

---

Theses

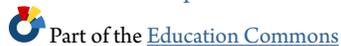
---

2006

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

Chris B. Hackett  
*University of Notre Dame Australia*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses>



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA  
Copyright Regulations 1969

WARNING

The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further copying or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act.  
Do not remove this notice.

---

Publication Details

Hackett, C. B. (2006). A longitudinal study of the personal and professional responses of recently assigned secondary Religious Education teachers to curriculum demands (Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)). University of Notre Dame Australia.  
<http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/1>

This dissertation/thesis is brought to you by ResearchOnline@ND. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of ResearchOnline@ND. For more information, please contact [researchonline@nd.edu.au](mailto:researchonline@nd.edu.au).



# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH:**

### **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter sets out the context to understand the nature and extent of the research problem about recently assigned RE teachers coping with the demands of an unfamiliar RE curriculum. The study confines itself to Western Australian Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Perth and the dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton. Furthermore, the study occurs within the context of the theological and pedagogical principles of Religious Education, especially in relation to the perceptions recently assigned RE teachers possess about the demands of teaching the draft PAREC. This chapter attempts to provide for the reader a background of the recent events that formed the circumstances of this research. It is recognised that not all readers will be familiar with the Catholic Religious Education context of Western Australia and for those readers this chapter attempts to provide some background.

Religious Education is both a learning area and an integral part of the educational philosophy and structure of the Catholic education system in Western Australia. This chapter describes the models of Religious Education employed in secondary Catholic schools, especially in Western Australia. It then outlines how RE is organised in Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia. The chapter next describes the evolution of the Perth Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators into the draft Units of Work that have formed the circumstances of this research. Lastly, it concludes with a summary of this context as a precursor to the next chapter dealing with a review of the Research Literature.

## **2.2 Models of Religious Education**

This section provides a backdrop to understanding the place of Religious Education within Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia. A number of models of RE have been described to illustrate the conceptual framework within which curriculum developers construct the RE curriculum and which the classroom teacher needs to keep in mind when implementing that curriculum in classroom practice. It is quite possible that the demands placed on teachers to implement the curriculum were the result of a lack of understanding or confusion about the model of RE being employed. This scenario is explored further in the ‘Review of the Research Literature’ in the next chapter (Chapter 3, p.54).

### ***2.2.1 Catechetical and Educational Orientations***

In Australia, curriculum developments in RE have reflected two orientations: one towards ‘education in faith’; and, the other towards an ‘education in religion’ (Rossiter 1981; White, 2003; Marendy 2005). Each orientation insists that Religious Education is distinctive yet complementary to catechesis: it is a ‘...ministry of the word in its own right’ (Holohan 1999, pp.27, 30-32). Both orientations recognise that Religious Education goes beyond what can be achieved in the classroom alone (Engebretson, Fleming and Rymarz 2002, p.2). Holohan (1999, p.34) points out that, ‘...no current diocesan RE programme seeks to offer catechesis. Each seeks to meet educational aims. None reflects confusion between religious education and catechesis (sic)’. Students are required as part of their religious development to learn about the nature of Christianity and how Christianity responds to the world today (Congregation for Catholic Education 1988, par.69).

The ‘education in faith’ or catechetical orientation leads to a curriculum model where the intent is to allow students to deepen their faith through an understanding of the integration between their lives and the Christian message. The RE classroom becomes a place where significant human experiences are explored and the Gospels and Church Traditions are seen as responses to these experiences. It is assumed that most students have come from a family background where students have received the Sacraments of Initiation and were exposed to Catholic beliefs and practices through the parish or Catholic primary school communities. The catechetical curriculum model focuses on a

specific teaching process and content framework that drives the teaching and learning program. The curriculum writers of Perth Archdiocesan RE Course (PAREC) require teachers to understand and follow particular steps beginning with the life experiences of students then connect this experience to the Gospel or Christian Story experience. Such a model may draw upon 'Life Experience', 'Kerygmatic' or 'Praxis' approaches to Religious Education (Ryan 1999).

