

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF  
AUSTRALIA

Report by – Jill Vines – 1999 Churchill Fellow

THE W.A. CHURCHILL FELLOWS' ASSOCIATION FELLOWSHIP

An investigation of teacher training and classroom practice for religious education  
in government schools in the United Kingdom.

March 12 – May 21, 1999

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

During March, April and May 1999, I visited key centres in England, Wales and Scotland to investigate teacher training and effective classroom practice for religious education (RE) in schools. The intention was to bring to Western Australia ideas and approaches that would enhance the delivery of Special Religious Education (SRE) in WA government schools.

I aimed to look for ways in which sound educational principles are being applied to classroom practice in RE lessons, and to explore the ways in which RE is linked to other key curriculum areas such as language, literature, art, social sciences, and personal development. I also wanted to investigate the development and use of appropriate curriculum resources.

As my investigation proceeded, several associated topics became significant. The influence of politics is always in front of educators as ideas develop; thus they attempt to be prepared for, or ahead of, the next education department or government directive regarding religious education.

Children's spirituality is also integral to key areas of work. A number of viewpoints are being explored, and teaching methods and resource development reflect the perspective of each school of thought. Four distinctive approaches to RE were noted.

Introduction of the Literacy Hour each day in all schools has important implications for RE. Allocating lesson time for meeting objectives in both RE and Literacy gives schools a challenge. Resource centres are helping teachers find ways to use material with RE content in the Literacy Hour. Focus on the *purpose* of RE and its relationship to other subject areas is important.

With respect to effective classroom practice, approaches such as critical inquiry techniques, art as a basis for investigations in RE, using intellectually challenging activities, and building links with the community as a resource are widely valued and included in teacher training programs.

### Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my sponsors, the West Australian Churchill Fellows' Association. The support they have given my project, and their on-going interest in the outcomes has been most satisfying and very much appreciated.

Thanks also to my employer, The Churches' Commission on Education, for the gift of study leave for the project, and for opportunities to speak with key groups about the ideas gathered.

My sincere thanks also go to my referees: Mr Russell Ridden, Chairman of The Churches' Commission on Education, Ms Margaret Bunday, and Mrs Elaine Blake; and to David Clements, whose home-base support sustained me in the tiring and trying times.

Resources: a list of curriculum resources and reference materials is available on request from Jill Clements at The Churches' Commission on Education.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Project Description:

The aim of the project was to explore programs of training for the teachers of religious education (RE) in the government schools in the United Kingdom. I was looking for effective approaches and activities for the classroom, and for links between RE and other key curriculum areas. The development of curriculum resources for RE was also of interest.

### Project Highlights -

Clive and Jane Erriker, co-directors of the *Children and Worldviews Project* based at the Chichester Institute of Higher Education introduced the notion of children's spirituality. Their associate, Dr Ian Hay of Nottingham University, emphasised the need for careful nurture of the spirit of the child, and the importance of having deep respect for the child as an individual.

At the Stapleford RE Centre in Nottingham, Trevor and Margaret Cooling, John Shortt and Ruth Cooper explained current approaches and methods for teaching about Christianity in RE, and facilitated my exploration of curriculum resources.

John Logan, director of the BFSS National RE Centre at Brunel University in Isleworth, Middlesex, enabled me to attend the RE and School Effectiveness Conference in Poole as well as facilitating observation of teaching practice in RE at several London schools.

In Leicester I observed Lat Blaylock working with year seven students, and some very young students in reception classes, using new resource materials he is developing. Lat is the executive officer of the Professional Council for RE (based in Derby).

### The major lessons I learned:

- RE is a challenging subject in its own right.
- Effective RE lessons can help students extend language and thought structures.
- Skills of discussion, debate, critical thinking and exploration of ideas developed in RE can lead to enhancement of students' understanding and performance in other subject areas.
- Education can be significantly enriched when the religious dimension of being human is acknowledged and linked to topics and issues raised in other subject areas.

### Application in Western Australia:

Key approaches and classroom activities are being incorporated into the training courses provided by The Churches' Commission on Education. I have contributed to several seminars and conferences, with one newspaper article published to date. Further propagation of the new ideas is intended through these means, with discussions with key people in church, education and government circles being continued.

### 3 PROGRAMME

#### JILL VINES: CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP PROJECT - MARCH - MAY, 1999

Churches' Commission on Education cce@ozeinfo.net.au Ph 61 8 9383 9377

<i>Location</i>	<i>Name/Contacts</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Program/Activities</i>
Chichester Institute of Higher Education: School of Religion and Theology Bishop Otter Campus College Lane, Chichester West Sussex PO19 4PE	Clive & Jane Erriker Tel 01243 816000 Fax 01243 816080  Cathy Ota: ota@mistral.co.uk	March 15,16 18,19	Investigate the <i>Children and Worldviews Project</i> Speak with groups about SRE in WA
Hampshire County Council RE Centre, Falcon House Romsey Road, Winchester SO22 5PW	Alan Brine County Inspector for RE Tel 01962 863134 Fax 0015 44 1962 876275	March 17	Investigate Standards for RE in schools Explore support for RE teachers
St Martin's College Bowerham, Lancaster LA1 3JD	Dr Brian Gates <a href="mailto:b.gates@ucsm.ac.uk">b.gates@ucsm.ac.uk</a> Tel 01524 63446 ext 520	March 22, 23	Initial Teacher Training courses with focus on primary RE teaching
Stapleford RE Centre Wesley Place, Stapleford, Nottingham NG9 8DP	Trevor & Margaret Cooling admin@stapleford-centre.org Fx 44 115 939 2076 Ph 44 115 939 6270 / 4671	March 24,25,26 29,30 April 6	Concept Cracking: Personal tuition RE resources Charis Project Distance learning programs
EASTER		April 2 - 5	
University of Sheffield Tapton Hall, Crookes Road	Lat Blaylock April McIntyre	April 7 - 9	PCfRE conference
Warwick University Institute of Education Graduate Studies Building Westwood Campus Warwick CV4 7AL	Prof. Bob Jackson <a href="mailto:aerao@dredd.csv.warwick.ac.uk">aerao@dredd.csv.warwick.ac.uk</a> Contact: Sue Bawden, <a href="mailto:s.f.m.bawden@warwick.ac.uk">s.f.m.bawden@warwick.ac.uk</a>	Apr 14	Consultation: Approaches to training RE teachers
Scripture Union (Eng & Wales) 207 - 209 Queensway Bletchley Milton Keynes MK2 2EB	Emlyn Williams, Tel 1908 856 000 Fax 1908 856 111 contact Ruth Thomas, <a href="mailto:ruth@scriptureunion.org.uk">ruth@scriptureunion.org.uk</a>	April 15	Consultation re: primary age children's workers

