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A longitudinal study of the personal and professional responses of recently assigned secondary Religious Education teachers to curriculum demands

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# CHAPTER ONE

## THE RESEARCH PROBLEM DEFINED

### 1.1 Introduction

Religious Education teachers in the Catholic schools of Western Australia were the subject of this research thesis, in particular, recently assigned Religious Education (RE) teachers. The focus of this study explored how these teachers responded personally and professionally to the demands of implementing a newly introduced RE curriculum. Principals and Religious Educators considered recently assigned RE (RARE) teachers to have limited training and experience in teaching Religious Education. Over the past 30 years, a number of curriculum developments were designed specifically to provide resources and support for this group of teachers. During the late 1990s, these developments culminated in the implementation of draft RE Units of Work in Catholic secondary schools across the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury, Geraldton and Broome.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the problem faced by recently assigned RE teachers regarding the intense quality of commitment and effort such a curriculum implementation evokes. After outlining the problem and the purpose of the research, a primary research question and four subsidiary questions are developed. From these research questions, an outline of the research design is given. Next, the chapter defines key terms used in this study and discusses the limitations and significance of the study. The last focus of the chapter is to outline the format of the study.

### 1.2 The Research Problem

In 1981, the Archbishop of Perth, L. J. Goody established the Perth Archdiocesan Department of Religious Education (PADRE). The task of this Department was to assist RE teachers with the difficulties of teaching RE by developing a comprehensive set of Guidelines for Religious Educators (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth 1983, p.4). In 1987, these 'RE Guidelines' were published as a series of documents called *The Truth Will Set You Free: Perth*

*Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators* (PAGRE). Between 1993 and 1996, these Guidelines were reviewed and superseded by the introduction of ‘working drafts’ of the *Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course* (PAREC). The PAREC was referred to as a working draft because Religious Educators had the opportunity to provide feedback about its viability in addressing particular curriculum issues and because it was yet to be officially approved (given an imprimatur) by the Archbishop of Perth. After a lengthy period of evaluation, revised editions were prepared for implementation in 2003.

One of the particular curriculum issues to be addressed by the PAREC was that the Course should contain Units of Work suitable for use by secondary RE teachers with limited RE teaching experience and with relatively little formal training in Religious Education. Most teachers were trained in another major learning area but, for many of them, had limited years of general teaching experience. According to the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA), these RARE teachers represented the largest group of RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia (CEOWA 1997a).

The development of the PAREC involved the investment of considerable human, financial, and material resources. Despite the degree of personal and professional commitments, efforts and resources involved, a serious problem existed if RARE teachers were not able to deal with the immediate demands of implementing the draft Course documents as part of their classroom teaching. Such a problem perpetuated what the Catholic Secondary Principals Association of Western Australia (CSPAWA) recognised as a significant limitation of the superseded PAGRE. The consequences of this problem could include a heightened dissatisfaction with teaching RE among recently assigned RE teachers, a lost opportunity for catering for the changing professional needs of RE teachers, a failure to improve and sustain the quality of RE teaching in secondary schools, and a substantial waste of valuable human, financial and material resources.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of the research was to investigate how recently assigned secondary RE teachers responded to the demands of implementing a new RE curriculum. While most Catholic secondary schools in WA were using the draft PAREC (Kehoe 1996, p.1), little systematic research had been conducted in this area. It was both opportune and advantageous to examine the issue of curriculum demands on RARE teachers working in an unfamiliar learning area. For many of these teachers, the RE curriculum was largely out of their field of experience and training. The research was not an evaluation of the RE Guidelines, although the perceptions of the teachers might be data for this evaluation at some later stage. The research sought to accumulate information towards a foundational database that described the perceptions and outlooks of a significant group of RE teachers.