Other RE curriculum models rely upon an 'education in religion' or educational orientation. The intent here is to draw upon current educational and phenomenological approaches to teaching and learning and to use these approaches to inform students about the breadth and depth of not only the Catholic religious tradition but also the religious traditions of other world religions (Engebretson, Fleming and Rymarz 2002, pp.10-11). Students are exposed to a 'content-rich' curriculum that does not assume prior knowledge or acceptance of a particular faith stance. Teachers are required by their Archdiocesan or diocesan Bishops to use mandated curriculum frameworks that make classroom RE no different to any other learning area. Such a model may draw upon recent educational approaches drawn from outcomes based education, national profiles and State authorised curricula outlines.

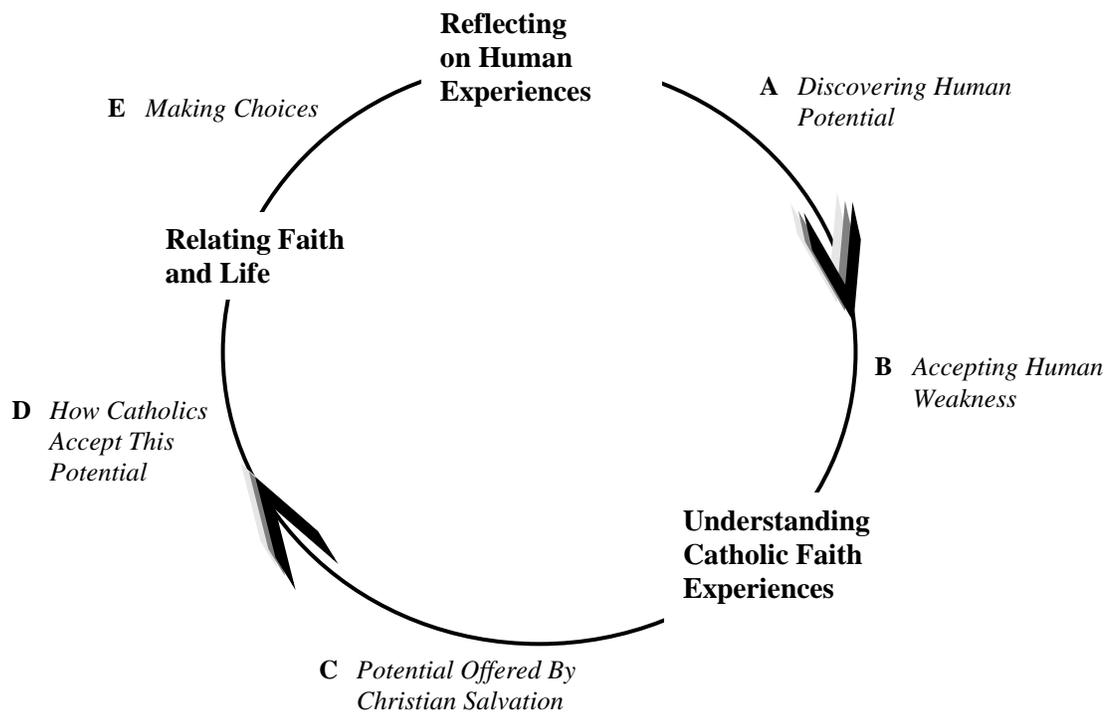
### ***2.2.2 Catechetical and educational orientations embedded into the draft RE Units***

The draft PAREC Units have a strong catechetical orientation and the Units also incorporate current educational practices. The Units attempt to mesh '... catechetical insights, curriculum directions and pedagogical practices that will ensure a balanced approach to religious education' (White 2003, p.24). The approach taken by PAREC not only recognises that RE is a learning area that reflects other learning areas in teaching, learning and assessment but also, as a Ministry of the Word, has a part to play in the evangelisation of students (Holohan 1999). The draft Units of Work incorporated a content framework and teaching process in a teaching and learning program. Figure 2.1 (p.39) illustrates this integration of the content framework and the teaching process. Teachers begin the Unit by assisting students to reflect on their significant life experiences and to identify how a Catholic understanding of the human person can assist them to recognise how these experiences are a part of their human potential and human weakness. This process then leads them to consider how Catholics understand these

experiences because they are made in the image and likeness of God. Due to their sinfulness, people require Salvation through Jesus Christ. The teacher assists students towards an understanding of how Catholics can draw on this Salvation in their lives. Lastly, the students reflect on how these Catholic faith experiences can help them in their own lives.