University of Birmingham School of Education Birmingham B15 2TT	John Hull j.M.Hull@bham.ac.uk School of Education Building	Apr 16	Consultation
Westhill College RE Centre Weoly Park Road, Selly Oak Birmingham UK B29 6LL	Geoff Teece, Primary RE specialist g.teece@westhill.ac.uk Tel 0121 472 7245 Fax 0121 415 5399	April 16	Discussion re: inter-faith experiential courses.
Derby: Professional Council for Religious Education (PCfRE) Royal Buildings Victoria Street Derby DE1 1GW	Lat Blaylock, Executive Officer Fax 44 1332 343253 Tel 01332 296655	April 19, 20  school visits	Curriculum development Teaching resources Visit RE classes, Explore: Language and Learning in RE
Culham College Institute The Malthouse 60 East St Helen's St, Abingdon Oxon OX14 5EB	John Gay, director Tel 01235 520 458 Fax 1235 535 421 contact: Nicola Challenger <a href="mailto:enquiries@culham.ac.uk">enquiries@culham.ac.uk</a>	Apr 21, 22	Information Technology &RE Curriculum resources
Farmington Institute for Christian Studies, Oxford	Dr Martin Rogers MA Tel 01865 271968	April 22	Consultation
Sandbanks Hotel Poole, Dorset	RE & School Effectiveness Project Conference Contact: John Logan, National RE Centre, Brunel University	April 23,24	RE & school effectiveness: children 'learning from religion' Support for non-specialist RE teachers
BFSS National RE Centre, Brunel University Isleworth Middlesex	John Logan <a href="mailto:john.logan@brunel.ac.uk">john.logan@brunel.ac.uk</a> Tel 0181 981 8324	April 26,27	RE & school effectiveness Mentoring program Using curiosity and research skills of older primary children
The National Society's RE Centre (CofE) 36 Causton Street London SW1P 4AU	Alison Seaman Tel 0171 932 1190/1 Lorraine McColl Fax 0171 932 1199 <a href="mailto:nsrec@dial.pipex.com">nsrec@dial.pipex.com</a>	April 29, 30	Investigating resources and resource development
Trinity College Carmarthen Camarthenshire Wales SA31 3EP	Rev'd Prof. Leslie Francis Tel 01267 676 804 Fx 01267 676766	May 3,4	Empirical survey work. Research in RE: the psychology of religion

Cheltenham, INSET	M Cooling	May 5	Using the Bible in the Literacy Hour
University of East Anglia, School of Education and Professional Development Norwich NR4 7TJ	Marion Agombar m.agombar@uea.ac.uk Tel 01603 593179 Fax 01603 505975 Linda Rudge l.rudge@uea.ac.uk Tel 01603 592 646	May 6, 7	Investigate Initial Teacher Training Visit schools
North of England Institute for Christian Education Carter House Pelaw Leazes Lane Durham DH1 1TB	Jeff Astley <a href="mailto:Jeff.Astley@durham.ac.uk">Jeff.Astley@durham.ac.uk</a> Tel 0191 384 1034 Fax 44 191 384 7529	May 10 – 12	Information Technology Research data base Curriculum resources
Edinburgh: CEM in Scotland, St Colm's Education Centre 18 Inverleith Terrace Edinburgh EH5 5NS	Elizabeth Templeton cemscotland@cem.org.uk Tel 0131 332 8399 Fx 0131 315 2161	May 13, 14	View RE materials & philosophy, visit schools
University of Stirling Department of Education Stirling FK9 4LA	Alison Logie Prof. Keith Whitlam	May 20	Visit schools Explore concurrent RE/Education training

## 4. BACKGROUND

### Special Religious Education (SRE) in Western Australia

For government schools in WA, the Education Act states that Special Religious Education (SRE) may be provided to students, and that, subject to the regulations, the principal may allow time for the special religious education of students, up to 40 hours per year. Thus, SRE takes place at the discretion of the principal, in consultation with the whole school community.

SRE classes are provided in primary schools only. The teachers of SRE are visiting instructors who are members of the local churches and faith groups. The teachers must be trained to a minimum standard, and registered annually with the Education Department.

Two streams of SRE exist: Denominational instruction, where students from a particular faith group are taught by instructors authorised by that faith group using their own curriculum materials, and Composite SRE, where interdenominational teams of Christian teachers accredited by the Churches' Commission on Education take whole class groups for education about Christianity. Teachers of Composite SRE all use the same curriculum, as agreed by the Education Department of WA and the Heads Of Churches in WA. All SRE teachers offer their services on a voluntary basis. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from SRE.

### Religious Education in the UK

The Education Act 1996 identifies the distinctive place of religious education as part of the basic curriculum, with equal standing alongside core and foundation subjects within schools. Unlike these National Curriculum subjects, religious education is not subject to national prescription in terms of attainment targets and programmes of study.

Thus religious education in Britain is taught to all pupils other than those in nursery classes (four year olds). Parents may withdraw their children from religious education classes. Religious education classes are conducted by the classroom teachers, and the teachers' rights are safeguarded in that they may withdraw from teaching these classes.

Curriculum content is outlined in a Local Education Authority Agreed Syllabus, and in each school, the RE team plans the programme of study using this Syllabus as the framework. The Education Act indicates that an agreed syllabus should '*reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions in Great Britain*'. An Agreed Syllabus cannot be designed to convert students, nor to impose a particular religion or religious belief upon students. The time commitment for RE varies from 36 hours per year for junior primary students to 45 hours per year for upper primary and junior high school students. Senior students engaged in Religious Studies programmes may have a larger time commitment.

Each local education authority (LEA) receives advice on religious education and collective worship from its Standing Advisory Council for RE (SACRE). The SACRE is composed of representatives of the LEA, faith communities and teachers. It plays a vital role in raising the standards of achievement in RE. The local Agreed Syllabus for RE must be reviewed every five years by a Syllabus Conference, usually convened by the SACRE.

Most Agreed Syllabuses in the UK specify two Attainment Targets:

learning *about* religion and  
learning *from* religion

Schools in the UK are subject to regular inspections by the LEA and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) which discern to what degree the school is succeeding in addressing the statutory requirements for RE.

Having large groups of people from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds in the community in Britain has influenced the implementation of RE, so that Christianity and five other world religions (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism) are studied by school students.

### Philosophy

Key educators like Trevor Cooling at the Stapleford RE Centre in Nottingham stated the view that the overall aims of education, and especially RE, needed to encompass the realisation that finding a set of values that everyone can agree on is rather like the search for the Holy Grail. Trevor commented, 'What we should be doing is finding ways of teaching young people the skills to live in a society where differences abound. They need to know how to live out their own beliefs with integrity, while being able to accommodate the differences without conflict.' Much of the research, methodology and resources being produced in the UK has this goal in mind.

### Comparing UK with Western Australia:

In Western Australia state school students are taught SRE by Christians, and most of the current activity in SRE is directed towards learning about Christianity. There is no formal system at present for evaluating the effectiveness of, or learning outcomes from SRE lessons.

### Summary

The Churchill Fellowship investigations were carried out with the intention of discovering information and techniques that could be taken and used directly in the context of Composite SRE in Western Australia. The expectation is that The Churches' Commission on Education will continue to provide relevant, up-to-date and stimulating training for accreditation, and to deliver in-service programs which will enrich the skills of the teachers, deepen their understanding of the task, and boost their enthusiasm and commitment.

## 5. FOUR APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE UK

In the development of religious education in Britain there are four main approaches that address the way the subject is being taught. Each approach gives rise to different methods for lesson structure, and the development of related resources, but all the groups agree that what is presented has to be done with excellence, with integrity, and with respect for the various faith groups and their associated cultures. The four main schools of thought come from:

- David Hay at Nottingham University - looking at basic 'experiences' which are common to human beings, which are spiritual in nature. Methods stemming from this approach aim to give students experiences of the spiritual dimension of life, facilitating exploration into experience. It is rooted in religiously plural ideas of spirituality.

