

Article

Give Them Time to Ponder

Anne-Marie T Irwin 

School of Education, The University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney, NSW 2007, Australia;
anne-marie.irwin@nd.edu.au

Abstract: The current educational climate poses challenges for both the educator and learner when it comes to deep learning. A significant part of the solution lies in providing both time and space wherein a deep learning can occur, despite the challenges. After situating the SALT Approach (acronym for Scripture and Liturgy Teaching Approach), progressing from its doctoral study roots, the paper unpacks ways that the SALT approach harnesses time to facilitate deep thinking. The pedagogical ways discussed can also be adapted for use across the curriculum, as the ‘toolbox’ of ideas in the final section of the paper summarizes elements that can facilitate a classroom climate and setting leading to peace and productivity in the learning space.

Keywords: the SALT approach; time; pondering; wondering; Montessori; Cavalletti; spiritual

1. Introduction

Poverty of time to ponder poses challenges for humanity. In today’s climate, opportunities to ponder are frequently stripped away. Moments of external silence are increasingly rare. Life appears rushed. Shopping happens in busy, noise-filled environments and traveling is accompanied by headphones and electronic devices to distract and occupy. Silence is a rare commodity. Yet external silence opens the way to inner quiet. Inner quiet facilitates thinking. This can become pondering. Pondering can lead to wonder, and wonder can lead to awe (Büssing et al. 2021; Caranfa 2003). Awe is an experience unique to human beings. It manifests in a sense of joy and peace, and in the experience of love (Ratzinger 2007).

In the Christian context of religious education, a student who ponders the theological knowledge grows in the understanding of that knowledge. At the same time, the spirit is nurtured in a Christian sense. Indeed, the Christian anthropological understanding of the human person is that the person is endowed with intellect and free will, capable of knowing and responding to a personal God. The task of the Catholic school is to provide opportunities for children to experience this (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, §30, §33, §102, §105). Relevant church documents point to the need to foster in the child an intimate communion with Jesus Christ (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, §79–82).

Montessori supported this understanding when she recommended that the teacher’s task was to facilitate circumstances and conditions wherein a child can find God and respond to Him, and to respect the child’s nature with regard to supernatural life. (Montessori 1965). Cavalletti also observed that the child is intuitively attracted towards God and that this encounter brings joy (Cavalletti 2002). Fostering this living relationship was her focus in developing the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (Cavalletti 1983).

In her recent publication, Robinson (2022) explored the connection between pondering and wondering. While wondering is so much deeper than pondering, the two are intimately connected. Robinson cites Kessler’s (2000) study in which the importance of silence in the quest for meaning and purpose is emphasized, leading to joy, wonder, and delight. Robinson also refers to the CEO Rockhampton study (2012) indicating the need to provide opportunities for children to wonder and ask ‘big questions.’ She concludes:

‘Further research that explores the promotion of wonder in early childhood through a spiritual lens, can add to the findings from this investigation to explicate



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the gaps that exist in current practice in relation to facilitating wonder as a pedagogical practice,' and that '[her] research brings wonder to the forefront of discourse on children's spirituality.' (pp. 172–73)

This article is a response to Robinson's proposals. It explores the aspect of recognizing and creating time wherein pondering, leading to deeper 'wondering' can occur, both for the teacher and the student. It does so from the perspective of the pedagogical approach emanating from the author's PhD research study (Irwin 2017), briefly described in the subsequent section. This article is limited only to aspects relating to facilitating pondering in the classroom. The PhD, and this article, are written from a Catholic/Christian perspective.

In a rushed world, garnishing time is essential for both teachers and students. Teachers themselves need this precious commodity if they are to open the path to pondering and wondering in the lives of students. It is a sine qua non: no time, no pondering, no wondering, no contemplation leads to little experience of joy, love, and awe. Cavalletti observed that children can grasp deep spiritual realities and are intuitively attracted towards God, and that this encounter brings joy (Cavalletti 1983). Csikszentmihalyi referred to the deep "flow of learning" that allows for working without worry, a loss of self-consciousness, and the achievement of intrinsic enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi 1999).

Monash University's study 'Australian Teachers' Perceptions of their Work in 2022' (Longmuir et al. 2022) conducted a poll of 10 000 NSW teachers, revealing that 73% say their workload is unmanageable. On average, classroom teachers are working 55 h per week, release time is woefully inadequate, and administration requirements consume time that should be dedicated to teaching. The study also evidenced research suggesting that Australian teachers struggle to manage their workloads. Heavy workloads are associated with higher rates of stress, burnout, and attrition for teachers.

Principals and leaders want things to change. Gifting 'pondering time' to both educator and learner in the current educational climate not only facilitates deep learning, but also lays the foundations for reaching the height and depth of which the human heart, mind, spirit, and soul is capable.

So, what can be achieved today, now, despite the challenges?

This paper will firstly reflect on current research. It will go on to describe the author's own design-based research doctoral thesis (Irwin 2017). The doctoral research was intended to form the first phase of a series of iterations.

The paper will move on to describe conclusions with a focus on the element of pondering related to the SALT Approach, outlining developments and implementations to date. The most valuable and practical part follows. In the context of the SALT Approach's session framework, it offers a straightforward but comprehensive outline of ways in which pedagogy garnishes time for pondering. Finally, after considering limitations, the paper concludes with suggestions indicating the way forward for researchers and practitioners who wish to contribute in practical and useful ways, either through the SALT Approach or other similar approaches.

2. The Doctoral Research Study: Placing This Paper in Context

2.1. Introduction

This paper is intended to provide suggestions to facilitate garnishing time whereby children and teachers can ponder. It does so in the context of the author's original doctoral research. This can be more fully explored in the actual PhD and subsequent published papers, which have been included in the reference list. This section of the current paper aims to provide the reader with essential background information.

