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## Developing a Model for Teacher Formation in Religious Education

Chris Hackett

University of Notre Dame Australia, chackett3@nd.edu.au

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**Dr Chris Hackett**

**The University of Notre Dame Australia**

**Developing a Model for Teacher Formation in  
Religious Education**

## **Abstract**

*The intent of this paper is to demonstrate how the development of research-based modelling can assist teachers and decision-makers in making improvements to the processes of curriculum implementation. The paper presents a model of teacher formation based upon findings from a two-year study on the responses of recently assigned Religious Education (RARE) teachers in Catholic secondary schools within Western Australia. Data from the study provided evidence that these teachers experienced deepening layers of personal and professional growth as they implemented a newly drafted RE Curriculum. The model provides a framework that caters for the desire of RARE teachers to be competent classroom managers and for their vocational aspirations about becoming highly respected specialist RE teachers. These desires were related to teachers' concerns about the RE curriculum as well as the positive social relationships they developed with students and colleagues alike. Coping with these concerns effectively was invaluable to their personal and professional esteem. The model described here draws upon the work of educational change researchers such as Fuller, Fullan, and Jacobs. Such a model may be useful in improving the processes of curriculum implementation in Religious Education by considering the legitimate concerns of RARE teachers.*

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to describe a model of teacher formation for recently assigned Religious Education (RARE) teachers in Catholic secondary schools. The model is based upon the findings of a two-year study of RARE teachers in Catholic schools within Western Australia who were implementing a new RE curriculum during the late 1990s (Hackett 2004). The sample of teachers involved in this study consisted of 122 teachers in a survey followed by two rounds of interviews with 28 teachers.

The paper will begin by outlining the professional profile of recently assigned RE teachers. Next, the paper will draw upon the work of educational change researchers such as Fuller (1969), Fullan (2001), and Jacobs (1996) to explain the significant concerns teachers experience as they implemented an unfamiliar curriculum. The paper will then turn its attention to describing a model of teacher formation towards excellence in RE teaching. Lastly, the paper will consider how the model may be applied to future situations where recently assigned RE teachers are required to implement an unfamiliar curriculum.

## **Professional profile of Recently Assigned Religious Education (RARE) teachers**

Recently assigned RE teachers consist of both beginning and experienced teachers who are new to the teaching of Religious Education. For both groups, their experiences of teaching RE tend to reflect the difficulties of any teaching for the first time (Bezzina, Stanyer and Bezzina 2005; Feiman-Nemser 2003; McCormack and Thomas 2003). While many of these teachers have completed mandatory accreditation requirements for teaching Religious Education, they are normally teaching outside of their field of expertise and comfort zone. They may

experience a serious loss of efficacy or confidence as they face the dilemmas and challenges of curriculum implementation for the first time in a learning area in which they are inexperienced or inadequately trained.

In the two-year study, RARE teachers, like their more experienced RE colleagues, alleviated the pressures they faced by relying initially on instructional resources such as worksheets and student resource books. Similarly, Rymarz and Engebretson (2005) have described this finding of a heavy reliance on print resources in their review of RE curriculum implementation. As RARE teachers gained teaching experience in implementing the curriculum, they normally broadened their repertoire of strategies and resources. Furthermore, the teachers increasingly drew upon their personal and religious backgrounds to respond to specific RE curriculum demands. For some RARE teachers, the personal cost of coping with the intense demands of an unfamiliar curriculum were too great and led to burn out or dissatisfaction with teaching Religious Education.

These personal and professional responses to curriculum implementation were very powerful drivers in determining the teachers' willingness or disposition in continuing to teach Religious Education. The success of an implementation became reliant on teacher disposition. A number of curriculum change models have incorporated such teacher responses and are the focus of the next section.

## **Teacher concerns about curriculum implementation**

A number of educational change models describe and analyse the processes of curriculum implementation, especially at the classroom level or 'the actual change in practice component of implementation' (Hall 1997, p.31). Research about the concerns of teachers when implementing a curriculum has focused upon understanding the affective and behavioural responses of teachers to the demands they experience as they implement a new curriculum (Anderson 1997). For 'the single most important factor in any [implementation]... process is the people who will be most affected by the ... [implementation]' (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin and Hall 1998, p.29). The success of an implementation appears to hinge upon the capacity of teachers to cope with the changes expected of them.