Key Reference: *New Methods in RE Teaching – An Experiential Approach*, D Hammond and D Hay, Oliver and Boyd, 1990.

- Michael Grimmit and John Hull at Birmingham University - developed 'A Gift to the Child' – a systematic approach for RE in the early years, that uses religion for the benefit of the students, not simply the transmission of religious understandings.

Being alert to educational psychology, this approach is child and student centred. Curriculum materials focus on life-themes from the world, constructed along the lines of growth and development models of humanity and education. It is rooted in liberal Christianity.

Key Reference: *Religious Education and Human Development*, M Grimmitt, McCrimmons, 1987. ISBN 0 85597 401X

- Robert Jackson at Warwick University, using methods based in ethnography and anthropology, promotes studies of people in their own environment, identifying concepts that can be used to build bridges between groups of people with differing beliefs and cultures. Deeply rooted into religious communities, the interest is in contemporary religion, in a post-phenomenological context.

Key reference: *RE: An Interpretive Approach*, Robert Jackson, Hodder, 1998.

- Stapleford RE Centre markets the Concept Cracking method - an approach for teaching Christianity in a way that focuses on age and stage appropriateness of lessons, providing for progression in the depth of understandings and experiences of students.

This approach sees religions as centrally concerned with constructing reality, and with truth claims. It is rooted in evangelical Christianity.

Key Reference: *A Christian Vision for State Education*, Trevor Cooling, SPCK 1994.  
ISBN 0-281-04758-8

## **6. TEACHER TRAINING AND IN-SERVICE PROGRAMMES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

### Initial Training

There is an urgent demand for qualified RE teachers, and moves to raise the standard of religious education in schools throughout the UK. Teachers face rapid changes in religious education, and the challenge of teaching in a pluralist society.

Universities offer training courses that lead to specialisation in religious education for graduate teachers. As a prime example, St Martin's College, with campuses at Lancaster, Ambleside and Carlisle, offers a four-year Bachelor's Degree in Arts or Science, with Qualified Teacher Status at primary or secondary teaching level, where Religious Studies is listed as an area of specialisation.

St Martin's also offers a one year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) for either primary or secondary teaching, which allows a student who has already studied Religion in their first degree, to qualify as a school teacher specialising in RE.

Other key training institutions such as Brunel University and the University of East Anglia in Norwich also focus on delivering the PGCE programme for RE specialism.

It is significant to note that teacher trainees who elect to specialise in religious education do not necessarily have a personal faith commitment or religious adherence of any sort. They choose to take up RE specialism because they have found the subject intrinsically interesting. They recognise the opportunities inherent in religious education for school students to be challenged through the exploration of ideas, belief, and culture. They aim to facilitate students building their own constructs, which they can then apply in their everyday lives.

### Inservice programs and further study initiatives

Inservice Training for teachers of RE (INSET) is provided in a number of ways:

#### 1 Local Education Authority

The local education authority (LEA) has Teacher Advisers with responsibility for RE. They advise schools, take part in school Inspections, and provide support to the RE teachers. The LEA office usually has a resource centre from which materials, such as books, posters, videos, teaching packs and artefacts can be borrowed for use with classes. Because of the close relationships that are built between schools and the LEA, INSET programs can be offered at specific points of need, tailored to a particular school or year level, and arranged so that the content focuses on the Agreed Syllabus for RE for that LEA.

Alan Brine and Judith Lowndes from the Hampshire County RE Centre described how they assist teachers to plan for RE lessons, starting from overall objectives, and continuing into specific activities for a single lesson. The Hampshire RE Centre also produces a newsletter each term for RE teachers. This newsletter contains ideas for enhancing and improving RE lessons, updates from the SACRE and LEA on the Syllabus, and contributions from teachers themselves.

In *An analysis of 1997 SACRE reports* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 1998), it was noted that schools sometimes had difficulty in releasing teachers during the day for INSET, and twilight programs, offered regularly, did not prove the best time for teachers to invest in new learning, after a tiring day at school. Some found whole-school INSET days focussed on RE were helpful. The RE advisers and other providers constantly seek the most effective ways to deliver INSET for maximum participation.

## 2 RE Conferences

I attended two conferences as part of my project: the Professional Council for RE (PCfRE) Spring course at Sheffield and the Religious Education and School Effectiveness (REaSE) Conference at Poole. These provided excellent opportunities to get some insights into this kind of provision for support of RE teachers.

At Sheffield University, RE teachers and educators from all over the UK met for the **PCfRE Residential Spring Course**. The theme was “Making Progress in RE: Raising Curriculum and Professional Standards”. Topics included presentations on progress being made in RE at the national level, interaction between RE and the media, and continuing professional development for teachers for whom RE is a career choice.

Workshops at this conference addressed specific aspects such as assessment in RE, personal search in RE, spiritual development, using the literacy strategy for RE, progress in the early years and inspection in RE. Delegates could attend three different workshops during the Spring Course.

A special event at the Spring Course was the presentation of the Sandford St Martin’s Trust Religious Education Award for the best television programme, video or CD-ROM in the field of religious education over the previous two years. An animated film made in Czechoslovakia by Zenni Yukishige, a Japanese director, on *Sikhism: The Life Of Guru Nanak* won this award. This raised my awareness of the contribution made by television channels and other media groups to providing relevant and top quality resources for religious education in state schools.

The BFSS National RE Centre at Brunel University has set up the **Religious Education and School Effectiveness Project**, to combine research and development into what constitutes effective RE for pupils in schools, and then to develop specific resources and strategies to address identified needs. Financial support for this project came from the BFSS, local authorities and dioceses and Brunel University BFSS RE Centre.

At the **REaSE Conference**, groups of RE teachers and advisers who had carried out specific research projects reported on their progress over the year. Each group had received the same amount of funds, and worked on a variety of tasks ranging from pupil assessment and transfer of information about pupils’ achievement in RE from the primary schools to secondary school, to helping teachers at a ‘failing’ school to raise the quality and enjoyment of RE lessons. A project of note was that undertaken by the PCfRE Midlands group, to find ways of supporting Teachers with Other Subject Specialisms (TWOS) who are nominated by their schools to take responsibility for RE programs.

### 3 Workshops

Development days are provided at RE centres in the various universities and colleges. An RE teacher Mentor's workshop I attended at St Martins' College, Lancaster, was held for secondary teachers who act as resource people for their RE teachers. The focus for this INSET day was on using ICT (Information and Communication Technology) for RE. The Mentors explored getting access to internet sites that are valuable resources for RE teachers, which students could access during lessons. The use of CD-ROM packages was also discussed.

The government has made ICT a priority for education across the country, and National Curriculum directives require ICT to be incorporated into all subject areas. In response to this, the PCfRE has set up a project called REFIT (RE *from* IT), to promote the effective use of this technology in RE programs. Some factors contributing to a good lesson in RE using ICT were outlined by REFIT adviser Carolyn Reade, who conducted the Mentor's workshop.