The Scripture and Liturgy Teaching Approach (hereafter referred to as the SALT Approach) was developed through doctoral research applying the work of Montessori (1965), Cavalletti (1983); Gerard O'Shea (2018) in the classroom. It emanated from a need to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering a viable approach for teaching and learning of religious education in contemporary Catholic schools.

The main objective was to design, trial, and refine an approach for teaching religious education in a contemporary Catholic systemic school. The subsidiary objectives arising from this main objective became the three lenses used on the journey. They emerged as:

- Exploring the empowering and disempowering factors affecting today's child within the SALT Approach.
- Equipping teachers and schools to implement the SALT Approach.
- Achieving the accountability requirements of a diocesan Catholic school through the SALT Approach.

2.2. Methodology

The study used a design-based research model, which facilitated the “engineering” of learning and the learning environment by testing, refining, and revising an educational prototype through a series of iterations (Cobb et al. 2003). Originating in the work of Ann Brown (1992), design-based research (DBR) is geared towards (a) contributing to educational practice, facilitating the development of tools and curriculum, and (b) contributing to theory (Barab and Squire 2004; Collins et al. 2004; Bradley and Reinking 2011; Sandoval and Bell 2004). As indicated by Barab and Squire (2004), while it involves observing and identifying, it is primarily concerned with transformation. Design-based research incorporates ‘embodied conjectures,’ a term introduced by Sandoval and Bell (2004) referring to the embodiment of theoretical conjectures into design, appraising how the theory can be made to work in practice. Barab and Squire (2004) identified design-based research as a ‘methodological toolkit’ involving a series of approaches with the intention of engineering learning and the learning environment. It involves testing, refining, and revising a series of iterations (Hoadley 2004; Shavelson et al. 2003). Thus, design-based research was ideally suited to the doctoral study, with its theoretical research, prototype planning, and reflective iterative cycles extended over a full academic year.

Design-based research is interventionist, collaborative, process-oriented, and useful (Akkerman and Filius 2011; Brown 1992; Cobb et al. 2003; Nieveen 2006).

The doctoral study amply fulfilled these criteria. It was carried out in a challenging environment, namely a Catholic systemic school in the outer western suburbs of Sydney. The religious education coordinator of the school and participating teachers worked alongside the researcher. The students knowingly contributed to the refinement of the approach being designed.

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks were ‘put to work’ in a real and complex environment, and the final prototype offered significant new contributions to both educational theory and practice. It aimed to offer a tried, tested, and refined prototype that would open the path to further interventions, preferably as design-based research or action research (Irwin 2017).

2.3. Participants

The school was a systemic Catholic school. These schools run alongside government schools and are not private schools. Systemic Catholic schools in Australia welcome students of other faiths whose parents wish to enroll their children in a Catholic school knowing that the Catholic faith is taught. The selected class provided a purposive sample. Situated in outer western Sydney, the school's clientele was multi-cultural and multi-religious. There were a number of fragile families. These factors were compounded by the obligatory diocesan approach of using agile learning spaces. Agile learning spaces involved each grade using one large space, with students within that space allocated to home-room teachers. Every grade was organized in this way, from kindergarten through to year six. Typically, this involved 60–70 students in one space, usually the size of three traditional classrooms. A significant number of students were fairly unharnessed in their behavior within the open setting, and this undermined the potential success of the holistic nature of the SALT Approach, built, as it was, on Montessorian principles.

These factors offered realistic challenges for this study, aimed, as it was, towards discovering how the SALT Approach could be refined to work effectively in these situations.

Year two was selected because these children were moving from the three to six-year-old phase, described by Montessori as the age of the absorbent mind, towards the six to nine-year-old phase, when abstract thinking begins (O’Shea 2018) This age selection offered an opportunity to discover and demonstrate how the SALT Approach could be adapted to work successfully with children moving beyond the absorbent mind stage, often perceived as the ideal age for Montessorian approaches.

There were random elements with regard to the student and teacher selection for the study. These matters were left to the school executive and ultimately to the principal. The researcher’s approach here was to accept whatever was arranged. The final group included a multi-racial mix of students, many with complex personal and family challenges. Tables 1–4 summarize the student profiles according to ethnicity, religious affiliation, family arrangements, and other known issues.

Table 1. Summary profile of student ethnic backgrounds. Male: 13, female: 13, total 26.

Ethnicity								
Australian Caucasian	Sudanese	Islander	Indian	Filipino	Vietnamese	Chinese	Part-Aboriginal	Turkish
10	6	2	2	2	1	1	1	1

Table 2. Religious affiliation.

Religious Affiliation					
Catholic: Church Attending	Catholic: Not Church Attending	Non-Catholic Christian	Buddhist	Hindu	Muslim
9	11	3	1	1	1

Table 3. Family arrangements.

Family Unit					
Parents Together	Separated/Divorced	Single Parent	Foster Parents	Same-Sex Relationship	Known Parent Alcohol/Mental Illness Issues
16	7	1	1	1	3

Table 4. Other issues.

Other Known Issues			
Behavioral Challenges	Children Displaying Emotional Insecurity	Learning Difficulties	No Great Observable Issues
6	4	2	14

3. Conclusions of the Study

Conclusions of the study, as relating to pondering, indicated that the SALT Approach incorporated a range of opportunities easily accessible for teachers that equipped students to learn deeply and respond profoundly. The students displayed deep desires to seek truth and were attracted towards the spiritual. The potential for impacting on the spiritual formation of the teachers was also indicated.

Both Montessori and Cavalletti built into their methods the deep and living spiritual input of the teachers. While honoring the essential elements required, the SALT Approach

marked a certain reversal of several recommendations. A pertinent one in the light of this paper was that teachers should make their own materials (Cavalletti 1983). The research indicated that in the 'time-poor' 21st century era, it was important to at least offer ready-made materials and guidance through carefully developed booklets. This would free teachers to invest time into pondering, both for themselves and for students. The research offered a practical backbone regarding the materials needed and addressed challenges in the set-up and maintenance of the learning environment. This would facilitate finding time for pondering.