**Figure 2.1 Steps of the Teaching Process**

---



*Source: Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth, 1996a, PAREC Teacher's Manual: Expressing the Christ-like Within, Draft Copy, p.2.*

---

Each unit adopted a significant faith-life theme and was packaged with seven sections that included: an overview section; a content section; a teaching and learning program (with objectives and suggested strategies); teacher resources; student resources (including a student resource book); and, evaluation procedures (including formal assessments). The Units consisted of content that was based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) as well as focused on the personal and religious needs of

students. In 1996/97, the Upper Secondary RE Units were accredited with the Curriculum Council of Western Australia (formerly the State Education Authority) as fulfilling the outcomes of their phenomenological Beliefs and Values Courses. The Units had the flexibility to satisfy the common assessment requirements for these Courses. Students received recognition for the subject on their Certificate of Secondary Education and the results from the subject were used for entrance into Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Training Colleges.

### **2.3 Religious Education in Western Australia**

In Western Australia, Religious Education is considered the first learning area in a Catholic School (CECWA 2001, par.43). Under the terms of its mandate, the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) requires teachers to use RE curriculum documents approved by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Western Australia and supervised by the Director of Religious Education (CECWA 1993b). In particular, RE teachers are required to use the draft PAREC as part of their classroom teaching. This section describes the structure and evolution of the PAREC Units.

#### ***2.3.1 Educational philosophy of Catholic schools***

Essentially, Catholic schools in Western Australia seek to fulfil the educational philosophy declared by the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE), that is, to focus on the integration of Catholic faith into the culture and lives of students and their communities (CCE 1977, par.49). Such a critical integration underpins the lifelong formation of students as a whole human person as ‘God wishes them to be’ (CCE 1977, pars.29 and 45). Catholic schools operate from the premise highlighted by the Second Vatican Council that each person is made in the image and likeness of God (Vatican Council II 1965b, par.12). However, each person, because of Original Sin, experiences sinfulness and needs Salvation. This salvation comes from Jesus, the Son of God, as people choose freely to repent and believe the Gospels (Mark 1:15). This call to inner conversion underpins the formation of the whole person to become like Christ:

the development of [people] from within, freeing [them] from that conditioning which would prevent [them] from becoming a fully integrated human being....

[Schools] must develop persons who are responsible and inner-directed, capable of choosing freely in conformity with their conscience. This is simply another way of saying that the school is an institution where young people gradually learn to open themselves up to life as it is, and to create in themselves a definite attitude to life as it should be.

(CCE 1977, pars.29 and 31)

Catholic schools present Jesus Christ as the key to this Salvation and model for whole person formation. Jesus is the person who ‘gives new meaning to life and helps [people] to direct [each] thought, action and will according to the gospel, making the beatitudes [their] norm of life’ (CCE 1977, par.34). Within this context, one of the specific tasks of a Catholic school is to provide explicit and systematic instruction in Religious Education that is directed towards not only ‘intellectual assent to religious truths but also a total commitment of one’s whole being to the Person of Christ’ (CCE 1977, par.50). The Religious Education teacher plays a significant role in providing such instruction and enthusiasm for living the Christian message to the students.

### ***2.3.2 Catholic education system in Western Australia***

The Conference of Catholic Bishops of Western Australia holds responsibility for Catholic schools in Western Australia. There are four dioceses: the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Broome, Bunbury and Geraldton. The Bishop within each diocese has the canonical role to evangelise by providing systematic instruction (Vatican Council II 1965a, par.14). To support them in this role, the Bishops and the Major Superiors of Religious Orders established the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) in 1971 to pool their resources and coordinate their decisions regarding the management of the Catholic education system throughout Western Australia. The CECWA is responsible for policy development and resource allocation as set out by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Western Australia and the Major Superiors of Religious Orders in the *Mandate and Terms of Reference of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 1993–1999* (CECWA 1993b). In 2001 a revised Mandate letter was published called *Mandate, Mandate Letter and Terms of Reference for the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2001-2007* (CECWA 2001).