Centres such as Stapleford and the CEM in Derby offer INSET programs to groups in regional gatherings, with topics tailored to current issues and needs. One of these issues is the national strategy of the Literacy Hour, an action aimed to raise literacy standards generally.

Margaret Cooling from the Stapleford Centre conducted a one-day workshop on **Using the Bible in the Literacy Hour** at Cheltenham, which was attended by teachers from Wales and surrounding counties. The Bible was viewed as a work of literature, as well as a sacred text. Exercises focussed on development of relevant and intellectually engaging activities that used Biblical content as the basis for achieving Literacy Hour objectives. Current publishing has not provided many resources in this area, so the participants explored how to produce their own texts for use with pupils.

Margaret demonstrated how RE content material can be opened up in the Literacy Hour, through the specific strands defined in the Literacy curriculum document (ideas such as characterisation, structure of poetry, metaphor, narrative, spelling, personal dilemmas, conflict and tension, to name just a few), and then this material can be explored more deeply in a reflective manner, through the RE lesson. By using RE content in Literacy, RE time is not limited, rather, Literacy provides a bonus for RE extension, and RE reinforces the Literacy program. Many of the activities in the *Toolkits* resource are very useful in this context. *Toolkits* was written by Margaret Cooling, for use with the Concept Cracking approach to RE, and is published by the Bible Society.

### 4 Distance Learning for RE Teachers

A large number of training institutions provide distance learning opportunities for teachers to update their knowledge and extend their teaching strategies, as well as providing initial training courses for people wanting to specialise in RE. The Professional Council for Religious Education publishes a directory of institutions offering in-service courses in religious education by distance learning. Programmes range from short courses to higher degrees.

These courses combine academic enquiry with enhancement of classroom practice and management skills. The increase in the number of courses being offered in this mode stems from government initiatives to raise the standard of teaching in schools. These initiatives have emphasised the importance of critical reflection on classroom practice, and the courses follow

this perspective. Teachers are becoming aware of the availability of this kind of support for their on-going professional development.

### 5 Other Initiatives for Professional Development and support of RE teachers

At the Culham College Institute in Abingdon, conversations with the Director, John Gay, led to awareness of several interesting support ventures.

Each year in June, funding from the St Gabriels Trust (administered from Culham College) enables 200 recently qualified RE Teachers to participate in a weekend of seminars, workshops and discussions, with national officers and leaders in RE being present. One of the aims of this weekend is to give recognition to the role of the RE teacher, to provide encouragement, and to affirm the contribution each teacher makes to RE. The participating teachers are able to attend free of any costs apart from their personal travel needs. Professional Development (PD) is intended and achieved, but the most significant outcome is the renewed sense of purpose and value that is generated in the teachers.

Also set up under the St Gabriel's Trust is the *Action Research Project for INSET*. Under this program, groups apply for funding to set up a local project that will benefit RE.

Many of the groups used the funding, or substantial proportions of the funds to pay for cover (relief) teachers, whilst the group teachers were involved in doing the INSET or project.

Some of the programs were PD, others were designed to enhance local syllabus understanding, or to develop classroom materials for lessons, some were to collect artefacts that could be circulated among the schools as a resource for RE lessons. Reports from the project groups showed photographs of artefacts such as costumes, garlands, lights and so on, across the range of religions. Many excellent lesson materials and lesson plans that had been written by the groups were also included in these reports.

A new program being developed under the Association of Church College Trusts and administered from the Culham Institute is the *RE Teacher Recruitment Initiative (RETRI)* which focusses on developing career opportunities within RE.

RETRI development officer Tina Broekhuizen explained the task includes tracking some of the 11,000 high school students doing 'A' level Religious Studies each year, to find out what study programmes they go into, or what sort of employment they take up. It will also involve contacting school Careers departments and encouraging them to promote RE teaching as a career path, and reaching those involved in Theology studies at Universities with prospects about RE.

She aims to run 'taster' sessions on RE, by linking teacher training colleges with schools in their area known to demonstrate good practice in RE, so that students can and see what happens in RE. The production of promotional material will be a key activity for the project.

## 6 Farmington Fellowships

Martin Rogers, director of the Farmington Institute for Christian Studies at Harris Manchester College, Oxford, outlined the idea of this program - to provide for the enrichment of RE teaching by enabling classroom teachers to spend a term in a University or College, carrying out research or development work in some aspect of study that is directly relevant to the teaching of RE. Farmington Fellowships are awarded to secondary teachers, with Millennium Awards for primary teachers.

Teachers devise the area of study they want to undertake. The Universities like the program, and want Farmington Fellows - it gives them prestige and links to schools. The Fellowship pays the University fee, the teacher's living expenses, and the costs for cover teaching when necessary. Farmington Fellowships are often carried out at Theological Colleges, however, many are based in Schools of Education

Currently there are 25 secondary and 25 primary teachers in the program.

Martin is interested in spreading the concept to other countries - including Australia. This would involve talking about the idea with appropriate people, then finding a key person or university to take up the idea. A small pilot scheme could be started, and when it is seen to work, sponsors could be found to continue the program.

## 7 Reflections on INSET (UK) and In-service programs in Western Australia

One of the factors which was most impressive was the number and variety of sources of funding for projects and programs related to RE. Although the different providers of INSET spoke constantly about the competition for funding, and the difficulty of maintaining services at current levels, there is still a considerable pool of money accessible by groups and institutions for development of RE support.

For WA, the availability of funds for training and development in RE is very limited, or else has not been tapped by the CCE to date. SRE teachers usually pay for their initial training, give their teaching time on a voluntary basis, and contribute to the costs of inservice day programs from their own resources. Some of the churches are able to help individual teachers, but most cannot, or do not. This is a real challenge for us, and one that the CCE is beginning to take up. Much more will be needed to revise training courses and deliver quality in-service programs, to enable the achievement of excellence in the teaching of SRE.

## 7. STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT IN RE – CONFERENCE REPORTS

At the Spring Conference of the Professional Council for RE in Sheffield that I attended, John Keast, the Principal Subject Officer for RE at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) opened up the topic of having standards for RE, and the need to continually work towards standards of excellence in the teaching of RE.

John pointed out that, overall, there exists

- general perception that standards in RE are rising -although some data indicates that the starting point is coming from a fairly low perspective
- evidence coming from OFSTED (the Office for Standards in Education) that indicates things are improving, but there is still long way to go
- a need for all groups concerned with RE to work together

It appears that there are no specific criteria or benchmarks for measuring student progress in RE, so any reporting of standards includes a degree of subjectivity, depending on the extent to which the Inspector from the county education office knows and understands what is actually happening in RE, compared to what could be happening. It was recognised, that as Inspectors become more effectively trained in the RE field, there may be a perceived drop in current standards, due to more systematic and objective reporting.

Further discussions with key teachers clarified that RE is not included in the National Curriculum document as a discrete subject, hence there are no national standards, and no measurement criteria. Yet the education authorities are directing that RE must happen. So, it is left largely up to the LEA and its SACRE to follow up and ensure that effective RE is happening.

Some of the people felt that this reflected a lack of courage on the part of the National politicians to come to grips with the whole issue of religious thought and life. They commented that any statement made at the National level relating to things of religious nature is interpreted as being tied up with racial and ethnicity issues, with politicians being too afraid to touch it, in case some group gets offended. [We in Australia face the same dilemma, to some degree.]