Another closely analyzed aspect was the perspective of the Catholic Church when it comes to considering the spirituality of today's child. Church documents emphasize the Christian anthropological understanding of the human person endowed with intellect and free will, capable of knowing and responding to a personal God. The task of the school is to present the mystery of the Trinity in a clear and cohesive way to children who are capable of grasping such truths (Congregation for the Clergy 1997). Relevant church documents point to the need to foster in the child an intimate communion with Jesus Christ (Congregation for the Clergy 1997). This can only occur if reflective time is incorporated into the lives of students and tangibly visible in word and deed within the school environment.

Montessori supported this understanding when she recommended that the teacher's task was to facilitate circumstances and conditions wherein a child can encounter and respond to God, all the while respecting the child's nature regarding supernatural life. (Montessori 1965). Cavalletti also recognized through her research and practice, that if left to gaze in wonder, the child experienced an intuitive attraction towards God and that the consequence of this encounter was joy (Cavalletti 2002). Fostering a living relationship with God was her focus in developing the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (Cavalletti 1983). These perspectives are brought to bear in O'Shea's (2018) *Educating in Christ*.

The doctoral study evidenced these assertions. Students of all backgrounds frequently expressed their attraction to the spiritual dimension. They readily engaged with new opportunities offered throughout the liturgical cycle. Students relished the challenge of delving deep into the meaning of scriptural passages beyond their immediate grasp, returning again and again to such topics. They incessantly brought spiritually related thoughts and reflections to discussions and explored them in choice time. They spiritually nurtured each other through a spontaneous sharing of understandings, ideas, and discoveries. They demonstrated an absorbed focus on many occasions, to the extent that they could be oblivious to any noise around them (Irwin 2017, 2019).

The currently prevailing outcome-based education places the spiritual perspective under great pressure, leaving adults and children alike with little time to think and ponder in a truly deep way (Berlach 2004; Waghid 2003). Cecero and Prout (2011), however, identifies a growing openness to the spirituality of children and the need for an allocation of time not easily built into a learning outcomes approach.

Nevertheless, there was significant evidence in this doctoral study that, should conditions be right, children are capable of rapidly switching into the spiritual zone, coming into the room from a tangibly different atmosphere, quickly engaging in opportunities to pray and reflect, and finding quiet spaces within the room to do so (Irwin 2019).

The Fourth Way, described by Fullan and Langworthy (2013), Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), offers a window for the SALT Approach. The Fourth Way recommends moving away from the top level, micro-management approach, and towards recognizing school-level autonomy combined with personalized, holistic elements (Niemi et al. 2016; Sahlberg 2011). The Fourth Way recognizes the vital importance of deep learning, at least some spiritual aspects of the human person, and that children are capable of character development, critical thinking, creativity, and imagination (Fullan 2016). Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition of holistic approaches which recognize the need for time to reflect and ponder (Fullan and Langworthy 2014).

While a far cry from the full Christian anthropological perspective of the Catholic Church, such considerations open spaces within the contemporary educational climate. If

[Sahlberg \(2013\)](#) is correct in maintaining that the Fourth Way can be implemented across distinct educational systems, the same could be applied to the compatibility of the holistic SALT Approach. For this to occur, schools need to exercise autonomy while functioning within a diocesan system of education. The doctoral study demonstrated that given the necessary latitude while functioning in an outcomes-based environment, the spiritual aspect of children's nature could be deeply nurtured. The data also revealed tangible and sometimes profound spiritual development in the children engaged in the study, regardless of faith background ([Irwin 2019](#)).

Data indicated that the SALT Approach can offer a paradigm for thinking about religious educational practice in Catholic schools, suggesting a move away from the restrictive demands on school and teacher accountability and towards the recognition of an academic approach suited to deep religious education; an approach more suited to fostering the spirituality and faith of students, empowering them to discover the spiritual dimension for themselves. Recent studies are designing and trialing assessment approaches that reflect a deep understanding of holistic education and fit well with these ideas ([White 2021](#)). One of the schools involved in that study has, for the past four years, been implementing the SALT Approach across all its primary classrooms, and anecdotal evidence suggests that a strong fit is emerging.

4. The SALT Approach: A Brief Outline

The SALT Approach is designed to support the Christian theology and spirituality. The latter involves a personal encounter with God through Jesus Christ. These understandings and spiritualities are developed by presenting opportunities that enable a deep consideration of Scripture and Church liturgy within a climate conducive to prayerful reflection. At the same time, it takes into consideration the presence of students who are not Catholic by affiliation whose parents have specifically chosen a Catholic school.

It is geared towards primary-aged students (5–12 years of age) and its methodology is built on Montessori principles as explored by Sofia Cavalletti, who applied them within the spiritual plane within parish catechetical settings ([Cavalletti 1983](#)). As recommended by both Montessori and Cavalletti, the liturgical year of the Church provides the SALT Approach with a comprehensive framework incorporating Scripture, sacraments, Catholic teaching, and prayer. Children ponder deeply as they engage with the Catholic faith in all its dimensions, applying it to their own lives.

The SALT Approach applies the pedagogy developed by Montessori and Cavalletti to every aspect of a school's religious education curriculum. Distinct from the Cavallettian-inspired 'Catechesis of the Good Shepherd', it offers physical materials, supporting booklets, and tailored programs to give time-poor teachers the tools that free them up to focus on things that students will remember.

The religion lessons begin with a brief 'warm-up' linking the learning with previous sessions or the time of the liturgical year. For example, reference could be made to the City of Jerusalem model, introduced in an earlier session to contextualize the place where the events surrounding the Last Supper took place in Jerusalem.