The successful implementation of a curriculum into classroom teaching is a critical step in any curriculum development (Fullan 2001). The success of this implementation depends, in part, upon the changes teachers are willing to undertake. This willingness means that teachers perceive significant advantages to the implementation because the level of commitment and effort are within their capacity to cope with the changes. Alternatively, the willingness to change may not be so forthcoming because the curriculum is perceived as too difficult to implement or too challenging personally or professionally to warrant teachers continuing to teach the subject. In the case of recently assigned secondary RE teachers, their willingness to implement the draft RE Units was related to their increasing awareness of the level of personal and professional commitment and effort because of their RE teaching experience. The responses these teachers made to the RE Units either exacerbated or eased the problems encountered and either encouraged further lethargy or vigour towards improving their desire to become excellent RE teachers.

## **1.4 Evolution of the Research Questions**

The focus of the study was on recently assigned secondary RE teachers and their perceptions, concerns and experiences rather than the material per se with which they were dealing. The research was not about evaluating the content or the format of the draft Units of Work or about their implementation. Neither was the focus on classroom dynamics except where these were introduced by the teachers themselves. The intention was to identify a sample group of recently assigned RE teachers that had been often described anecdotally and to explore their perceptions of the responses they made to the increasingly intense demands of the newly devised RE curriculum. The problem was explored through an examination of the following question:

**What are the perceptions of recently assigned secondary RE teachers about the demands of implementing the draft Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course?**

This became the primary research question that was investigated in the study. The question was expanded into subsidiary questions to assist the manner in which the research was conducted.

Three subsidiary questions were developed initially based on the model of curriculum implementation proposed by Fullan (2001, p.39); namely, use of instructional resources, teaching approach and alteration of beliefs during the process of implementation as perceived by the teachers involved:

- 1. What are the perceptions of recently assigned secondary RE teachers about the usefulness of instructional resources from the PAREC in their classroom teaching?*
- 2. What are the perceptions of recently assigned secondary RE teachers about the appropriateness of the teaching approach conveyed by the draft PAREC in their classroom teaching?*
- 3. What are the perceptions of recently assigned secondary RE teachers about supporting the curriculum principles underpinning the PAREC in their classroom teaching?*

After the first round of interviews, findings emerged that warranted a re-examination of the primary research question and an additional subsidiary question was developed:

4. *What perceptions do recently assigned secondary RE teachers possess about the interplay between their personal and professional formation and the demands of implementing the draft Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course?*

Taken together, the personal and professional responses of recently assigned secondary RE teachers to these questions described how they coped with the intense demands of implementing the draft PAREC documents as part of their classroom teaching.

## **1.5 Design of the Research**

The design of the research was essentially a mixed method one with a significant focus on a survey and on semi-structured interviews. Though much was suggested anecdotally about recently assigned RE teachers, little was known about their perceptions of the demands of teaching the PAREC documents in their classrooms. The intention of this study was to form a better understanding of how recently assigned RE teachers responded to the pressures of dealing with a curriculum like the draft PAREC. As a result of the study, recommendations were made about how Catholic education systems can assist this significant group of teachers in the future.

The research project incorporated some quantitative techniques to gather data such as demographic information about the years of RE teaching experience and training of the participants, the frequency of use of instructional materials, and the number of teachers supporting an understanding of a teaching approach. The database was used to identify a sample group of recently assigned RE teachers for the in-depth interviews as well as to assist in the development of interview questions. The study was longitudinal because the same participants were re-interviewed a year later to discuss questions of change and development in their outlook towards teaching the draft RE Units (Vallance 2005).

Qualitative techniques were used to allow for an exploration of the perceptions, beliefs, or understandings of a situation or event by participants as well as how they related to each other from the inside. The study explored the perceived understandings or shared knowledge of recently assigned RE teachers. These perceptions provided insights into how RARE teachers implemented the PAREC documents and their responses to the demands that arose in doing so.

## **1.6 Significance of the Research**

The significance of the study was that it reveals a range of insights about how recently assigned RE teachers adapted their teaching as they became more familiar with the curriculum materials over time. These insights are potentially significant to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Western Australia, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA), and Catholic secondary Principals because they oversee and manage substantial financial and human resources in developing and implementing the draft RE Units. With the longitudinal nature of the study, it was possible to capture both the 'initial' and 'with more experience' viewpoints of the teachers. Furthermore, it was possible to explore how this adaptation takes place within the interaction between personal and professional demands of teaching RE. As a result, the findings of this study are a valuable database to the curriculum writers in the further revision of these Units and how the RE curriculum could better cater for the personal and professional needs of recently assigned RE teachers.