When some teachers were asked how they would go about taking RE to the national politicians, they all stated that effective and on-going communication, and involvement of the politicians in local events and schools was crucial.

With regard to raising achievement in RE, John Keast listed various levels of input:

National: There is a need for recognition at the national level that RE is important, and there is a need to keep RE alive and relevant as a subject at the National Curriculum level.

LEA: Some SACREs are not giving support to schools for RE, others do it well (for example, Hampshire )

Schools: at the management level: where senior management don't rate RE very highly, there are problems in raising standards. John felt if RE had a "Cinderella" image, that was not so bad, as she did eventually get dressed and go to the ball in finery. Where a "Mickey Mouse" image of RE existed, it was a worry.

Schools: at the subject department level: the RE department in a school needs to give guidance for encouraging standards and excellence in teaching.

Teacher and Student: this is where the matter is crucial, because it's the quality of the teaching, and pupil/teacher interaction that really makes the difference between effective and non-effective RE. Students bring factors also such as their effort, interest, and participation to the task.

Family: student background, and degree of support from the family has impact, especially if it's counter to what's being explored in RE.

Community: this may be supportive of RE, or not.

All these factors play their part in the success or otherwise of the RE program. Most people involved are becoming more aware of the need for continued effort.

## FUTURE ACTION

The 1998 OFSTED report on standards in primary RE lists Action Points:

'In order to improve further standards in RE schools should:

- meet fully the legal requirement to teach RE to all pupils;
- enhance pupil's spiritual and moral development through explicit teaching about beliefs and ideas;
- increase the challenge of the tasks by asking students to interpret, analyse, evaluate and reflect on what they learn rather than simply write descriptively, reiterate stories or record pictorially;
- train pupils to listen to, analyse and evaluate what others say in discussion, making their own contributions informed and thoughtful
- make good use of the opportunities offered by RE for developing literacy (reading writing and speaking)
- agree standards expected in RE across the school, following the requirements of the agreed syllabus.'

One of the key issues implicit in this whole topic is what sort of outcomes should be measured, in order to assess achievement and progress of pupils in RE. It was acknowledged here, and in other institutions, that while background information about religious beliefs and practice is important and can be examined, much of the most valuable learning from RE is in the intangibles. There was awareness that putting a framework on outcomes from RE could mean a loss of the spontaneity and atmosphere in which children can feel free to speak about what they are thinking and constructing from the input.

The OFSTED report concludes, regarding assessment:

‘The lack of formal assessment in RE results in many teachers being unaware of the potentially high standards which pupils can achieve. In many schools teachers have lower expectations of their pupils in RE than in other subject areas, and are unaware of what primary pupils can achieve in RE.

It is not unusual for teachers to be aware of pupils’ knowledge. But it is unusual to find teachers who know how far pupils have progressed in other aspects of RE, such as understanding of the impact of religion on society or the arts, being able to offer interpretations of religious texts and symbols, or the extent to which pupils can understand or evaluate moral issues.’

In reporting on a Year 5 class, an Inspector noted that

‘The most serious consequence (of lack of assessment) is that pupils with high abilities in RE go undetected and are consequently not set suitably challenging work. Pupils’ abilities are judged solely by their written work. This fails to identify those pupils who have particular insights into religious and moral questions, but who lack the literacy skills to write them down. Equally, over-generous judgements are made about the abilities in RE of those pupils who have good language skills but have little understanding of religious and moral concepts.’

[In the Western Australian context, these comments are particularly worth noting, since SRE is never assessed formally, and apart from quizzes, and anecdotal evidence, no attempt is made to evaluate the knowledge or understandings that students develop through SRE. If formal assessment was to be carried out, the implication is that extension of training for the SRE teachers would be necessary. Developing more in-depth assessment could also challenge perceptions of what SRE is about, not only for the teachers of SRE, but for schools as well.]

The highlighting of the need for all groups associated with RE to work together in order to raise achievements has significance. The fact that at six levels key groups of citizens are involved in the successful development and delivery of RE programs in the UK points again to an acknowledgement of the relevance of the subject to everyday life and community. [There is a struggle in our own community in Western Australia to get this kind of recognition. Often it is only the SRE teachers who have the vision and commitment to insist that SRE is relevant, important and complementary to the rest of the curriculum.]

‘Religious education makes a greater contribution to pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development than any other subject. Opportunities, particularly for spiritual and moral development, occur when teachers ask and encourage questions and the discussion of issues stemming from the subject content of RE.’

Statements such as this, included in the OFSTED report on primary RE, motivate my determination to raise the profile of SRE in Western Australia, and to foster informed debate about ways in which religious and moral education for young students can be carried out in our state schools.

## 8 TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN RE

What makes for excellence in RE? The dynamics of teacher and student working together is crucial, because it's the quality of the teaching, and pupil/teacher interaction that really makes the difference between effective and non-effective RE.

A number of educators I visited spoke about the characteristics they look for when selecting applicants for RE courses. Key factors sought were these:

### Teacher Characteristics

- Sound background knowledge and grasp of subject matter – able to get to the heart of what we want to teach (for this we need teachers who are well trained or well resourced)
- Awareness of the students' world of experience: what they talk about with each other, what magazines they read, what TV shows they watch - a willingness to move out of the 'religious' frame into the child's frame (it's no good talking louder or using bigger flannel boards)
- Helps students think, "Why do I need to know this?" (the 'so what?' approach)
- Uses effective questioning skills and techniques
- Must be a learner himself
- Courage - not to have things set in stone, knowing the importance of setting aside the need to be right (especially in the religious context).
- Accept that it's all right for the teacher not to know the answer - "but we can explore this topic together"
- Fosters the 'Aha!' element in lessons
- Attends to using activities that are intellectually engaging - using the mind and senses: kids are looking for relevant things, not necessarily trendy things
- Has the ability to challenge students to think, reflect, explore ideas
- Need to have a real 'feel' or passion for the religious domain - this attitude gets passed onto the students (some Christians may have a rather bizarre understanding of their own religion)
- Be sufficiently undogmatic, able to embrace a range of ideas
- Need for a grasp on reality :
  - understanding what it is like to be a (10 year old/15 year old) person in today's world
  - understanding the student (teenage/primary age) culture
  - willing to encounter students
- Be themselves, confidently
- Relates personally to students (takes a personal interest in each student)
- Treats students as whole people (not just another scalp to be saved), loves the whole being
- Conviction that the person wants to, is 'driven' to teach RE

### Key Factors for effective RE

- Quality of teaching and student/teacher interaction
- Effective Questioning
- Use of current media and artistic expressions, as well as literature, to gain students interest
- Use of Critical Inquiry techniques
- Permitting students to push ideas to the limit
- Avoidance of a simplistic approach – exploration of ideas in the religious domain can be the most taxing intellectual work around!
- Inclusion of activities that are challenging and engage the intellect

## CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE RE

### Questioning Techniques and Intellectual Engagement

One thing that was discerned very strongly, is the need for teachers to focus on questioning techniques, for the kinds of questions being asked direct the flow of the lesson, and determines whether students are just ingesting information for factual recall, or are really coming to grips with the concepts. This matter of using apt questions was instrumental in the work of all the people with whom I have talked, whose vision is for in-depth engagement by students with RE lesson content.

