'd like my school to be) for this category included:

- My ideal school would demonstrate its Catholic identity by its endeavour to have people with different philosophies of life work together towards a future that's good for all.
- I'm all for a Catholic school that considers the present-day religious and cultural diversity as an opportunity to learn what it means to be really Christian today.
- My ideal Catholic school views the religious diversity of its students as a positive challenge and a source of inspiration for a renewed Christian profile, adapted to our time.
- My ideal school is a Christian school that tries to express Jesus' message of faith, hope and love in the contemporary context.

The Confessional School

This school type or category is included only in the factual (what my school is like) statements to assist in identifying confessional structures that remain in place or are not seen as problematic or in conflict with the secular and pluralist cultural context. Since the option to actively promote a school's confessional identity is already covered by the reconversion school type, this option (passive confessionalism) is only included on the factual level. Factual statements (what my school is like) for this category included:

- Just like in the past, my school still assumes that the Catholic faith is practised by most of its members.
- My Catholic school still feels connected to the Roman Catholic Church in Australia, just as it always has.
- In my school it has always been considered normal that celebrations of the Eucharist take place frequently, and today this still is the case.
- Most of the following items are considered fairly normal at my school: crosses on the wall, classes in religious education, celebrations of the Eucharist at school, a morning prayer, praying before meals, school catechesis, a priest who's present in the school.