Religious Educators at tertiary institutions such as the University of Notre Dame Australia and the Catholic Institute of Western Australia could also benefit from the findings of this study. The findings point to specific personal and professional needs that may influence the future preparation of pre-service and in-service RE teachers in their professional competence and formation of their religious understandings (Flynn, 1993; Convey, 1992). The document, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, emphasises the importance of such preparation:

With appropriate degrees, and with an adequate preparation in religious pedagogy, they will have the basic training needed for the teaching of religion.  
(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, par.66)

The findings could also be significant to the Assistant Director of Religious Education and consultants at the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia in

planning future professional development programs, workshops and retreats for recently assigned secondary RE teachers. As the document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* states:

The Catholic educator has an obvious and constant need for updating: in personal attitudes, in the content of the subjects that are taught, in the pedagogical methods that are used. Recall that the vocation of an educator requires “a constant readiness to begin anew and to adapt”. If the need for updating is constant, then the formation must be permanent. This need is not limited to professional formation; it includes religious formation and, in general, the enrichment of the whole person.

(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, par.68)

At an individual level, the study invited recently assigned secondary RE teachers to reflect upon their own RE teaching. This reflection can assist them to improve themselves both professionally and personally. Within schools, Principals and RE Coordinators may benefit from the findings which provided insights into how they may better support their RE teachers, particularly those who were inexperienced or had little formal training.

The study likewise could be significant for RE teaching in other Catholic dioceses in Australia. Religious Educators may benefit from the findings of this study in the professional formation of their recently assigned RE teachers. More recently, the Archdioceses of Melbourne and Sydney have worked collaboratively on a new RE curriculum called ‘*Know, Worship, Love*’. This curriculum has textbooks and online resources available to teachers. The findings in this research may prove useful in terms of providing insights into how RE teachers responded to the use of these curriculum materials for future curriculum implementation and reform initiatives. In addition, the findings of this study may be valuable to RE teaching in Catholic primary schools in WA and for religious instruction in other denominational schools or religious studies in State high schools.

Lastly, this study could be significant to a wider educational audience. As a study of the responses by inexperienced and under-trained teachers to the demands of adopting and implementing a curriculum, the findings may be valuable to educators similarly involved in providing 'practical, professional development plus good support documents that outline accessible resources' (Interim Curriculum Council 1997, p.11). It may also be valuable to personnel responsible for training pre-service and in-service teachers in other curriculum areas.

## **1.7 Limitations of the Research**

There are a number of important limitations to this research. As the study confined itself to the Archdiocese of Perth and the dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton in Western Australia, its significance to other dioceses may be somewhat lessened due to factors such as geographical and cultural differences. Like other studies, this study is more significant to Catholic secondary schools in a specific Archdiocesan or Diocesan region. Studies undertaken by Fahy (1992), Flynn (1993) and Bezzina, Chesterton, Johnston, & Sanber (1993) focused on the situation in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The research work of Macdonald (1990), for the National Catholic Education Commission on assessment and reporting in RE, focused on teacher responses from the Archdiocese of Melbourne. While comparisons are possible, generalisations are difficult due to the parochial nature of each study.

The study focused on schools that were implementing fully the draft Units of Work from the PAREC. While this fosters a consistency in the data, the applicability of the findings to schools not fully using the Units of Work may be reduced because RE teachers in these schools may have different perceptions of the Course. Furthermore, the study focused specifically on the practices and understandings of recently assigned secondary RE teachers. It is this group of teachers that was recognised by Principals and the Perth Archdiocesan Director of Religious Education during the 1990s as having specific difficulties. The findings then may not be applicable to more experienced or more qualified RE teachers.