The CECWA directs the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) in managing policies of the Commission, distributing resources and providing support services to schools. The support services include the curriculum development and professional support of Religious Education. This is a daunting task considering the wide distribution of schools in dioceses across the State and the number of students and teaching personnel in Western Australia. In 1998, the CEOWA served 47 secondary schools of which 19 were composite (combined primary and secondary schools). These secondary schools educated 23,308 students and were administered by 47 Principals and staffed by 1,709 teachers (CECWA 1998, pp.42-44).

Catholic schools are accountable to the Bishops in one of two ways. Schools which are responsible only to the Diocesan Bishop through the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) are termed 'Diocesan accountable' whereas schools which are both Diocesan and Religious Order accountable are responsible to the Diocesan Bishop through the CECWA and to one or more Religious Orders which own and administer these schools (CECWA 1998, p.42). For the purpose of this study, these schools are described collectively as forming the Catholic education system in Western Australia.

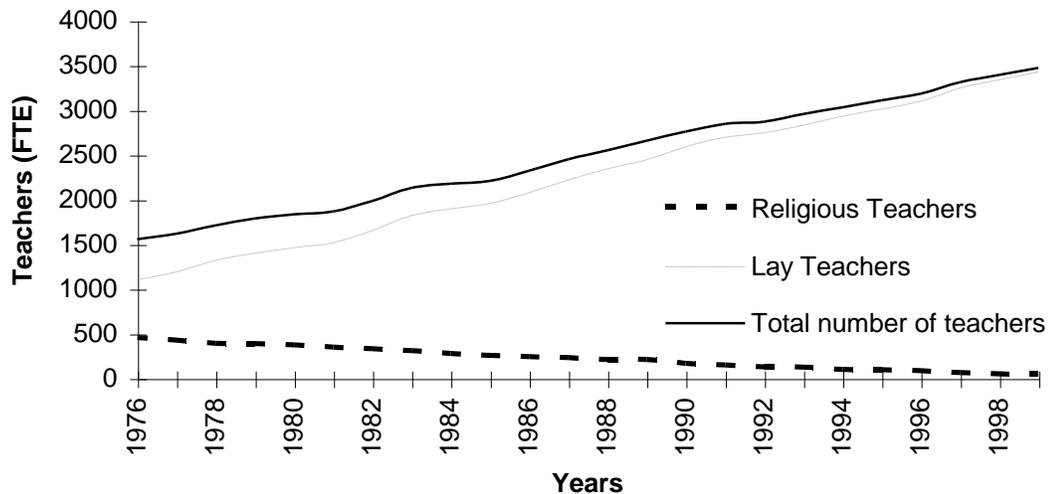
### ***2.3.3 Administration of Religious Education in Western Australia***

From the mid-1880s, Catholic schools in Western Australia had relied heavily on the availability of religious brothers, sisters and priests. However, the numbers of religious in schools have declined since the 1960s and decreased dramatically over the last three decades (CECWA 1985, p.15; 1996, p.38 and 2003, p.33). Concurrent with this change in teaching personnel were increasing school enrolments due to a number of factors such as an overall increase in the school-age population, increasing retention rates in secondary schools and changes in economic and government policy.

The combination of these factors resulted in a threefold increase in the number of lay teachers teaching in Catholic secondary schools (CECWA 1985, p.15; 1996, p.38 and 2003, p.33). Figure 2.2 (p.44) shows the trends in the staffing of religious and lay teachers in WA Catholic schools between 1976 and 1999. Overall, the total number of teachers had risen from 1557.7 full-time equivalents in 1976 to 2321.1 full-time equivalents in 1986 and further again to 3473 by 1999. In 1976, there were 455.6 full-time equivalent teachers from religious congregations. By 1986, this had decreased to 243.3; and in 1999, there were only 48 of these teachers working full-time in Catholic schools. By contrast, there were 1100.1 full-time equivalent lay teachers in 1976 representing 70.7% of the total number of teachers. This figure increased to 2077.9 (89.5%) in 1986 and continued to rise to 3425 or 98.6% of the total number of teachers by 1999. As a result, Catholic schools in Western Australia had experienced a rapid increase in the total number of teachers who were predominantly lay teachers. Such a situation reflected the trends elsewhere in Australia (Canavan 1999, 2006). In turn, many of these lay teachers were called upon to teach Religious Education with little or no experience or training in this learning area.