## **Stages of Concern during curriculum implementation**

Fuller (1969) proposed that recently assigned teachers experienced a series (or 'stages') of concern in curriculum implementation about 'self', the 'task' of teaching and 'impact' of this teaching on students:

- *Concerns about Self:* In the early phase of curriculum implementation, teachers are concerned about surviving the stresses of teaching and gaining acceptance as a competent teacher from the principal, their colleagues, and students.
- *Concerns about the Task of Teaching:* After some experience with curriculum implementation, teachers begin to focus on the practicalities of

teaching – ensuring access to instructional resources, developing a repertoire of strategies and seeking advice about improving their teaching from their colleagues.

- *Concerns about the Impact of their Teaching:* Later in the curriculum implementation phase, teachers become aware of the specific learning needs of their students and focus upon adapting their teaching strategies to meet these needs.

Fuller (1969) also distinguished between the categories of concerns for beginning and experienced teachers. She felt that concerns for ‘self’ and ‘tasks’ were more associated with beginning teachers whereas ‘task’ and ‘impact’ concerns were more common to experienced teachers. Later, Fuller and Bown (1975) proposed that these differences in concerns reflected stages in the professional development of teachers (Table 1). Teachers unfamiliar with the curriculum focused initially upon surviving and becoming familiar with the content (Stage 1). They were concerned about their competence as a teacher and worried about acceptance from their colleagues. In the next stage (Stage 2) teachers focus on the quality of teaching, especially in terms of developing a range of strategies and resources. In the third stage, the focus for teachers centres on engaging students in their learning. As each stage occurs there appeared to be an increased demand from competence to excellence placed upon the teacher.

Reviews of the research literature related to these stages of development by Veenman (1984) and later, Dollase (1992) and Whittaker (2001), have supported the model advanced by Fuller. These three areas of concern are not mutually exclusive but interact with each other according to the circumstances. The impact concerns of teachers are always present but the intensity of each concern may take longer to arise depending on factors such as access to professional support. Such concerns are a response to the subjective dimensions of curriculum implementation as it is translated from program to classroom practice. The dimensions of curriculum implementation will be discussed next.

**Table 1 Stages of Teacher Development (after Fuller and Bown 1975)**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Concern</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
First Stage	Concerns about Self	Focus on survival and control by familiarity with content and management of students. Heightened expectations about their own sense of competency and gaining favour with their more experienced peers.
Second Stage	Concerns about Tasks	Focus turns to the teaching experience, especially the frustration and demands of developing resources and strategies that explain the content to their students. Expectations relate to quality of their teaching as opposed to student learning.
Third Stage	Concerns about Impact	Focus more on the educational needs of students; develop a greater sensitivity to the personal, social interactions between themselves and the students. Expectations relate to the value of what students learn and become.

(Source: Kallery 2004, p.148)

### **Dimensions of curriculum implementation in the classroom**

It is within the nature of any curriculum development to have a tension between 'espoused theory' and 'actual practice'. Such a tension is the result of implementation at one level (eg. education system) being translated to the next (eg. local school) because:

Curriculum ... can be seen to be interconnected at different levels or scales. Indeed, it is the *translation* [their italics] from one level to another which often produces gaps between intentions and what actually occurs in the classrooms.

(Smith and Lovat 1991, pp.12–13)

The translation of new curriculum documents during an implementation process at the classroom level does involve 'learning how to do something new' (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992, p.1). This learning process on the part of teachers is also a part of their professional development (Little 1992, p.170). As a result, there are three dimensions considered to be important when studying curriculum implementation at the classroom level (emphasis in italics by Fullan):

(1) the possible use of new or revised *materials* (instructional resources such as curriculum materials or technologies), (2) the possible use of new *teaching approaches* (i.e. new teaching strategies or activities), and (3) the possible alteration of *beliefs* (e.g., pedagogical assumptions and theories underlying particular new ... programs).