The application of findings in this study to other Catholic education systems may be limited because of variations in the professional formation of recently assigned RE teachers. Catholic education systems with a history of ongoing professional development for RE teachers may not find their recently assigned RE teachers facing the same challenges to the demands of implementing their RE curriculum. The nature of the demands may be different because of the differences in the curriculum approaches used in Religious Education across Australia. During the 1990s, the PAREC was more in keeping with the catechetical or 'education in faith' approach of the *Guidelines for Religious Education of Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* (CEO, Archdiocese of Melbourne 1995) than it was to the 'educational outcomes' approach of *Faithful to God: Faithful to People* taught in Sydney (CEO, Archdiocese of Sydney, 1994). Since 2003, the revised draft editions of the Units of Work in the PAREC and the '*Know, Worship, Love*' curriculum used in the Archdioceses of Melbourne and Sydney have found further common ground in their approaches.

There may be limitations due to differences in the provision of training pre-service teachers in Religious Education by tertiary institutions. As a result, the findings may be limited because the problem with recently assigned secondary RE teachers using RE curriculum documents may not be as acute in other places. In Western Australia, the Catholic Institute of Western Australia has provided limited training through the State universities over the last thirty-five years. The University of Notre Dame Australia, since its beginnings in 1992, has provided post-graduate and, a few years later, undergraduate studies in Religious Education. In contrast, New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria have a longer tradition of training graduates for Catholic schools. Such training occurred initially, through their Catholic Teachers Colleges and, more recently, through the Australian Catholic University.

While this study has implications for educators and education systems that are attempting to create successful curriculum change, the scope of the RE curriculum covers more than an educational dimension, there is a faith formation dimension too. Only limited comparisons with other curricula may result, as they do not necessarily have the latter dimension.

## 1.8 Definition of Terms

### *Accessibility*

Accessibility refers to the ways in which teachers are able to obtain and use instructional resources from the Units of Work within the PAREC or from other sources.

### *Accreditation*

Since 1984, teachers in Western Australian Catholic schools are required to complete a certification process to teach Religious Education, which consists of:

a professional development program designed to assist ...  
[them in gaining] ... an understanding of the nature and objectives of the school community they have chosen to enter, and their own duties and responsibilities within that community.

(CEOWA 1997c, p.15)

In 1986, a mandatory professional requirement for RE teachers in Catholic schools, called *Accreditation to Teach Religious Education*, was introduced by the CECWA. Between 1986 and 1993, RE teachers in secondary schools who taught RE before the introduction of Accreditation were exempt from the study and inservice requirements.

Religious Education teachers, within their first five years of teaching the subject, are to complete the 'mandatory professional requirements' of *Accreditation to Teach Religious Education* (CEOWA 1997c, p.9). To satisfy this Accreditation, a teacher studies three tertiary units (or its equivalent) in at least two out of three areas in Scripture, Liturgy and Sacraments, Theology, Religious Education and, Morality and Prayer. They are also required to complete an in-service course that outlines the Catholic education principles, content framework and teaching process of the PAREC documents. From 1997, the Catholic Education Office expected this to be the minimum formal qualification for RE teachers. Teachers were required to renew their Accreditation every five years by attending professional and faith development opportunities.

### *Content*

Content in Religious Education refers to the Catholic teachings and practices approved by the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia for use in the RE classroom. This content was taught as part of the 160 minutes per week Religious Education class-time allocation within Catholic schools. The content is referenced directly back to Tradition and Scripture as described in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) and *The Word Dwells Among Us* (Education Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference 1990).

### *Curriculum implementation*

Curriculum implementation refers to the translation of a curriculum within a learning area from one level to another such as from the provision of PAREC documents to their use in classroom teaching. This implementation depends on three dimensions: possible use of new or revised direct instructional resources; possible use of new or revised teaching approach; and, the possible alteration of beliefs or assumptions about pedagogical (Fullan 2001, p.39) as well as theological perspectives.