In 1981, Archbishop Goody appointed a Director of Religious Education along with the establishment of the Perth Archdiocesan Department of Religious Education (PADRE). The task of PADRE was to assist these predominantly lay RE teachers experiencing difficulties with their classroom instruction by developing Religious Education Guidelines (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth 1983, p.4) using a 'Guidelines Taskforce' composed of experienced RE teachers, both lay and religious. In 1986, the PADRE was subsumed into the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia. The Director of RE became a member of the CECWA and continued the delegated responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of WA for RE in all Catholic schools in Western Australia.

**Figure 2.2 Staffing trends of religious and lay teachers in WA Catholic schools between 1976 and 1999**



Source: CECWA Annual Reports 1985, 1993a, 1996, 1998, 2003

In 1987, RE Guidelines were published as a series of documents called *The Truth Will Set You Free: Perth Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators* (PAGRE). The Bishops of WA mandated these documents to be used in Catholic schools in their Archdiocese and dioceses (CECWA 1993b, par.1.22). The Perth Archdiocesan RE Guidelines documents were also cross-referenced to *The Word Dwells Among Us* (Education Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, 1990) that outlines the Catholic beliefs and practices to be taught in all Australian Catholic schools and parishes by the Education Committee of the Conference of Australian Catholic Bishops. Between 1993 and 1996, these Guidelines were reviewed and superseded by the draft *Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course* (PAREC).

In 1996, RE curriculum support materials and professional development programs on the content and methodology of RE were provided for Catholic secondary schools by the Director of Religious Education and five RE consultants of the CEOWA. The Catholic Education Office in Perth had three RE consultants and the WA regional Catholic Education Offices in Broome and in Bunbury had one each. Within schools, the Principal delegates the coordination of the RE programs usually to one other person. In

most secondary schools, this person is called the RE Coordinator (REC). The task of the REC was to coordinate the activities of the RE program within the school and provide support and resources for RE teachers (CEOWA 1997c). Many RE teachers teach this subject as a part of their minor teaching load.

#### ***2.3.4 Review of the Perth Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators***

Like other Catholic education systems around Australia, the Perth RE Guidelines were devised to guide Principals and RE teachers in developing their school RE programs. The Guidelines were designed to address the needs of many lay RE teachers who had neither the expertise nor experience in teaching Religious Education. The PAGRE had been developed in response to the needs identified at the 1981 and 1982 conferences of Principals, RE Coordinators, personnel from the CEOWA and Catholic Institute of Western Australia, parish priests and parents (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth 1987, p.1). The Archdiocesan documents were not a centralised syllabus but instead guidelines for RE teachers on the content and teaching process to be implemented as part of their school RE programs (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth 1987, p.2). The Director of Religious Education and his Guideline Taskforce had designed the documents to be used by RE Coordinators and other experienced and trained RE personnel to develop school-based programs that would meet the specific needs of Catholic secondary students in different cultural and geographical locations. It was felt that:

Because of factors such as the distant locations of many schools, the limited support that could be offered by a small Religious Education department, and the inability of many schools to take advantage of Religious Education inservices, self-help would have to be a permanent feature in the development of Religious Education....

(Director of Religious Education,  
Archdiocese of Perth 1987, p.4)

Therefore, it was assumed that this 'self-help' with the support of RE Coordinators, would assist the formation of all RE teachers for them to learn how they might better cope with the demands of teaching the Religious Education programs within the school. However, these Guidelines were soon suspected to be inadequate and Catholic

secondary principals expressed their concerns at their RE Conference in 1988 (Holohan 1992).

By 1989 some sections of the Catholic community were becoming increasingly concerned about the quality of RE teaching in Catholic secondary schools in WA. Phelan (1990) was commissioned by the Knights of the Southern Cross to survey its members on their perceptions as parents about the quality of RE teaching in Catholic secondary schools. One of the findings of this survey claimed that many lay RE teachers were not sufficiently equipped to teach RE because they lacked the necessary professional or religious formation.