Alan Brine, County RE Inspector for Hampshire, spoke very strongly about the value of children being intellectually engaged, through various levels of thinking processes, in sifting and sorting ideas and experiences, then being able to make some statement that demonstrates the internalising of the ideas, and of a personal perception being developed.

He believes teachers must equip themselves to challenge the students to think, and to think creatively about the ideas and information being presented. It was asserted by Alan that children of all ages are able to carry out this kind of thinking, at an appropriate level, when they have knowledge of the skills, and with the effective use of questions from the teacher. The skills thus learned can be transferred to other subject areas, with beneficial results.

In addition, considering the religious or spiritual dimension in various subjects can bring deeper meaning into the pursuit of knowledge in that subject - so students can be motivated to know, understand, explore and to implement in their lives the ideas they are finding.

Alan gave an example of what he was espousing:

“We must look at the nature of the intellectual engagement and tasks children are asked to do. For example, after a class visit to a Hindu temple, children could be asked during the Literacy hour (at year 4 level) to write a persuasive letter - using persuasive language - to the teacher of another grade, setting out why they should take their class to the local Hindu temple. This requires the children to process what they’ve experienced during the visit, set out what they learned, why it affected them, what they think other children could gain from such a visit, and write in the persuasive genre. Intellectual processing of quite a high level is being carried out.”

In many RE lessons using standard approaches, teachers hear the kids say, ‘RE is boring.’ What Alan believes students find is, “The tasks you give us to do are boring or uninteresting.” Their interest and intellect are not engaged, and they react accordingly.

## Philosophy With Children

Lorna Crossman, of St Martin's College in Lancaster, echoed what Alan had said. As Lecturer in English and RE for teacher trainees, she is able to integrate content and strategies in both fields. Often she uses a story for the jumping off point for a lesson. The story may be a bible story, folk story, modern day anecdote, or fable.

Lorna feels that children develop mastery of stories (in the RE context) in their early years. They are happy to listen to a story, maybe just re-tell it, because it's all new to them, and they are practising with it, developing mastery. After that, they want to do more, because they have the mastery, and they get bored if the approach ("Now write the story in your own words.") is the same.

At this point, students need to be engaging with the story at a deeper level, one that challenges them, and requires higher order learning and processing skills. Lorna uses the *Philosophy with Children* approach, throwing in leading questions, encouraging genuine debate, teaching the children how to listen to each other, to reflect on what is said, and make their own comment, agreeing with or disagreeing with their classmate, but giving their reasons for doing so. The teacher is more a facilitator, and the students learn from each other, as they progress.

The kind of questions that Lorna Crossman uses in her *Philosophy with Children* approach come from studies of the work of Matthew Lipman and Karen Murriss. Lorna herself has been tutored by Karen Murriss, who is in Wales. The approach was generated by Matthew Lipman in New Jersey, USA. He is regarded as the grandfather of the movement.

[In Australia, Philip Cam in New South Wales is carrying out progressive work in this field.]

Vivienne Baumfield, director of the PGCE RE course at Newcastle University in the UK, also focuses attention on the need to foster critical thinking, and the appropriate use of effective questions. Other approaches to inquiry taught by Vivienne include such activities as Mysteries, Living Graphs and Concept Mapping.

[Australian educators Richard White and Richard Gunston at Monash University explore some of these ways to help students develop critical engagement with the key content. The book Probing Understanding, Falmer Press, 1992, outlines these approaches.]

## Concept Cracking

At the Stapleford RE centre, the Concept Cracking approach has been developed as a methodology for effective exploration of Christian beliefs. It was seen that students did gain some knowledge of Bible stories and what Christians do through RE, but the reasons behind the behaviours were rarely explored. Trevor Cooling and his team wanted to provide opportunities for students to encounter the meaning of Bible stories, and to look at the significance of practices such as baptism and communion.

The team believed that children could cope with quite difficult ideas, as long as they were presented in ways that made sense in their world of experience. The challenge was to provide input at various age levels that built on to earlier learning, and helped students develop a more sophisticated understanding of specific topics.

Two important components for planning an RE program in Christian beliefs were determined: Identifying a focus, and relating beliefs to children's experience.

The first was necessary because there is a multiplicity of ideas or beliefs embedded in topics selected for RE lessons in schools. The temptation is to include everything, for fear of missing a key facet of the story.

The second is important because for most children in the schools, Christian beliefs do not form part of their everyday experience. The challenge is to link children's personal experience of the world with the world of Christian belief in ways that help them make sense of the beliefs.

Concept cracking consists of four main steps: Unpacking the ideas or beliefs, Selecting one idea, relating the idea to the child's Experience, and bringing in the Religious idea in a way that is Relevant (U.S.E.R.).

*Toolkits* is a resource containing activities that offer more than surface level engagement by students. Through Art, Music, Writing, Poetry, Story and Drama, students are invited to use their minds and senses to experience and explore the Christian religion.

The Stapleford RE Centre has produced a large number of resources for use in schools, based on the Concept Cracking approach, and covering a range of subject areas and year levels. One such resource, the *Charis Project*, provides Christian resources promoting spiritual and moral development across the curriculum. Units in English, Mathematics, French, German and Science are available at this time.

## The Bible in Schools

Agencies such as The Bible Society, the Stapleford Centre, CEM and the National RE Centre in London direct significant activity into investigating how Bible text is presented to students in schools, and documenting the students' responses. Coming from the perspective that education is about informing people and inviting them to join the debate and seek truth for themselves, the educators promote text formats that students will relate to, and produce support materials that will aid student explorations of the Bible.

A wide variety of Biblical material is published, from comic strip format to picture book mode, and on to dramatised presentations of selected readings from the Good News Bible and New International Version texts. The aim is to get students involved in reading the text, and interacting with the story of people's encounters with God. INSET workshops focus on developing a variety of approaches to exploring the Bible, and for using Biblical material in language and literacy lessons.

## The Literacy Hour

Through all of this, there is a thread of the importance of language and language development in RE. The Literacy Hour has been instituted (at government direction), to try and lift literacy levels generally. RE organisations focus on providing teachers with ways of using RE material in the literacy hour, for literacy objectives, and then following up the affective aspects of the content in the RE lesson itself.

RE also stimulates a range of vocabulary and thinking processes that may not be readily explored in other subject areas. Almost every subject area touches in some way upon the religious domain, and the promoters of RE intend to keep stretching these interfaces in every possible way.

## Pictures and story books

Karenza Passmore from the North East Religious Learning Resources Centre at Durham, provides INSET programs for RE teachers, and helps RE teachers set up RE programs and units of work. For Karenza, pictures provide a favourite medium for investigation. Karenza believes that all illustrations are loaded with agenda. Publishers pay a lot of money for the right to use them, so they must have a purpose. Pictures are carefully chosen.

For this reason, she invites students to critically scrutinise illustrations, describing what they see, and what meaning is conveyed to them. The story itself may then be told or read, after the students have had time to express their own interpretation of the picture. The students can make comparisons, query why the story ran as it did, what it means, whether anything like that happens in their own lives, what subsequent actions might follow.

Again, the vital factor is in the questioning, getting children to enter into the story, and draw reflections from their own experience.