(Fullan 2001, p.39)

Fullan believes that changes in teaching practice along the three dimensions described above are 'critical for the simple reason that it is the *means* [his italics] of accomplishing desired objectives' (2001, p.70). The process of implementation thus depends on how these dimensions affect the understandings and teaching practice of teachers. An effective translation occurs when teachers, as a group, have a common understanding or shared knowledge about the curriculum (Keeves 1988, p.168). This translation of the curriculum is dependent upon the perceptions teachers have about the curriculum and, in turn, how they deal with its implementation. Usually, teachers make decisions about how they implement a curriculum based on what is best educationally and professionally for their students. However, they do not necessarily make these decisions collectively nor do they perceive the same reality about curriculum implementation:

it is *individuals* [author's emphasis] who have to develop new meaning, and these individuals are insignificant parts of a gigantic, loosely organised, complex, messy social system that contains myriad different subjective worlds.

(Fullan 2001, 1992)

In addition, a mandated 'packaged' curriculum (such as the Catholic RE curriculum in Western Australia) can have a profound personal impact on teachers (Montgomery and Way 1995). Teachers may perceive they are caught in a professional conundrum (Fullan 2001, pp.39-40). Should teachers implement the curriculum as advised by the curriculum developers (fidelity perspective) or should they implement and modify the curriculum as they see fit (mutual-adaptation perspective)? Teachers may perceive such a dilemma as a challenge to their efficacy and reduce their enthusiasm for teaching the subject.

Consequently, an in-depth understanding of these individual perceptions about curriculum implementation is crucial. By studying the subjective realities of teachers implementing a curriculum, it may be possible to ascertain certain patterns of behaviour that shed light on how to address the personal and professional stresses on teachers. As a result, these patterns may provide insights into the interplay between teacher formation and curriculum implementation.

## **Model of teacher formation**

Over the two years of research on how recently assigned RE teachers coped with implementing the draft RE curriculum, it became apparent that the teachers

were themselves being informed and formed by the experience. The enthusiasm of RARE teachers to become good RE teachers developed into a search for authenticity, integrity and motivation. As Fullan (2001) predicted, there were changes in the ways these teachers used the curriculum materials and in their teaching approach. There were also changes in their beliefs about their role as an RE teacher and why they taught Religious Education. Recently assigned RE teachers reached a point of asking themselves, "Why am I doing this?" Wanting to teach RE was very much related to the conditions the RARE teachers experienced. The efficacy of the RE teachers was connected to the disposition they felt towards RE teaching due to their formative experiences.

In looking at the changes experienced by the teachers, as they dealt with the personal and curriculum demands of teaching the draft RE curriculum, a pattern of experiences in teacher formation emerged. The emergence of such a pattern indicated that teachers required a period of adjustment to the demands of curriculum implementation. Teachers needed time to understand and appreciate the personal and professional demands of curriculum implementation. The amounts of time varied between different concerns. Whereas adjustments to initial concerns were immediate with accessibility to curriculum materials, later concerns required a longer period of reflection, greater effort, and careful consideration. Without supportive formative experiences, dissatisfaction, exhaustion and poorer teaching became evident.

Formative experiences that were positive and ongoing were able to assist teachers to develop a positive and sustainable disposition towards managing the subjective realities of curriculum implementation (Fullan 2001, p.32). The subjective realities experienced were divided between dealing with the feelings of concern raised by the phenomenon of implementation and the changes in perception in response to managing the implementation (Table 2). Over time, the experience of teaching; collegiality; professional development opportunities; and, reflection seemed to lead to a reassessment of current subjective implementation practices. Each formative experience was a catalyst to enhance a positive and sustainable disposition towards concerns about a curriculum demand. Each layer of key concern, type of formative experience and key disposition is not clear-cut. Rather there are emphases that focus on a particular concern, formative experience, or disposition. It seemed that recently assigned RE teachers were trying to cope with simultaneous pairs of subjective realities.