This is followed by the presentation, during which the teacher introduces the topic using concrete materials and dioramas relating to Scripture, liturgy, or church tradition. In this case it would be the diorama of the Last Supper, including figures of the disciples and Jesus. Other examples would be three-dimensional presentations of events from the life of Jesus, each including figurines of the characters involved; three-dimensional and magnetic maps of Israel facilitating an understanding of the place and time of the events; or mini versions of furniture, vestments, and linens used in the sacraments.

A time of pondering flows naturally from the presentation. Thought-provoking questions are framed in terms of 'I wonder.' A number of 'I wonder' questions are included in the booklets supplied, although students and teachers may come up with others. Examples of this relating to the parable of the Good Samaritan might be: 'I wonder why the priest and the Levite passed by without helping the wounded man?' or 'I wonder

why the Samaritan stopped to help him?’ Effective ‘I wonder’ questions are not simply comprehension questions, but facilitate an exchange of thoughts and responses, leading to deeper reflection.

The next and longest part of the session is ‘choice time’ when students are free to continue reflecting on the concepts introduced in a variety of ways. They are able to use the materials and booklets used in the presentations or can respond through journaling, poster making, art, craft, or jigsaws, applying a ‘see, think, wonder’ approach to relevant art works. Importantly, students are free to return to topics introduced in previous sessions, which encourages deep thinking through long-term rather than short term engagement. As the year progresses, students acquire many skills enabling a wide range of responses conducive to pondering and reflection.

Thus, the SALT Approach embeds a pedagogy that facilitates pondering, offering time and space for this to occur. It is designed to encourage children and educators to engage through the body, heart, and mind, exercising authentic freedom through choices made throughout the RE sessions and beyond. Personal engagement is fundamental to the SALT Approach. Through it, children and adults alike are empowered to ponder deeply as they engage with the Catholic faith in all its dimensions, applying it to their own lives in age-appropriate ways. By offering authentic choices and a rich variety of ‘hands on’ materials, children are drawn towards deep and absorbing reflections. This is followed by a brief closure session, which offers a few minutes of peaceful pondering and praying.

The pedagogy and related materials allow for a myriad of opportunities for pondering and recognizing the pockets of time that can be gifted to teachers and students alike and is vital for success.

5. The Practical Toolbox to Facilitate Pondering

When is it possible for time-poor teachers and students to enter a zone where time exists for personal pondering and wondering? Where is that time? What does it look like, feel like, sound like? Is it possible to create places of peace, oases of calm in busy days and weeks?

Pockets of time can be garnished through (a) the provision and layout of materials in the learning space and (b) the various segments of the SALT session structure.

5.1. Materials and Learning Space: Establishing the Climate for Pondering

- Provide an ordered, uncluttered space with a range of materials accessible to students, such as dioramas, charts, maps, timelines, and sacramentally related kits.
- Give students control in accessing all that is required to ponder in religious education.
- Arrange the materials to facilitate efficient student access, saving time wasted in setting things out and putting things away for the session. As students become familiar with the expectations and procedures, they become responsible for returning materials and enjoy that responsibility.
- Store the range of response tools on a set of narrow shelves, including pens, pencils, paper, tracing paper, A4 clipboards, mini blackboards, whiteboards, etc.

5.2. Session Structure

5.2.1. Beginning the Session: Prepping for Pondering

- Time for pondering is garnered if teachers and students gather in a recollected, mutually respectful way. This approach does not mandate a circular seating arrangement, so long as students have a clear view of the presentation space and are seated to avoid distracting others.
- The initial focus is the presentation table. A low table is preferable to the floor for these presentations. The teacher will find it comfortable to be seated on a chair alongside the table with materials within easy reach.
- The presentation materials are placed for ready access. Using a real candle is recommended. A lighter and candle snuffer is placed on the table. Teachers are the ones

using these. If schools have a policy against using a real candle, a pillar battery candle with a flickering light is the closest replacement.

- Reference materials can be located on a nearby shelf, against a wall, or on a pinboard. For those using the SALT Approach, this will include laminated images, a bible, a wooden bible cabinet containing miniature wooden representations of all the books of the bible, magnetic maps, a raised map of Israel, a puzzle map of the regions of Israel, the City of Jerusalem model (not necessarily with the wooden pieces), and samples of items that students will be encouraged to use in choice time.
- Take a few moments to clarify expectations based on the experience of previous sessions. These could be grace and courtesy issues, such as reminding students how to gauge appropriate noise levels; remembering what pondering looks, feels, and sounds like; how respecting other's time for learning is manifested; the importance of taking personal responsibility in accessing and returning materials; using materials for their intended purpose; keeping the focus on religious education topics; the need to rotate the use of popular items; end of session procedures; and exercising of specific human virtues that make working together a pleasure.

5.2.2. Warm-Up: Linking with Pondering from Past Sessions

- Keep the warm-up brief and focused. It links to previous learning, draws attention to a feast, liturgical time, or to a particular reading in recent liturgy that is relevant to the topic.
- Long digressions are not appropriate. However, tangible evidence of engagement of students is appropriate and welcomed. Students will want to bring up aspects they have been pondering.
- To keep the flow and focus, suggest and ensure an opportunity to share discoveries, ponderings, and reflections during 'choice time,' keeping interest alive, rather than quelling it.

Box A1, found in Appendix A, provides two examples of 'warm-ups'.