## Art and Religious Education

Margaret Cooling at Stapleford RE Centre, and Lat Blaylock of PCfRE in Derby both promote the use of the arts to explore religious ideas that may often be thought of as too difficult for children. They encourage student exploration of the expression of faith and beliefs in art, considering a variety of mediums including stained glass, sculpture, paintings, mosaics and illuminated manuscripts.

Margaret Cooling explained that art is a non-verbal means of expression which students can find a freeing experience. It allows a depth of exploration in critical inquiry aspects, as well as allowing involvement with materials in the creative aspects. The creative processes encourage student responses, and this is particularly relevant in the 'affective' or feeling dimension of RE. Making choices in the creative process involves evaluation and decision-making, which expands the educational value of RE. Responding to art involves awareness that can lead to understanding that this belief being explored is an important one for Christians, or to a response of a more personal nature.

The Religious and Moral Education Press at Norwich, in association with the National Gallery Publications Limited has produced a teaching resource *Jesus Through Art*, written by Margaret Cooling. This resource has 12 units of work, with 24 large colour prints for use in the classroom, looking at important events in the life of Jesus as depicted by key artists throughout the world. It has links with other curriculum areas, and the teacher guide includes student worksheet masters.

In *Toolkits* Margaret Cooling sets out twenty questions for investigating works of art as a basis for RE lessons. *Toolkits* also contains a wide range of art activities that will enable students to become involved in expressing their own responses to RE topics.

CEM was also developing a resource pack of selected art works, *Jesus in Art*, depicting events in the life of Jesus. At Babbington High School, in Leicester, I watched Lat Blaylock work with year seven students as he trialled this resource, finding out which paintings were most effective in attracting student responses. The selection of artworks included many modern paintings from a number of different cultures and countries. After re-capping on prior knowledge about Jesus' life, the students were invited to indicate the pictures they liked, those they did not, and to formulate questions they would like to ask the painter or sculptor about the artwork. In the last part of this lesson, the students were asked to write or draw their impression of what it would be like if Jesus came to Leicester today. Lat subsequently used this information to finalise the content of the prints in the resource pack, prior to publication.

## Using Local Resources

One of the often-neglected resources that is within reach of every school is the local community. In the UK, the local community may be richly varied in the cultural and religious groups that contribute to the school. RE development officers at the LEAs encourage RE teachers to make use of the knowledge and experience of faith and religious practice that resides in the families associated with the school.

The benefit of this was particularly brought home to me during the REaSE conference, where one of the key projects for raising school effectiveness was centred in schools identified as needing considerable development work, following an OFSTED inspection.. It was seen that RE made a significant contribution to improving the whole ethos of a school, as RE programs focussed on building successful relationships with the wider community were implemented. The effectiveness of RE was gauged from raised self-esteem of individuals, schools and the community, as the beliefs and culture of the students were recognised and celebrated. Members of faith groups in the community were invited to share their experiences and personal stories with students, and some excursions to local places of significance were carried out.

At Notre Dame High School in Norwich a class was investigating the life and influence of Julian of Norwich, a woman who was an anchoress at St Julian's Church in Norwich for twenty years in the early 1400s. Following key reading and notation about the life and work of Julian, the class was to visit the Julian Shrine in the city, combining a historical exploration of this local site with some inquiry into the religious significance of Julian's writings.

[To some extent, our SRE program in Western Australia already uses community resources like this, as the teachers are self funded, and must be practising members of a local church congregation in order to qualify for accreditation. Many of the WA teachers do facilitate student visits to local church buildings. Occasionally additional input may come from special visitors coming into SRE lessons for a specific topic. Our historical sites may not have the antiquity of some of the wonderful places in Britain, but they still speak about the story and struggle of people of faith coming to terms with a new and challenging environment, and would be worthy of inclusion as resources when RE lessons are being planned.]

## Artefacts and RE

Most of the LEA resources centres carry collections of pictures, books, videos and artefacts for use by RE teachers. The use of religious artefacts with students is encouraged, not only because it can expand student knowledge and experience regarding a particular belief system, but because the need to handle such articles with sensitivity and respect can amplify the understanding and awareness of students about what it is like to be a person with religious faith. It is expected that this will help generate a deeper respect and acceptance of people who have different beliefs, and who express these beliefs in ways that may not be easily understood from superficial scanning.

## **9 CHALLENGES IN COMMON TO THE TEACHING OF RE IN THE UK AND IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

It was interesting to identify that challenges which are present in the Western Australian context for SRE are also present in the UK system. Some of these common issues are:

- lack of recognition at government levels and in the churches of the significant contribution RE can make to education as a whole;
- recruitment of teachers for specialisation in RE;
- securing adequate funds to resource and support RE;
- maintaining availability of courses for training people for teaching RE
- developing a good public image of RE
- getting whole school support for RE.

### Acknowledgement from Government and Education Department

Getting recognition and acknowledgment from the government and education department for Religious Education as being an important part of the development of all students is a continuous task. This is in the face of the British government's demands for attention to spiritual and moral development of students, as per the 1944 Education Act, and re-addressed by the 1988 and 1996 revisions of the Act.

### Citizenship and RE

There is growing debate about the possibility of Citizenship being added to the required subjects that schools are asked to teach in the UK. The supporters of RE see two possible directions for this: RE will be pushed further into oblivion in the efforts to promote Citizenship, or, vocal RE teachers and school department heads can point out that current initiatives in RE already are directed towards developing that sense of community and social harmony that goes towards producing good citizenship. It all depends on how well the programs and effectiveness of RE is promoted to the authorities and the community at large.

Key educators believe effective communication by all available means is needed. It is felt that this has to be continuous, with no resting on the laurels, for more vocal groups arise with new agendas, and if the religious community is not in there too, RE will be overlooked and ignored. They agree the various religious faiths have to work together to achieve this end.

### Churches and Ministers

In the UK getting the churches to appreciate the significance of the role they can play in schools, to influence and support the schools is hard work, and a continuous task. The Christian Action Research and Education (CARE) organization, located at 53 Romney Street, London, prepares and distributes material that shows how Christians can be involved in the schools for improvement and high standards of operation.

It was mentioned, that where a church congregation is lively and contagious, there is almost always a number of teachers, and probably some RE teachers among the members. However, that church itself may not be mindful of the needs of the local schools, nor actively promoting support for schools through prayer and input from its members. Again, communication is the key to making changes. Ministers and church leaders need to be kept informed of what is happening.

### Political Directives

It seems that much that happens on the broader scene in the UK is initiated at government levels. Decisions by national politicians very directly affect daily life. There is on-going discussion about the achievement levels of students across the nation, in all subjects. It was said, at the PCfRE conference, by John Keast of QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), that at the recent RE Festival, held in the south of England, positive reports of the programs and activities were recorded in the press. This was in the context of multicultural/ multi-faith RE. He commented that RE is evidently successful at the local level, while it remains problematical for the Politicians. It could be asked whether the politicians might not learn from the locals in this.

### The Millennium

In all spheres there is focus on the Millennium, and what people might do to celebrate it. The churches and all major religious groups have put together a full program of possibilities for schools to be involved in art, drama, literacy and music activities that focus on the event, and reflect its significance. Schools have been invited to join the project, and receive updates on events that they can take part in.