### *Exigencies*

Exigencies in curriculum implementation refer to perceived demands or 'classroom press' (Huberman 1983, pp.482-483) that require immediate and ongoing actions or efforts by the teacher such as: background research of content, lesson preparation, classroom rapport and resource acquisition. These demands may also require a level of personal or professional commitment such as: teaching persona, role modelling and professional development, unrealised by the teacher until placed in the situation of implementation.

### *Perceptions*

For the purposes of this study, the perceptions of teachers were based upon two assumptions of the construction of knowledge: '(a) knowledge is actively constructed by an individual; and (b) coming to know is an adaptive process which organises an individual's "experiential world"' (Hendry 1996, p.19). It was assumed that a perception refers to how recently assigned secondary RE teachers express, give meaning to or interpret what they know about implementing the PAREC. This was their subjective reality as expressed through the experiences and responses of the RE

teachers: 'People construct new forms of knowing through perception and action, and specifically through perception-action in communication' (Hendry 1996, p.23). These perceptions build up an outlook towards the demands of using the instructional resources and teaching approach as well as understanding the underlying pedagogical and theological principles in the draft RE Units.

#### *Recently assigned secondary RE teacher*

For the purposes of this study, recently assigned secondary RE teachers were teachers trained in another major learning area but inexperienced in teaching Religious Education and had limited training before or during their time of teaching RE as assigned by the school Principal. Most RARE teachers had graduated within the period of 1 January 1993 and 31 December 1997. Some teachers were experienced teachers in another learning area who began teaching RE within the same timeframe. The experience of the teachers in teaching Religious Education came largely from the implementation of the PAREC documents in 1998 and 1999. Teachers in this category were expected to meet the study and inservice requirements of *Accreditation to Teach Religious Education* within their first five years of teaching Religious Education.

#### *The Truth Will Set You Free: Perth Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators (PAGRE)*

The PAGRE are a series of documents published by the Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth through the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia. These documents are also called RE Guidelines or just Guidelines. They outline the RE content and teaching process mandated for use in Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth, Book 2 1987, p.2). Between 1987 and 1995, schools were expected to use these Guidelines to create their own RE programs to meet the specific needs of their students.

#### *Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course (PAREC)*

PAREC consists of a series of draft Units of Work for lower and upper secondary students in Catholic schools. The Units included content and a teaching process and specified the outcomes and objectives to be completed. The PAREC had 19 draft

Units of Work, 12 in lower secondary and 7 in upper secondary school. Between 1996 and 2003, most schools used these draft Units of Work as part of their RE program. An important consideration for their implementation was their suitability for use by inexperienced and under-trained RE teachers. The documents were draft because the Archbishop of Perth and the Bishops of the Bunbury, Geraldton, and Broome dioceses had not formally mandated them.

### *Religious Education (RE)*

Catholic Religious Education in Western Australia is ‘... developed systematically from the content and Guidelines approved by the Diocesan Bishop’ (CECWA 1993b, par.32). Religious Education may be divided into formal and informal programs within a school (Flynn 1993, pp.222–223). This study concentrated on the formal RE program that is taught usually in a classroom setting for 160 minutes per week.

### *Teaching load*

A teaching load refers to the number of teaching minutes per week a teacher is employed to teach. A full time teaching load in Catholic schools in Western Australia is approximately 1280 minutes per week. In the case of Religious Education, a teacher was required to teach a class for 160 minutes per week with a minimum of three periods of contact with the class each week. Most recently assigned RE teachers are specialist teachers from other learning areas and usually have one or two RE classes (Table 5.10, p.172). Consequently, RE teaching formed only a minor part of the teaching load of recently assigned RE teachers.

### *Teaching practice*

For the purposes of this study, teaching practice is defined as how the teacher actually implemented the instructional resources, teaching approach and pedagogical and theological principles underpinning the draft Units of Work in PAREC at the classroom level.

### *Topic*

The curriculum writers of the PAREC selected content drawn from the teaching of the Catholic Church on Christian Salvation including the Church’s understanding of the human person. In the draft RE Units, this content was divided into two sections.

The first section dealt with the discovery of the human need for Christian Salvation. The second section described how Christians draw on the experiences of Christian Salvation. Both these sections were referenced to the Church documents: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) and *The Word Dwells Among Us* (Education Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference 1990).