In 1991, Archbishop Barry Hickey directed that schools complete the process of implementing the PAGRE as part of their school RE programs by the end of the following year (Hickey 1991). This was in keeping with the advice of the predecessor of Archbishop Hickey, William Foley. Archbishop Foley had scheduled 1992 as the proper time for the review of the PAGRE when he promulgated the documents in 1987 (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth 1996b, p.7).

At the end of 1991, the Catholic Secondary Principals Association of Western Australia (CSPAWA) formed a working party to investigate the teaching and resourcing of RE and the difficulties RE teachers experienced in using PAGRE documents. Much of their evidence was anecdotal and relied upon their own observations of RE teachers and on discussions with other Principals and RE Coordinators. In 1992 the working party presented to the CSPAWA its findings in the document: *The Teaching of Religious Education in Catholic Schools*. After deliberating on the findings of the working party, the CSPAWA (1992, par.1.4) agreed to endorse this document. The CSPAWA advised the Director of RE of their concerns for the teaching of RE in Catholic secondary schools, in particular, the problems inexperienced and underqualified RE teachers had in using the RE Guidelines (CSPAWA 1992, par.5[i]). The Director of Religious Education in Western Australia was asked to act on the recommendations within the document concerning the accessibility and resourcing of the PAGRE. The CSPAWA believed that the PAGRE had value as curriculum overview documents and in assisting the professional formation of teachers but:

as day-to-day teaching resources, they present difficulties of accessibility, particularly for inexperienced teachers or those without a solid training in religious education.

(CSPA WA 1992, par.3)

The CSPA WA also concluded that the accessibility of RE Guidelines, as day-to-day teaching resources, was crucial to their implementation in the classroom. This lack of accessibility, they claimed, contributed to their schools being unable to produce 'good quality teaching resources' that were suited to the professional needs of their RE teachers. The CSPA WA felt that teachers had not been able to develop adequately their school RE programs from the RE Guidelines. Many RE teachers had lacked the professional formation to implement these documents within the given time and resource limits (CSPA WA 1992, pars.4.1 and 4.3).

The notion of teachers working in an unfamiliar learning area (Chapter 3, p.60) clearly applies to many recently assigned RE teachers. In Western Australia, secondary teachers are trained in major and minor learning areas. During their pre-service training, a teacher will study eight tertiary Units that deal with the specific content knowledge of one learning area (major teaching area) and six tertiary Units that deal with the specific content knowledge of another learning area (minor teaching area). However, in the case of Religious Education, only two universities provide tertiary Units for teaching RE in Catholic schools: Edith Cowan University (ECU) and the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA). ECU students (through the Catholic Institute of Western Australia) may study three tertiary Units (two in Theology and one in Curriculum Principles of Religious Education); UNDA students may study five tertiary Units (three in Theology and two in Curriculum Principles of Religious Education).

Data collected by the CEOWA regarding the Accreditation status of RE teachers also highlighted the vexed issue of a lack of professional formation and the limited capacity of recently assigned RE teachers to access the PAGRE documents. Table 2.1 (p.48) illustrates the impact of the changing professional composition of RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools. With the introduction of PAGRE, teachers who began teaching RE after 1986 were required to have a professional qualification to teach RE called *Accreditation to Teach Religious Education* or Accreditation B. Initially, teachers who had taught RE before 1986 were not required to have this Accreditation. In 1994,

the CECWA revised its policy statement on Accreditation and advised that all RE teachers were required to have *Accreditation to Teach RE* (CEOWA, 1997c). On the basis of this division, 203 teachers (37%) were ‘pre-1986’ and 342 (63%) were ‘post-1986’ RE teachers. This implied that after the Guidelines were introduced the majority of RE teachers (63%) belonged to a group with less than seven years experience in teaching RE.