**Table 2 Integrated Model of Teacher Formation in response to Curriculum Implementation**

<b>Layer</b>	<b>Key Concerns</b>	<b>Formative Experiences</b>	<b>Key Dispositions</b>
1	<i>Instruction</i> Concerns for self (survival): due to demands of getting ready, finding resources and meeting expectations.	<i>initial content knowledge with prior training and background &amp; developing content knowledge</i>	<i>Surety</i> Changes in perceptions about the use of curriculum materials to cope with these demands.
2	<i>Prowess</i> Concerns for the tasks: due to demands of organising lessons, covering the content and developing repertoire of strategies.	↓ <i>ongoing content knowledge &amp; developing pedagogical content knowledge</i>	<i>Confidence</i> Changes in perceptions about the use of teaching strategies to cope with these demands.
3	<i>Empathy</i> Concerns for impact of teaching on students: due to demands of evaluating outcomes, rapport with students and growing awareness of students' learning needs.	↓ <i>ongoing content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge &amp; developing experiential content knowledge</i>	<i>Insight</i> Changes in beliefs or understandings about the nature and purpose of the curriculum to cope with these demands.
4	<i>Modelling</i> Concerns for efficacy: due to demands for authenticity, commitment, example, and integrity.	↓ <i>ongoing content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge &amp; experiential content knowledge</i>	<i>Vocation</i> Changes in professional character and deepening reflection of personal beliefs, values, and spirituality to cope with these demands.

### *Instruction and Surety*

When introduced to the newly drafted RE curriculum, teachers were very concerned about their preparation for teaching it. They planned what they were going to teach by becoming familiar with the content and the strategies and resources available in the Teacher's Manuals provided:

I believe that mostly teachers or teachers teaching a particular year group for the first time would be more reliant on Mastersheets and the Student Books—I was! Mainly because they are concentrating on content and effective delivery. After about a term, confidence with the content grows and I tended to rely on my own resources.

In these initial stages, the focus was on ensuring they were familiar with as much of the content as possible and had enough activities and materials to keep the students occupied. In large measure, this involved the frequent use of worksheets and student resource books.

After a year of teaching the curriculum, teachers felt more secure about the structure and sequence of the teaching and learning program. A sense of surety developed as they had access to a range of activities and resources. Recently assigned RE teachers also began to re-assess the quality of the curriculum materials that were offered. This reassessment was due in large measure by how teachers perceived the reactions of their students to the language and relevance of the content.

### *Prowess and Confidence*

The frustration of the classroom experiences that resulted from the shortcomings of using the worksheets and student resource books forced the recently assigned RE teachers to rethink what they were doing. They recognised that they needed to accommodate more closely the learning needs of their students with a wider variety of accessible and relevant resources and strategies:

Pure frustration. ... Well, I mean you're either, usually you're best lessons come out of being totally like, "Oh! I've got to find something that works." And occasionally you hit something that works. ... I think that's where your flexibility has got to link in because you've got to be flexible to the kids that are sitting in front of you. And make a strategy to fit them rather than them fit the strategy because you get better results if you're more flexible towards what they need.

Most teachers grew in confidence when they chose to follow this path by expanding their repertoire of teaching skills with collegial support. The more competent teachers felt they became with the content and strategies, the more assured they were in dealing with diverse backgrounds of their students. Some recently assigned RE teachers continued to be challenged by their students and felt increasingly frustrated in not being able to teach the way they believed RE should be taught.

### *Empathy and Insight*

A significant development for the recently assigned teachers was the realisation that a direct pastoral rapport with their students was a key ingredient in successfully implementing the draft RE curriculum. Teachers became more engaged in dialogue with their students. In so doing, they were able to gain insights into the learning needs of their students. Teachers became more concerned about the personal spiritual and religious formation of their students:

I think that the relationships with them are really important. That's a privilege also and an opportunity to get really close to people and share in their lives. Because it's often in RE that they'll tell things that are really important to them or that are worrying them. Or they share the really exciting, you might be the first to hear something good or an achievement they've made or something that's really happy that has happened in their family ... and that's really exciting to share in their lives and to be trusted.

As a result, RARE teachers were more critical of their selection of the content and how this content was to be taught in interesting and relevant ways to students. Such critical judgements heightened tensions within some teachers about their loyalties towards the perceived expectations of how the curriculum was supposed to be implemented. For others, there was a growing turmoil about their personal integrity in relation to the beliefs and values presented.