### *Unit of Work*

A draft Unit of Work consisted of a number of components: term-length teaching and learning program; content describing Catholic beliefs and practices divided into two sections; suggested learning strategies; and, a variety of print and other resources, including support materials for teachers. The draft Units were published by the Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth through the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia. In lower secondary, there were 12 Units of Work, while upper secondary had 7 units.

## **1.9 Format of the Study**

The format of the study consists of nine chapters:

- Chapter One – The Research Problem Defined;
- Chapter Two – Context of the Research: Religious Education;
- Chapter Three – Review of the Research Literature;
- Chapter Four – Research Design;
- Chapter Five – Survey Findings;
- Chapter Six – The First Interviews;
- Chapter Seven – The Second Interviews;
- Chapter Eight – Reflections; and,
- Chapter Nine – Conclusions.

A more detailed outline of each chapter follows as an overview of the research project on how recently assigned secondary RE teachers coped with the exigencies of implementing the draft PAREC.

### *Chapter One: The Research Problem Defined*

The first chapter, which is this chapter, identified the problem of recently assigned secondary RE teachers facing the exigencies of the implementation process of the PAREC at the classroom level. The study examined this problem by addressing the research question:

***What are the perceptions of recently assigned secondary RE teachers about the demands of implementing the draft Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course?***

Chapter One also discussed how the research project used a mixed method approach to explore the subsidiary research questions. Initially, a survey was used to develop a data baseline and context for the first round of interviews that, in turn, formed the basis for further exploration of the perceptions of teachers in the second round of interviews. The description of the methodology is supported by a list of working definitions and a statement of the significance and limitations of the study. Lastly, the chapter presents this outline of the format for the study.

### *Chapter Two – Context of the Research: Religious Education*

Chapter Two outlines the context in which the research explored the learning area of Religious Education. The chapter reviews the model of Religious Education used in Western Australian Catholic schools along two orientations: catechetical and educational. It then describes the administration of RE in WA Catholic schools within the framework of Catholic educational philosophy and management by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and Catholic secondary schools. The chapter next describes the development of the Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course and the status of the draft Units of Work.

### *Chapter Three – Review of the Research Literature: Curriculum Exigencies*

Chapter Three reviews the literature on the responses of recently assigned teachers to intense curriculum demands. The chapter explores the characteristics of recently assigned teachers and the situations where these teachers are required to familiarise themselves with implementing a curriculum with which they have little or no prior training or experience. The responses these teachers make to an unfamiliar curriculum are compared with the models of curriculum implementation that

incorporate the perceptions of teachers. The Stages of Concern model proposed by Fuller (1969) and the Change Agent model by Fullan (2001) are described next. These models provided a framework for exploring how teachers are affected both personally and professionally by the demands of an unfamiliar curriculum. Lastly, the role of personal, professional, and religious formative experiences is discussed in assisting recently assigned RE teachers to cope with the demands of curriculum implementation.

#### *Chapter Four – Research Design*

In Chapter Four the methodology used in the research is described. The methodology incorporates a mixed-method approach with an emphasis on qualitative analysis. The chapter describes the process of identifying the target population of recently assigned secondary RE teachers. The development of the survey instrument is described next and the procedures used in delivering, collecting, collating and analysing the survey responses are outlined. The survey responses served as a database from which a sample cohort of teachers could be selected and interviewed. The identification of the sample group of teachers to be interviewed was based on a purposive sampling technique. The chapter then addresses the benefit of using indepth interviews and how the interview questions were created, based on the indications from the previous survey. This is followed by an account of how the interviews were arranged and conducted to explore in greater depth how the recently assigned RE teachers perceived their experiences of implementing the draft PAREC. Lastly, the chapter focuses on the process of modifying the research questions because of the themes that emerged from the first round of interviews and develops the procedure for a second round of interviews.