## 10 CHILDREN AND SPIRITUALITY

One of the key factors that shaped the training for specialist RE teachers was the perspective held by the teacher educators about children and spirituality. These understandings were also reflected in approaches to writing curriculum resources, and local education authority Agreed Syllabuses for RE.

One viewpoint that I found immensely interesting and helpful was that spirituality is something that is innately human, not a product of any religious belief or practice. David Hay, Reader in Spiritual Education at the University of Nottingham propagates this theory. His investigations into the way in which children express their spirituality led him to define a quality he calls the *relational consciousness*, a compound property which reflects an unusual level of consciousness, or perceptiveness on the part of the child expressed in conversations, in partnership with how the child related to things, other people, him/herself, and God.

He asserts that modern western thought (and social practice) limits the development of spirituality and thus ethical human behaviour. David was emphatic that this 'relational consciousness' is something particularly human, something that is a human universal, which religious people take seriously - we are defending something that is innately human, not defending 'religion'

David believes that children become fearful (sometime around the ages 6 - 10) of acknowledging or expressing their spirituality. Some of the reasons for this are: social pressure, lack of awareness by significant adults, lack of acknowledgment of this aspect of the child's nature by school and community at large.

He believes that spirituality is not the preserve of religious education - that it affects the politics of the curriculum, and concerns the entire culture of the school. He asserts that, for spiritual education to become a practical reality, there will have to be a radical change in educational culture, and at the very least, the backing of a policy directive at Government levels will be needed.

In his book, The Spirit of the Child, David outlines practices which could contribute to a change in the culture within schools. He suggests teachers and parents can:

- help children keep an open mind
- explore different ways of seeing - the relational consciousness has to struggle for legitimacy against forces which narrow the selfless impulse in human beings
- encourage personal awareness of the world around us, and the objects and surroundings which are part of the fabric of each day (some call this the 'Aha!' element)
- become personally aware of the social and political dimensions of spirituality

With respect to teaching David outlined how the relational consciousness could be nurtured:

- Introduction of reflective exercises (recognising that many teachers have lost their relational consciousness, which would enable them to communicate religious ideas with children)
- Listening to children, listening to children's stories, listening without imposing an adult frame of reference.
- Use of questions that allow children to explore their ideas, each other's stories.
- Facilitating children questioning each other, children communicating with each other (building a community of inquiry)

If there is soundness in his theories, the need to look at ideas that can change the way in which people think about and interact with children is paramount. His book concludes with a statement affirming the prime need to nurture above all, the spirit of the child.

## 11 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My Churchill Fellowship explorations lead me to believe most firmly that the inclusion of religious education in mainstream curriculum planning for government schools can make a significant contribution to the overall effectiveness of education for Australian students.

Some comments generated from the Biblos Research Project carried out by the Bible Society in the UK and reported in their publication *Transmission* in autumn 1998, point to the purpose of religious education:

*Churches and other faith communities have different roles, with some common ground. It is no part of a state school's job to try to recruit for or against any particular faith, but to present accurately and interestingly every faith required to be taught in the legally-binding agreed syllabus for RE. It is a very real and central part of a faith community's role to welcome and nurture children and prepare them to be, or to consider becoming, committed adult members of that faith community. But churches and schools have a shared interest in children understanding and making informed judgements rather than falling back on a mixture of prejudices and ignorance.*

Trevor Cooling's statement on the overall aims of education greatly interested me. Here, I believe, is a challenge to current expectations of religious education in government schools in Australia:

*What we should be doing is finding ways and teaching young people the skills to live in a society where differences abound. They need to know how to live their own beliefs with integrity, while being able to accommodate the differences without conflict. What people will need in the future is to be able to live peaceably in a society where differences of thought and viewpoint are the norm, and we have to live with that, and work in that frame of reference. What life skills are going to be needed to do that? What skills of negotiation and reconciliation and acceptance are our young people going to need? That's what RE and education should focus on.*

I am convinced effective religious education *is* possible, and can offer an exciting forum in which students can explore the ideas and beliefs that help shape culture and society. Religious education can help students extend skills in the areas of discussion, debate, reflection, critical inquiry, interpersonal relationships, self-knowledge and self-expression.

The relationship between the teacher and the student is one of the key factors in the effective delivery of religious education. Community awareness and acceptance of the value of religious education will also give support to positive outcomes from RE.

The religious perspective can be touched on in all other subject areas, making links through values exploration, moral and ethical views and development of personal codes of behaviour. Effective religious education can provide a dimension for pushing understanding beyond what is seen and touched.

Alongside moves towards values education and studies in citizenship, consideration should be given to including religious education in mainstream curriculum planning. Conversations with people from all walks of life are needed, focussing on the positive contribution that studies of the religious dimension can make to the whole of education.

The Australian ethos presents challenges to open exploration of religious ideas and concepts in the state school system. To change this outlook in even minimal ways, the support of key educators and persons in positions of power and influence is needed. Continuation of discussions and affirmation of the contribution that religious beliefs and practice make to community wholeness will lead towards a shift in collective thinking, and hopefully to action that recognises this.

For the current situation in Western Australia, adjustment of initial and on-going training for teachers of Special Religious Education for government schools will provide the teachers with more skills and deeper understanding of the task. Revision of the training courses is at present being carried out by the Commission.

#### What Next: Activities to Disseminate the findings.

My work with The Churches' Commission on Education has provided many opportunities to share insights gathered during this project. Since my return I have:

- reported to The Commission on the overall success of my travels and explorations
- prepared a list of recommendations for The Commission with regard to SRE
- compiled a summary of key characteristics of effective RE teachers as specified by various educators in the UK
- contributed where relevant topics arose, to work carried out by the SRE Committee of the Churches' Commission on Education
- contributed to the Religion in Life® Curriculum Consultation in Melbourne, in August 1999. Topic: 'Reports from the United Kingdom.'
- participated in a workshop on "Spirituality and the Curriculum Framework" held by the WA branch of the Australian Association for Religious Education, August, 1999. Topic: 'Some contemporary experience in the UK.'
- run a workshop session at the Early Years in Education Society Spring Conference in September, 1999. Topic: 'Values Education and the Early Years'
- made available for loan to SRE teachers and interested other persons resources collected during the trip. These include videos, posters, workbooks and reference materials.

With respect to wider promotion of the ideas and insights, I have:

- Had an article published in the Uniting Church newspaper *Western Impact*, August 1999
- Met with the Governor of WA, Major-General Michael Jeffery for a consultation on my project and my proposed plan of action
- Met with the Acting Director-General of the WA Education Department, Mr Peter Browne for discussion on the place of RE in government schools

### On-going promotion and publicising

- In the new school year I expect to re-open discussions with key educators to whom I have been referred by Peter Browne and the Governor of WA.
- I will be contributing to the revision of CCE teacher training courses, and the development of new in-service programs for the SRE teachers.
- I will write articles for religious education journals both in Australia and in the UK.
- Regular contributions to church newspapers are planned, to maintain awareness of the contribution SRE can make to education as a whole.
- Contact with individual educators who have inquired after resource materials will be continued.
- I will seek opportunities to speak to groups about the Fellowship explorations.
- I will be attending the First International Conference on Children's Spirituality the University College Chichester, West Sussex from July 9 – 12, 2000.