### *Modelling and Vocation*

In the later stages of curriculum implementation, RARE teachers related their belief that it was important to be a model person to their students. This modelling was not only in terms of the human qualities they possessed but also in the faith witness they presented:

You must be both teacher and witness, mentor and guide. There is a responsibility to be real to the students at a deeper, spiritual level. The teacher must be more versatile, flexible, aware and available. There must be balance. Who you are is more important in RE than other subjects.

For most recently assigned RE teachers, it was this strong faith commitment that was significant in continuing their RE teaching. For some teachers, the nature of the faith commitment they felt was espoused by the draft RE curriculum proved too challenging to their sense of identity and integrity.

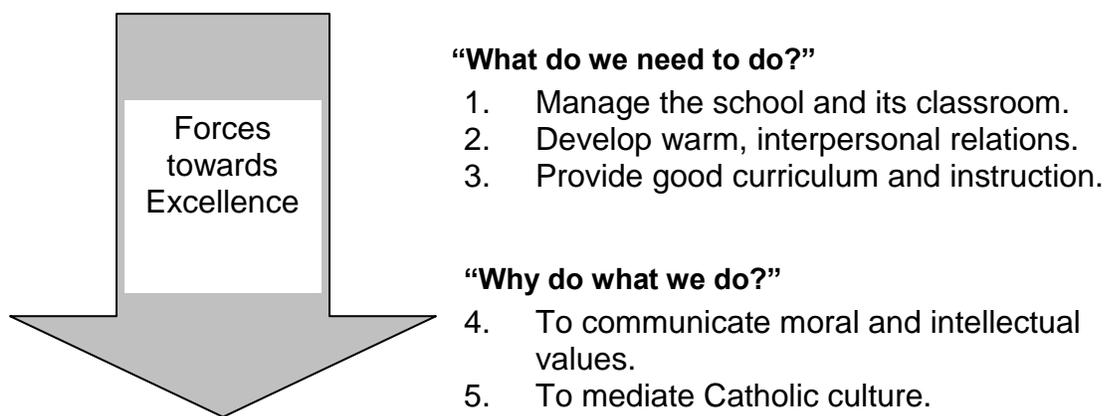
It was possible that such a self-knowledge and awakening to the inner call to serve as an RE teacher had led RARE teachers to a critical point in their RE teaching career. How they addressed this critical point led to their continuation or termination of RE teaching. Perhaps RE is one of the *first* subjects these teachers dropped as a part of their teaching load because of the personal, professional, and religious challenges the RE curriculum presented to them.

This pattern in the personal and professional formation of recently assigned RE teachers is reflected in the work of Jacobs (1996) on the formation of Catholic educators. Jacobs saw that the energy recently assigned teachers placed in teaching RE went into developing their competence as good RE teachers:

For the most part, the greater majority of novice teachers need to develop competence in at least three skills: classroom management, human relations, as well as the pedagogical skills associated with good curriculum and effective instruction. Throughout the course of their first five years on the job, neophyte teachers spend much of their time and energy focusing upon and developing competence in these important skills as they struggle through their successes and failures to become good teachers ....  
(Jacobs 1996, p.5)

Such energy was a response to forces of educational excellence within Catholic education (Figure 1). Jacobs (1996) believed that Catholic teachers progressed from being competent (to become good classroom teachers) to excellent (to become authentic, purpose-minded teachers) when they moved from asking the question 'What do we need to do?' to 'Why do what we do?' The latter question led to a sense of calling or vocation as part of the necessary inspiration for teaching in a Catholic school.

**Figure 1: The Five Forces of Catholic Educational Excellence**



*Adapted from Jacobs (1996, p.15)*

It appeared that the latter question, 'Why do what we do?' was the question recently assigned RE teachers were asking themselves in the later stages of curriculum implementation. When teachers were mindful of such a question in their teaching then they were beginning the journey from being a competent teacher to an excellent teacher (Jacobs 1996). It was a process typical of recently assigned teachers in their quest to consolidate their pedagogical content knowledge (Manuel 2003, p.35). There was a 'turnabout' (Hansen 1995, p.24) or

defining moment when recently assigned teachers experienced a change in outlook about the purposes of their teaching. Excellent teachers were the ones who articulated to others the importance of Catholic moral and intellectual values in their teaching and were able to draw upon their understanding of the Catholic school culture to contextualise the purpose of their teaching (Jacobs 1996).