**Table 2.1 Accreditation to Teach RE Status of RE teachers in WA Catholic secondary schools in 1993**

<b>Categories of RE Teachers</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
‘Pre-1986’ RE teachers	203	37
‘Post-1986’ RE teachers	342	63
<b>Total number of RE teachers</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>100</b>

<b>Accreditation status of ‘Post-1986’ RE teachers</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Accreditation completed	133	39
Accreditation inservice component only	104	30
Accreditation tertiary study component only	19	6
No Accreditation component	86	25
<b>Total ‘Post-1986’ RE teachers</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note:*

- *Accreditation to Teach RE is the mandatory professional requirement for RE teachers consisting of a study and an inservice component.*
- *‘Pre-1986’ RE personnel who taught RE before the introduction of RE Guidelines were exempt from Accreditation until 1993. Many of these teachers were religious or experienced lay RE teachers.*
- *‘Post-1986’ RE personnel began teaching RE after the introduction of the RE Guidelines. Many were lay Catholic teachers lacking experience and training in RE.*

*Source: Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 1993, Accreditation to Teach Religious Education Data 1993. Used with permission of the CEOWA.*

Table 2.1 suggests that these inexperienced RE teachers lacked formal training in the content (as indicated by the tertiary study component) and methodology (as indicated by the inservice component) of Religious Education. By 1993, 61% of ‘post 1986’ RE

teachers did not possess the mandatory professional qualification, *Accreditation to Teach RE* advocated by the CEOWA. Only 39% of the 'post-1986' teachers had completed this Accreditation, a significant number (25%) had no training in teaching RE, 30% had completed the CEOWA inservice component on the teaching approach of PAGRE and only 6% had undertaken tertiary-level study in RE. While they may be specialist teachers trained in other learning areas, they were not familiar with or experienced in the pedagogical processes used in RE. This issue is taken up further in the next chapter (Chapter 3, p.54).

The development of the 1987 edition of the *Perth Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators* (PAGRE) had been a response to the changes experienced throughout the eighties. Those responsible for RE at the school or Diocesan levels could not have fully anticipated the changes in the professional profile of RE teaching personnel nor the rapidity of these changes over the next decade.

Other changes played a significant role in restricting teachers in implementing the PAGRE. Firstly, the impact of the Beazley Report (1984) and other state and national reports on education led to many schools placing their time and resources in implementing the recommendations of these reports. These reports pertained to issues of schooling other than RE. These educational changes meant teachers did not have the time or energy to implement PAGRE fully as part of their school RE program. Secondly, the dramatic expansion of the Catholic secondary school system in Western Australia meant that qualified and experienced RE teachers became spread more thinly. As schools grew quickly, administrators were forced to hire specialist subject teachers, with limited or no training in RE or with little professional and religious formation to teach RE as part of their minor teaching load. Thirdly, the rapid socio-economic and technological changes experienced at the time by families contributed to many young people perceiving religious practice as irrelevant and teachers found it increasingly difficult to motivate these students in their classes.

### ***2.3.5 Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course***

In 1992, the Director of Religious Education in Western Australia and the Catholic Secondary Principals Association of WA (CSPAWA) agreed to review the RE

curriculum. After a series of meetings between the Director of RE and the CSPAWA, the decision was made to set a new direction in the curriculum development of the PAGRE in response to the rapid changes that had taken place in the number, composition and professional background of RE teaching personnel. The PAGRE was revamped into Units of Work that collectively became the *Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course* (PAREC). The Units of Work in PAREC were created to alleviate the difficulties encountered in teaching RE, especially by inexperienced RE teachers or those who lacked training in teaching Religious Education (CSPAWA 1992, par.5[i]).

In 1993 a joint CEOWA/CSPAWA working party was established. The working party consisted of RE Coordinators, experienced RE teachers and the CEOWA Secondary RE Team. Their task was to consult with the Director of RE on how to proceed with the development of a revised PAGRE and the implementation of a pilot RE Course containing Units of Work. As a key priority, Units of Work were developed to provide teachers with the content and teaching process of the revised PAGRE, including a teaching-learning program with objectives, strategies, resources and other support materials (Holohan 1996a, p.1). One of the terms of reference given to the joint CEOWA/CSPAWA Working Party was that they develop this Course suitable for teachers with less than six years of RE teaching experience or, teachers with little or no formal qualifications in RE (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth 1996b).