5.2.3. The Core Presentation: Focusing for Pondering

- Prepare the presentations well, so that there are effective times for pondering.
- Keep the presentations on the topic and avoid digressing. The sign of an effective presentation will be absorbed reflective interest from students, manifested in their largely silent but active participation. Keeping the students' focus, and one's own, on topic garnishes significant time for pondering.
- Be flexible in relation to the length of presentation. They can vary according to the topic and type of session, ranging from approximately 3 to 10 min.
- Have all the materials needed for the presentation in place ahead of the session.
- Use the small but powerful element of a candle representing the light of Christ and grace of the Holy Spirit. It is lit before reading a scripture passage and can remain alight until choice time begins.
- Practice effective use of the dioramas, kits, charts, or images. This involves moving diorama figures appropriately, avoiding holding of figures by the head, not moving figures at the same time as speaking, and using calm movements and appropriate voice speed and tone. These procedures assist both teacher and students in reaching that place of inner calm wherein pondering can occur and wondering develop.
- Be aware that student interactions, thoughts, and questions are sometimes appropriate in the presentation time. Sometimes interpreted as rude interruptions, they often indicate deep involvement and personal pondering.
- Generally, avoid the use of audio-visual material during the presentation section. It is more powerful to focus on the immediate, tangible environment and the inner self. There may be exceptions, such as the use of PowerPoints or their equivalent, particularly with older students.

Box A2, found in Appendix A, demonstrates the latter part of a presentation, reflecting the diversity of comments and questions that could lead to pondering.

5.2.4. 'I Wonder': Pondering to Wonder

- Ensure that the questions truly are 'I wonder' questions leading to deep thought. If a range of pondering questions are offered in the support booklets, not all need to be introduced.
- Be aware that students may come up with very good alternative questions meriting shared consideration, offering valuable lights from sometimes unexpected quarters. Student contributions can give rise to genuine teacher reflection that can be shared with students, though without dominating the conversation. In this sense, the teachers are truly co-pondering.
- Moving away from a strictly 'hands up' approach facilitates pondering, even with young students. This requires the development of a Socratic style of exchange. An expansion of this aspect is beyond the scope of this paper but can be easily accessed.
- Respond to glimmers of deep pondering to increase each student's active involvement in pondering. This is especially important when reluctant students display a desire to contribute.
- The time of wondering is, as mentioned earlier, a bridge to the next section, which involves student choices. A teacher conscious of this will help students to use choice time for effective pondering.

Box A3, found in Appendix A, presents an example of how pondering and wondering can develop deeper understanding over time.

5.2.5. Choice Time: Prime Pondering Time

- Remember that the teacher's role is that of facilitator and observer during this time.
- Ensure that 'Choice Time' occupies the greatest proportion of time in SALT sessions. It is time given over to children during which they can independently ponder and wonder in ways that draw them. Elements such as journal writing, research, and collaborative work are particular to middle and upper primary and are not the focus of this paper. Suggestions here will be limited to those appropriate for the earlier grades.
- Take the time needed to establish skills for good choice-making. At first, greater scaffolding is needed, establishing tighter boundaries leading to gradual release. One key element involves education in acts of grace and courtesy, as described by Montessori. This includes behaviors involved in things such as moving around the classroom, using quiet voices, using materials appropriately, and selecting and returning work (Montessori 1965).
- As the shared 'I wonder' time comes to a close, point out some of the choice possibilities, always including the materials used during the presentation and some of the previous ones. An effective way of moving quietly into choices involves asking students to consider what they would like to do first, then specifically asking 'who would like to . . .'. This facilitates an orderly, peaceful transition to 'choice-time.'
- Consider working in 'Pods'. While one pod is involved in art response, a second pod may work with the teacher on a guided activity, while the third has free access to the growing number of materials available as the year progresses. The pods rotate from one session to the next. Over time, and as students are introduced to a range of skills, the need for this structure diminishes and the scaffold slips away.
- Facilitate the development of 'generic' choices, responses that can be applied to any topic. They require varying degrees of teacher demonstration. Each week can involve introducing a new response, demonstrating how to access materials, actual use of the materials, and returning of materials. The skill can be practiced by all the students at the one time. Often some element of choice can be incorporated into the activity. Effective choice activities should not be so absorbing as to deflect from their true purpose: that of facilitating pondering. Some examples include drawing, painting with

cotton buds, pasting, using playdough effectively, tracing, jigsaw puzzles, using mini blackboards and white boards, 'See, think, Wonder' routines, simple book-making, and nature table observations. It may seem that some activities need no explanation, but setting about them in a reflective and effective way does require modeling and precise guidelines.

- If students do not gravitate to activities that relate to the presentation topic of the day before moving to other choices relating to previous presentations, consider whether the presentation itself has been effective.
- Avoid the inclination to insist that students keep their focus only on the topic of the day. This can challenge teachers, given the pressure to keep on topic and move forward quickly. However, in religious education the deep goal is to open the way through pondering to wondering, which in turn can lead to a sense of awe. This requires visiting concepts and events many times. When students are given the opportunity to return often to previously introduced topics, they will often choose to do so, and this is a sign of true pondering.
- With gentle firmness, remind students to focus on topics relating to religious education. Dioramas are to be used for the intended purpose. For example, students may want to use response materials for other purposes, such as creating cards for family or friends. Aim to bring the students back on track.
- Keep an eye out for students who, while not causing distraction to others, may not be on-task. Seek to engage them in an appropriate way. For example, boys are likely to enjoy working with maps and the City of Jerusalem model. The teacher can guide the students in using them and once engaged, students can be left to continue alone.
- Be aware of developing the skill of 'letting go'. This reaps significant pondering time by respecting children's space and personal time. Over-abundant teacher–student interactions, for example through constant probing and questioning, is counter-productive in the quest to harness time for personal pondering.
- Remember that students need to be truly free to ponder in ways that attracts them.

Box A4, found in Appendix A, illustrates the introduction to a choice possibility.