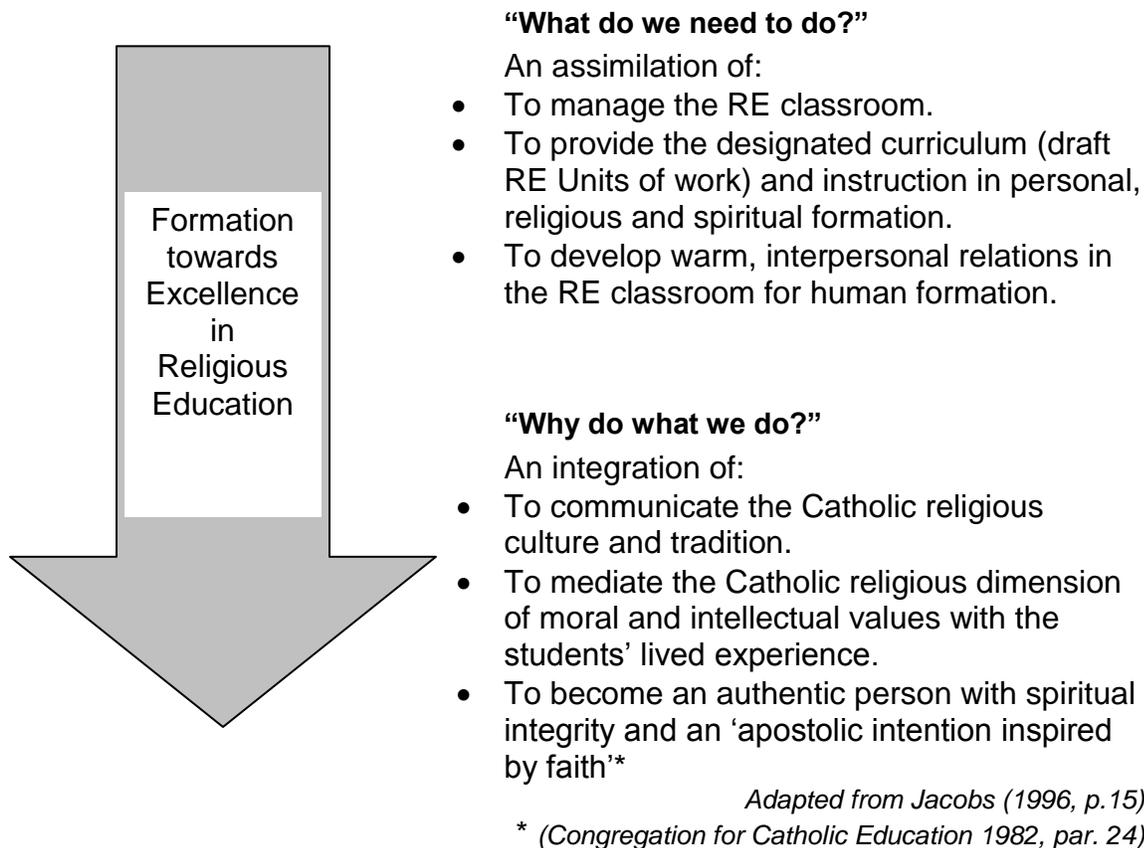
In the later stages of implementation, some of the interviewees seemed to be beginning this process from seeing themselves as good RE teachers to becoming excellent RE teachers. With teaching experience and direct pastoral rapport with their students, recently assigned RE teachers were able to develop their pedagogical content knowledge (Rymarz 1999). They were able to recognise and develop the links between the concepts and values of the RE curriculum and the personal and spiritual values of their students. In doing so, the teachers drew upon a wider range of curriculum materials (content knowledge) that conveyed a sense of what it was to be human (like Jesus) and how to live a meaningful and responsible life. At the same time, the teachers saw that their own example was significant in their lives of their students. Increasingly, they evaluated their own identity and sense of spiritual balance. The teachers understood excellent RE teachers were not only the ones who were able to deepen their skills and understandings but also the ones who lived as authentic and balanced adults with a strong faith commitment (experiential content knowledge).