#### *Chapter Five – Survey Findings*

Chapter Five presents firstly the demographic and professional backgrounds of the recently assigned RE teachers in the survey as a backdrop to the survey findings. The findings of the survey are then reported in terms of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying RE curriculum principles. Some statistical analysis was used to identify particular similarities and differences within the survey responses. Notably, the high level of agreement in the means and the narrow standard deviations indicated that recently assigned RE teachers held similar perceptions of

implementing the draft RE Units. Furthermore, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Post Hoc testing indicated some minor differences between teachers of different demographic and professional backgrounds. As a result of these findings, the selection of a purposive sample of RARE teachers as participants in two rounds of interviews was discussed. This selection was based upon identifying teachers who reflected the total mean, high and low scores on Likert items in the three categories of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying curriculum principles. From a potential group of 37 participants, 28 teachers agreed to be involved in the interviews.

### *Chapter Six – The First Interviews*

The experiences and themes to emerge from the first round of interviews are described in Chapter Six. The chapter describes how the questions in the semi-structured interviews were based on key collated responses given by teachers in the previous survey. These responses were used as a lead from which the interview participants could reflect and discuss their perceptions of implementing the draft RE Units. Once the recorded interviews were transcribed, they were coded and analysed for emerging patterns and themes. As a result, particular themes of concern emerged from this round of interviews related to the confidence of the interviewees in accessing resources and using these resources in ways that they felt satisfied the expectations of the curriculum and met the personal and learning needs of students. Furthermore, the themes indicated there was a need to further explore the perceptions of recently assigned RE teachers about the increasing demands on them in implementing the draft RE Units as it related to the personal and professional needs of the teachers themselves.

### *Chapter Seven – The Second Interviews*

The sample group was interviewed again the following school year using a less structured interview format. The intention was to discover whether the changes recently assigned RE teachers had envisaged about their RE teaching had occurred and to find out what was important in their outlook to sustain them through this period of RE curriculum implementation.

## *Chapter Eight – Reflections*

Chapter Eight reflects on the key themes that have emerged from this study and compares these themes with the educational literature on the formation and experience of recently assigned RE teachers. The chapter represents a synthesis of the thoughts, feelings and research from a range of sources. Firstly, the thoughts and feelings of the recently assigned RE teachers from the survey and interviews are considered. Secondly, the reflections of the researcher about the findings that have emerged are discussed and, thirdly, how these findings compared with other research and Church documents about the experience and formation of recently assigned RE teachers.

## *Chapter Nine – Conclusions*

This chapter reviews this study of recently assigned RE teachers and their personal and professional responses to the intense demands placed on them by the draft PAREC. The chapter firstly describes the problem investigated in this study and the primary research question that evolved from the problem statement. Secondly, the methodological approaches that were used to address the research question are described. Thirdly, the chapter considers how the subsidiary research questions were developed and formed the basis for the survey and two rounds of interviews. Fourthly, the key findings from the survey and the two rounds of interviews are outlined as well as a model of formation for recently assigned RE teachers. The chapter then focuses on recommendations in response to the research findings, followed by an overview that proposes a strategic plan to meet these key recommendations. Suggestions are then forwarded concerning possibilities for further research in Religious Education and curriculum implementation along with a conclusion that reviews the results of this research.

### **1.10 Chapter Summary**

This first chapter sets out the rationale for examining the personal and professional responses of recently assigned RE teachers to the exigencies of implementing the draft RE Units. The problem concerned the capacity of inexperienced and under-trained teachers in coping with the intense demands associated with implementing the RE curriculum and how the situation was compounded by a high expectation

upon their commitment and formation as RE teachers. Such difficulties were common where teachers were unfamiliar with a learning area. With regard to recently assigned RE teachers in Catholic schools in Western Australia, there was much anecdotal evidence but little research previously undertaken to investigate the veracity of the data.

To contextualise the situation recently assigned RE teachers experience, Chapter Two explores the nature and purposes of the curriculum model upon which the draft RE Units are based. By exploring this curriculum model and how the Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course was developed and managed in Catholic schools in Western Australia, it may be possible to ascertain the expectations placed upon RARE teachers.