5.2.6. Session Closure: Leaving the Space Still Pondering

- Allow time for the choice activities to 'wind up.' This step can be, in and of itself, another time for pondering—an opportunity to move quietly and reflectively as things are put back in place, the space is tidied, and completed or partially finished works are placed in personal pouches. This can be hard for students, who are likely to be absorbed in 'the Csikszentmihalyi (1995, 1999) flow'. It requires patience and calm, alerting students with sufficient time of the need to prepare to leave the space and its time.
- Once the students have gathered for the closure activity, take a few minutes to reflect in some way. Well-selected audio-visual materials are suited to this moment, offering consolidation and further pondering through a video clip, prayer, or song.
- Concluding quietly and respectfully facilitates the extension of pondering even beyond the session. This will be reflected in the students wanting to continue sharing thoughts after the session has concluded.

Box A5, found in Appendix A, illustrates 'winding up.'

Appendix B of this paper is an evaluative tool currently being trialed in a number of schools. It identifies how specific elements identified and discussed in this paper and leading to success in pondering and can provide an effective structure for positive and collaborative teacher observations. Teachers themselves pinpoint aspects they would like to consider, and these provide the focus of observation.

6. Limitations

The first limitation is that this paper addresses the need to provide time for pondering within the context Christian/Catholic religious education. However, the toolbox of suggestions relating to garnishing time for pondering can be applied within the context of other faiths. In addition, it is hoped that the suggestions and the evaluation tool offered in Appendix B can be adapted for use across the curriculum and even in non-religious contexts.

A second limitation is that, beyond the evidence found through the PhD phase of the design-based and iterative research, this paper offers only anecdotal evidence to support the garnishing of time to ponder.

A third limitation is that, given the number of possibilities outlined in this paper, some concepts require further discussion. Examples would be (a) unpacking of how generic activities can be effectively introduced to students, (b) addressing effective mentoring of teachers in techniques required to allow effective time for pondering, (c) addressing the challenge of how pondering can be fostered within the large, open classrooms found in many schools, (d) fostering pondering in places where student fragilities are reflected through discipline issues, and (e) a deeper unpacking of how this approach facilitates a teacher's own pondering, equipping and supporting them so that they can be at once both learners and experts, removing the angst that insecurity brings.

Such issues need to be unpacked in further papers. This paper draws attention to gaps that exist and that can be addressed through further research in classrooms implementing the SALT Approach, and even other approaches that aim to foster pondering. One tool to assist in this can be found in the Appendix B.

7. Conclusions

Plans are underway to take the doctoral design-based research into further iterative phases, involving the engagement of academic institutions and building a network of relationships with Catholic education bodies, schools, and individual teachers, both within Australia and beyond.

Currently the SALT Approach is being implemented in approximately 100 Australian classrooms. Teachers are furnished with programs compatible with a spiral liturgical curriculum and tailored according to diocesan requirements. A 'Companion Leadership' model is in place in many of the schools involved. These factors offer significant opportunities for further research. A further consideration is that the pedagogy of the SALT Approach can provide a segway into giving time across other curriculum areas that would benefit from time to ponder, wonder, and contemplate.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. Text Boxes Listed in the Paper

Box A1. First iteration extracts of class sessions relating to ‘warm-ups’ during Lent.

Partial Transcript of Class Sessions:

23 February 2015

Researcher: Today I will start to tell you some important stories. I don’t have a diorama, but I am reading from the Gospel. I am going to let you make a sort of diorama, once I have told you the story. And to help you, I have lots of pictures by lots of artists.

(Story of John Baptist read from Bible.)

24 February 2015

Researcher: Today we have another story. Here we have what I told you about yesterday *(pointing to images of the Baptism of Jesus)*. And here we have pictures of what happened after: Jesus went into desert, for 40 days, on his own. *(Looking at paintings)* He prayed and he fasted, and prepared for the next few years. It was the beginning of his time of preaching . . . *(researcher continues telling the story in own words and moved on to open a discussion about what we do in Lent, and linking it with the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert)*

Child: So, Lent’s like Jesus when he spent 40 days in desert . . .

Researcher: What should we do in Lent?

Children: Fast . . . pray . . . do kind things . . .

Box A2. Class session transcript demonstrating the latter part of a presentation, reflecting the diversity of comments and questions that could lead to pondering.

Transcript, Class Session 16 February 2015 Focus: Introducing the Liturgical Colors

Researcher: . . . soon we are moving into another time: Purple. Two times in the year we have times of preparation. Lent is one, leading to Easter and Advent is the other.

(Show the children the model of the priest and vestments. All this fascinates them and they are engaged, asking a number of questions)

Ahmed: What is Easter?

Another Child: What does Easter mean?

Researcher: It’s the word we use to remember the time when Jesus rose from the dead.

Child: He died . . .

Researcher: He died for us and rose on Easter Sunday

Celia: Did he die on Good Friday?

Researcher: Yes, he died on Good Friday.

Child: Did he come back to life?

Researcher: Yes.

Ahmed: Why is it Good Friday if he died?

Child: Is he still alive?

Researcher: Why did they call it Good Friday? What a good question. Because it is the day that Jesus saved us and they call it Good Friday because of that.

Trinh: But it is very sad that he died . . .

Researcher: Yes, it is sad that he died, but he died so he could save us.

Ben: It’s not just all about colors. It is about times we spend with Jesus.

Researcher: And the colors remind us the kind of time it is. So, we have this purple time now to prepare for Jesus death and rising from the dead.

Box A3. Pondering a very big question over time: why did John call Jesus ‘The Lamb of God’?

Class Session, 23 February 2015

The Lamb of God was introduced.

Researcher: Now I want to start to tell you some very special stories . . .

The story is about John. The first thing you need to know is that he was actually the cousin of Jesus . . .

Two Children: Was he Jesus’ cousin?

Researcher: His mother was Elizabeth . . . when he saw Jesus going by he said: “there is the Lamb of God, who is the one who takes away the sins of the world . . . ”

I wonder: . . . It is hard one . . . I wonder why John called Jesus the Lamb of God? Why? Celia?