Figure 2 adapts Jacob's (1996) ideas in light of the patterns represented in Table 2. Recently assigned RE teachers initially focused their concerns on assimilating four key aspects or layers to their personal and professional formation. Each of these layers complements the forces of excellence proposed by Jacob (1996). In their quest to become competent RE teachers, the teachers declared that they spent much of their preparation time in learning the content themselves and working out how they were going to teach from the teaching and learning program. Within a year of teaching the RE curriculum, recently assigned teachers had commented that they needed to modify their teaching practices. The first two layers of 'Instruction-Surety' and 'Prowess-Confidence' (Table 2) reflected the forces within the 'What do we need to do?' portion of Figure 2. Once these forces were operational then teachers had the capacity to consider the next set of forces within 'Why do what we do?' sections to transform their teaching.

The change in teaching practices was focused on ascertaining and accommodating the academic and spiritual learning needs of their students. It was not just enough to provide a warm, friendly learning environment but also to be a sincere and balanced model to students. To do so, recently assigned RE teachers believed that a direct pastoral rapport with their students was paramount in assisting the human formation of their students. As the teacher interacted with the class and took a keen interest in individual students, the students were influenced by the example of the teacher as a person with admirable human qualities. In the process of acting as a mentor or role model to their students, the teachers were confronted by the worth of their own sense of identity as a person of faith. These changes are summarised in the next two

layers of teacher formation: 'Empathy-Insight' and 'Modelling-Vocation' (Table 2). The next two layers may be considered part of the forces engaged in the 'Why do what we do?' sections of Figure 2. The impact of these forces become fully realised once teachers have developed the reflective skills to evaluate their teaching as part of their professional formation. As a result, excellence in RE teaching is enhanced by an integration of formative experiences.

**Figure 2: The Dimensions of Excellence in Religious Education**



The curriculum and personal demands placed on the RARE teachers to teach the draft RE curriculum meant that they had to consider seriously whether they wished to continue to teach RE after a few years. The teachers had approached a crossroad in their RE teaching career about their commitment to teaching RE as a person of faith and the ongoing demands of instructing and reaching out to students. Their focus shifted from ‘how and what do I teach in RE?’ to ‘why should I teach RE?’ and a personal search intensified for an integrated rationale for wanting to continue to teach Religious Education.

This change in focus seemed to have begun for many of the recently assigned RE teachers over the duration of the longitudinal study. The comments from the teachers interviewed seemed to suggest that they had reached an important moment in their RE teaching career. This moment of insight about their own purposes and principles of teaching Religious Education sustained their

enthusiasm to teach RE and defined them personally as passionate, committed teachers of faith. As one of the teachers remarked about his RE teaching and his faith commitment:

A calling? It's more a deliberate action to make, to give evidence that I'm living a Christian life on earth. Having all the faith in the world is good but also you've got to make use of it. So that's what my RE teaching is, making use of my faith for God's service.

Many recently assigned RE teachers believed they were making use of their 'faith for God's service'. It was the development towards such a disposition that energised and sustained them through the rigours of the personal and professional demands placed on them in implementing the draft RE Units. They were able to share their personal experiences of living the faith or what may be otherwise called 'experiential content knowledge'. Recently assigned RE teachers saw their witness as being more significant than their teaching.

The teachers who had made the decision that their RE teaching was a vocation reflected the exhortation of an 'apostolic intention inspired by faith' (Congregation for Catholic Education 1982, par. 24). As another teacher commented about her conviction to teach Religious Education:

I think God has called me to love and to bring other people to an awareness of [God's] reality and [God's] love for them. At the moment, my life has led me to be teaching RE and I have to say that I think that I'd find few positions more fulfilling. That's not to say I won't in time move on but for now I couldn't imagine anything I'd rather be doing.

This disposition in teaching RE as a vocation helped RARE teachers, as faith witnesses, to articulate a deeper understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices (experiential content knowledge), to relate the RE curriculum to the personal, spiritual and religious development of their students (pedagogical content knowledge) and to impart the content of the curriculum (content knowledge). Figure 2 highlights these aspects of the formation of RARE teachers in becoming excellent RE teachers. While the faith witness or experiential content knowledge, content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge of teachers were identified, the comments from the recently assigned RE teachers suggested that these aspects were interrelated and operated concurrently with each other. The concurrence of these knowledge forms may be deemed as the makings of RE teachers with a vision towards excellence in RE teaching. An excellent RE teacher required personal authenticity, spiritual integrity with an apostolic zeal to teach the 'Good News' and a commitment to ongoing professional and faith formation in teaching Religious Education as a vocation.

## **Application of model to curriculum implementation decisions in the future**

Educational reform needs to consider these dimensions or 'forces' (Jacobs 1996). These forces are a part of the formation (or conversion) of recently assigned RE teachers, as competent RE teachers, to becoming excellent RE teachers. The process of conversion is ongoing and teachers need to reflect personally on how to improve their teaching practice, to become lifelong learners as a way of coping with the demands of curriculum implementation (O'Donoghue 1997). There are three levels of reflection to be developed: 'technical rationality', 'practical reflection' and 'critical reflection' (O'Donoghue 1997, pp.32-33). Firstly, in the case of technical rationality, teachers improve their practice when they learn to consider alternative ways of teaching in the classroom. Secondly, with practical reflection, teachers clarify the assumptions about the value of their teaching and thirdly, with critical reflection, teachers examine critically the contexts of their teaching. Recently assigned RE teachers did reflect upon their teaching, albeit both positively and negatively. The more comprehensive they became in their reflection for improvement and renewal (as the teachers themselves also suggested), then the more likely they were able to see RE teaching as a worthwhile profession deserving of teachers of excellence.

For RARE teachers to cope with the personal, professional, and religious demands of curriculum implementation there is a need to focus on the formation of the whole person as a Religious Educator of adolescents. This formation requires additional financial and human resources as well as time and support from the Catholic education community. The formation is about inspiring growth in Christ-like qualities (that is, faith witness or experiential content knowledge) supported by content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Rymarz 1999) rather than achieving performance outcomes in isolation to this formation. Such a formation requires strategic planning at the personal, school and system levels that goes beyond the mandatory accreditation requirements to teach Religious Education.

## **Conclusion**

Over two school years in the late 1990s, recently assigned RE teachers were expected to implement a new draft RE curriculum. During this time, the teachers experienced a number of personal and professional changes. There were changes in the ways these teachers used the curriculum materials, changes in their teaching approaches and in their perceptions about their role as an RE teacher and why they taught RE. The quest to become good RE teachers, in response to these changes the demands evoked, deepened into a search for authenticity, integrity, and motivation. In turn, RARE teachers sought further personal and professional formation in response to the demands placed on them in implementing the draft RE Units.

Recently assigned RE teachers wanted formative experiences that provided support and assisted them in implementing the draft RE Units. There were four layers to this formation:

- good instruction and surety in content knowledge;
- further prowess and confidence in pedagogical content knowledge;
- developing a close pastoral rapport with students and gaining insight into their personal spiritual and religious development; and,
- a deepening sensitivity to becoming significant role models to their students and a sense of their own calling to teach as a person of faith (experiential content knowledge).

Such layers of formation indicated how recently assigned RE teachers could become initially, competent RE teachers and later, become excellent RE teachers. The catalyst for formation from competence to excellence seemed to be the result of the teaching experience and the response to challenges to the spiritual and religious integrity of the teacher. Implementing the draft RE curriculum involved more than simply teaching the 'what' and 'how' of RE: it included the role of 'who' teaches and 'why should one want' to teach Religious Education. In any future curriculum development that involves recently assigned RE teachers, there is a need to consider the character and integrity of these teachers and their capacity to model authentically what the new curriculum offers to the students.

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