Celia: Maybe it is the Lamb of God . . . *(the child has the confidence to ‘give it a go’)*

Researcher: Yes, you are getting something, you are starting . . .

Box A3. Cont.

Gajara: What is a lamb? (this very bright Hindu student is not afraid of asking this question. It is likely that children have many 'lagoons' that the teacher may be unaware of, unless the children have time to ask.)

Researcher: A baby sheep. Jesus is often called the Lamb. I will give you a hint . . . (*a child has hand up*) Yes?

Child: He is a shepherd.

Researcher: Yes, and the Lamb too . . . this is hard, and I won't tell you the answer. I want you to think about it . . .

End of Term 1, Focus Group 1

Researcher: . . . What happened in that city (Jerusalem)?

Chelsea: Jesus died . . .

Marisa: I was learning a lot about the Lamb of God. That the Lamb of God is Jesus.

Gajara (Hindu Student): And Jesus died as the same day that they crucified the lamb.

Researcher: You mean when they sacrificed the lamb?

Gajara: Yes, sacrificed the lamb.

End of Term 1, Focus Group 2

Researcher: What was it like in religious education in this room this term?

Various Students responses, as relating to the Lamb of God:

Ben: We learn about Jesus and God.

Celia: We learn all about he is the Lamb of God and that he died for us on the cross, so he can save us from things.

Ben: When Jesus died on the cross . . . umm . . . another lamb that was also on the son of God that also died at the same time that Jesus was dying. When my brother says 'Baa' I was remembering about the sheep in the story. That's why I want to learn more about the sheep.

Abrar: We learn about God and Jesus. We learn about new saints and new people of the Lamb of Jesus.

Researcher: Can you explain ways RE here is different to way done before?

Ahmed: (child with aphasia) We learn about new things like the Lamb of God, John the Baptist, the Guards . . . The Lamb is God . . . is the father of Jesus, and John is the cousin of Jesus and God is the Father of Jesus not like Joseph . . . And so, who is the Lamb of God and who is Jesus? Is he a lamb or is he . . . alive?

Abrar: Jesus is our savior . . . The lamb represented before he came.

Ahmed: So, the lamb that God lost was Jesus. And the Shepherd was . . . ?

Researcher: You are thinking on multiple layers. You can think about Jesus as the Shepherd who looks after us or the lamb that was sacrificed for us. It could mean all of these things.

End of Term 1, Focus Group 3

Jamie: I like learning lots and lots about Jesus and God and the Lamb.

Researcher: What did you learn about Jesus and the Lamb?

Jamie: That the lamb got killed and I remember one of the stories we did in Year One, when Jesus stopped the storm. **Azzam:** I like learning about Jesus and God and Mary and Joseph and the Lamb.

Basem: (looking at a symbolic picture of the sacrificed Lamb of God) How, wha . . . Did the lamb get poked in the neck with the cross?

Researcher: No, he is carrying the cross.

Basem: Then how? . . .

Researcher: It is a symbol: That is when Jesus was pierced in the heart after he died.

Basem: Oh.

Jamie: I like all these pictures.

Researcher: Why?

Basem: They show you what it was like when it happened.

Jamie: I like this one.

Researcher: What do we see in this picture? What does it all represent?

Jamie, Azzam, Namir: Jesus and God.

Basem: Jesus and the Lamb of God.

Researcher: Can you think of any new thing you have learnt this year?

Basem: The lamb was new. The Lamb of God. And Jerusalem was new . . . (*others agree*)

Box A4. Demonstration and modeling the skill of watercolor painting.

3 March 2015, Partial transcript of Class Session: Watercolor painting.

(Researcher ensures children enter and are seated using very few and very quiet words. Whatever said is quiet and respectful. The children were arranged so that they could all see how to paint with watercolors. All necessary things are on their desks.)

Researcher: Today is a very important today. I have arranged the paints at your desks, as you can see. You each have a picture to use today, like this one I have here.

Watching me carefully . . . you each have 5 buds, one for each color. I am explaining this to you because this is a work you can choose to do in the year. You need to know how to do it and I am explaining it to you so that you can work with water colors on your own through the year.

I will demonstrate with the yellow. This is what you do. Take a cotton bud and make it a tiny-wincy bit wet. Then you get the winsiest bit of color on your bud and you place it in a tiny blob on your paper palette. Then another color . . . so you have your five colors on your paper.

Then you are ready to paint your picture. These are water colors, so they spread quite a bit. You won't get it perfect right away. You go gently. when you use water, use very little because you don't want it to go everywhere. The more water you add the more it spreads. And you will get to know how you can make different shades of green, for example, just by the amount of water you use.

The first thing you do is put your name on your picture, in you very neatest writing, and to work very, very quietly and calmly. A very important last thing to do at the end is to gather your buds and wrap them in the paper and put them in the bin. If you do it in the way I am showing you, you will get better and better at it.

(Children move very quietly to their place and quickly become engrossed)

Child: What is the sponge for?

Researcher: Yes, thank you for that question. They are damp sponges for when you get some paint where you don't want it. It will pull the paint off the page.

. . . Several of you have asked me how to make orange, the way you make orange is you mix a tiny bit of red and a tiny bit of yellow. The children do become noisier, we hear words like 'awesome'. When the bell is rung, they are immediately quiet. Researcher compliments them on their work.

Clean up runs smoothly, everyone stops what they are doing. Pages are proudly named, students find a safe spot for their work, lid the paints, and clean up in reasonable time.)

Box A5. Transcript illustrating researcher clarifying issues relating to 'winding up.'

4 June:

I have set my alarm on my iPad: When you hear it, that is a signal to stop working and start to clean up. Especially if you are very engrossed in your work, you have to tear yourself away from that. By the second bell you have to be ready.

Today it is all beautifully clean because I spent a long time doing that, but I can't do that forever. I have to rely on you to put lids on paints and clean the surfaces . . . It is your responsibility. You have to grow.

. . . if people want to work at the art table they don't just go there to paint just anything. A lot of these pictures have got nothing to do with what we are doing. You are old enough to prepare what you want to paint and then do it. So, for example, today I have indicated you can draw and then paint what happened at Pentecost. You may choose to trace and then paint . . .

Appendix B. Religious Education Curriculum Enrichment Evaluative Tool

The core pedagogical approach requires facilitating pondering, deep respect for each person, and the exercise of authentic freedom.

Observations will focus on these points.

Observation Session Focus: _____ **Class: Date:**

Teacher/s:

MATERIALS AND LESSON SPACE			
Tick as appropriate			
	Yes	No	Comment/Suggestion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy student access to the dioramas or other materials used in the presentation. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of a good number of dioramas used in previous sessions. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An environment conducive to pondering. (Ordered, accessibility, students returning materials for others to use, quiet voices. Refer to setting up the RE classroom for more points.) 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of response tools that students can access with minimum teacher organization. • Place/shelves where the students can access pens, pencils, paper, tracing paper, A4 clipboards, mini blackboards, whiteboards etc. See booklet 'Setting up the RE Classroom.' 			
SESSION STRUCTURE			
Tick as appropriate			
Session Commencement	Yes	No	Comment/Suggestion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students gather together in a mutually respectful way. • Note: seating arrangement need not be that of a circle. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial focus towards a presentation table, visible to all. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation materials in place, ready to use. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A candle, a lighter, and a candle snuffer available. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other support items accessible and at hand. <i>E.g., Images, laminated and in view of students, Bible, wooden Bible cabinet, magnetic maps/raised map Israel, City of Jerusalem map (without wooden pieces), samples of items that students will be encouraged to use in choice time.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity taken to briefly clarify expectations regarding an aspect that did not go well in previous session. <i>E.g., appropriate noise level, the choices, respecting others' time for learning, personal responsibility in tidying up, waiting turn to use popular items, exercise of specific human virtue that makes working together a pleasure: grace and courtesy.</i> 			
Warm-Up	Yes	No	Comment/Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The warm-up is brief and focused, setting an atmosphere of quiet recollection appreciated by students and teachers alike. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can allow for students to bring up something relevant from a previous session that they have been thinking about. Avoid long digression: this may be more extensively discussed in choice time. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to previous learning/drawing attention to moments in the liturgical year. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may incorporate a short, heartfelt prayer: spontaneous or traditional. 			

The Presentation	Yes	No	Comments/Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective use of 2D or 3D materials. <i>Includes moving figures appropriately, not speaking and moving the figures at the same time, calm movements.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate voice speed and tone in presenting. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflects confidence in presenting: familiarity with the material. <i>This will grow gradually. Early days or first-time presentation can be more challenging.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scripture passage: the candle is lit for the Bible reading, representing the light of Christ. This can remain lit until choice time. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of booklets for guidance and doctrinal accuracy. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judicious allowance of student interactions, thoughts, and questions which indicate involvement. <i>A delicate balance is needed here. Involvement is vital, thoughts can be voiced. At the same time, know how to keep the presentation on track. If the presentation is well done, the students will be engaged in relative silence.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate length of presentation. <i>This will vary according to the topic and type of session. It could range from 3–10 min, not counting the ‘I Wonder’ section.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rare use of audio-visual material, facilitating a focus on the immediate environment and their own inner selves. 			
Pondering/Wondering	Yes	No	Comments/Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Thought-provoking questions will often be framed in terms of ‘I wonder . . .’, but for older primary students the term could be replaced. The booklets may indicate different turn of phrase: e.g., let’s ponder, reflect, explore what is happening, exchange thoughts . . . wonder section</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection of questions. Not all those suggested need to be introduced. Alternative ones may arise. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student response, exchange of thoughts. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher recognition of opportunities arising from student contributions. <i>Student response provides a window into where the children are at/thinking/understanding. The latter leads to deeper learning of the children and, many times, of the teacher.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expression of genuine teacher learning. <i>Student contributions may give rise to genuine teacher learning that can be shared with students. (Aspect of co-learning)</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moving away from ‘hands up’ only approach. <i>Knowing how to participate in group discussion is a very valuable skill.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage wide student contribution, even balance of boys and girls, etc. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing responses that indicate deep pondering. 			

Choice Time	Yes	No	Comments/Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear demonstration of new choices. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Techniques to facilitate choice making. <i>Often may include asking students to first work with the actual presentation topic before moving to other choices relating to previous presentations.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smooth transmission into choice time. <i>At first this needs more guidance and limited choices.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student responsibility in accessing choice materials. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on the stage students are at, students are free to explore the concepts introduced in a variety of ways. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With respect, make clear if needed that the focus needs to be on religious education. <i>Dioramas to be used for intended purpose, etc. If they cannot do that, leave it aside until they can.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If students are not causing problems, but are not on task, engage them in a task they will engage with (redirecting). <i>e.g., boys are likely to enjoy working with maps and City of Jerusalem—this can be suggested.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is this class at in terms of the following stages in ‘choice time’: (a) establishing boundaries leading to gradual release (b) laying the groundwork by demonstrating skills facilitating a range of choices (c) being ready to ‘let go’, recognizing one’s role as facilitator and observer. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing new response possibilities that are coherent with the approach. <i>I.e., activities that are not so absorbing for other reasons and essentially a distraction.</i> 			
Closure	Yes	No	Comments/Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective preparation for closure of choices for the day: putting materials back, tidy the space, putting work completed or partially finished in personal pouches. <i>Awareness that this can be hard if students are really absorbed. Patience.</i> 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate selection of the closure activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share work. - Audio-visual selected to consolidate and reinforce the main concept. - Prayer or song/prayer together. 			

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