In 1994/95, seventeen Catholic secondary schools participated in the 'Pilot RE Project' to trial the Units of Work prepared by the joint CEOWA/CSPAWA Working Party. In collaboration with the CEOWA Secondary RE Team, Religious Education teachers in these schools made recommendations about the implementation of the PAREC including their suitability for recently assigned RE teachers. Following the RE Pilot Project, the Units of Work were available to schools as a 'Working Draft' from 1996/97.

Even as the Units were implemented, the curriculum writers of the PAREC continued to promote a consultative and collaborative process of curriculum change. From the formation of the joint CEOWA/CSPAWA Working Party (1993) to the Pilot RE Project (1994/95) through to the 'Working Draft' of the PAREC (1996/97), the CEOWA,

CSPA, RE Coordinators and RE teachers collaborated in developing more effective ways of implementing and accessing the new RE Course. The curriculum writers claimed that the 19 Units of Work were comprehensive and ‘user-friendly’ (CEOWA, 1996a) because of this collaboration.

In 1996, Catholic secondary schools were given three options or means of implementing the revised PAGRE. They could implement the draft PAREC Units of Work as presented; they could modify their current school RE program with the draft Units or, they could create a new school RE program using the content and teaching process of the revised PAGRE. By 1997, 37 of the 38 secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton had taken the first option of implementing the draft PAREC Units of Work. One Catholic secondary school chose to modify its own RE program in line with the draft Units of Work. The diocese of Broome had not made a decision about the implementation of the revised PAGRE due to cultural and resource considerations.

In view of these developments in RE curriculum materials and professional formation, the end of the 1990s was an opportune time to discover how recently assigned secondary RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools perceived the implementation of the draft PAREC as part of their classroom teaching.

### ***2.3.6 Related curriculum developments in RE around Australia***

Such curriculum developments in RE were not peculiar to Western Australia. During the nineties, Catholic Education Offices (CEOs) in other parts of Australia recognised the significance of the issues related to the limited accessibility of RE Guidelines and the lack of professional formation for RE teachers. Another development was the introduction of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994). A common response of CEOs was to develop modules or Units of Work for schools.

The CEO at Parramatta published ‘Support Units’ for its Religious Education curriculum, *Sharing Our Story* in 1993. The Diocese of Bathurst produced Units of Work for its *Secondary Religious Education Program Years 7–12* in November 1994. In 1995, the *Guidelines for Religious Education of Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* were revised to take into account the substantial magisterial and theological

content outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Furthermore, a series of ‘Teaching Companions’ were included and, in 1997, student texts began to be developed. The Sydney Catholic Education Office also revised its secondary RE Guidelines: *Faithful to God: Faithful to People* in October 1994 with modules being published in May 1996 (Crotty, Fletcher and McGrath 1995, p.15). In 1997, the Brisbane Catholic Education Office also announced its intention to develop 52 ‘Sample Religious Education Units’ as part of the revised Archdiocese of Brisbane RE Guidelines (Barry 1997, p.25).

In recent years, there has been a trend towards closer collaboration between dioceses in the development of their RE curriculum. While some States such as Western Australia, Tasmania, and Queensland have a history of Archdioceses and dioceses working together, this was not the case in other parts of Australia. The Catholic Bishops of Western Australia have long recognised the cost advantages in pooling their resources in the development of RE curriculum. Similarly, the dioceses of Canberra and Goulburn, Parramatta, Wicannia-Forbes, and Wollongong have worked together in revising and resourcing the *Sharing Our Story* curriculum (Bezzina, Billington, Kenyon, Raue and Wilson 2002). At an Archdiocesan level, Melbourne and Sydney have developed the ‘*Know, Worship, Love*’ series of RE student texts (O’Grady 2004). Religious Educators have found that the quality of resources available and opportunities for professional development was improved as a result of this collaboration (Bezzina et al 2002, p.43). Such curriculum reforms were warmly welcomed, yet there was still a lack of professional formation among recently assigned RE teachers and this concern is discussed further in the next chapter.

## **2.4 Context Summary**

The intention of this chapter was to set out the context of the research problem within the Western Australian Catholic school system. Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the dioceses of Broome, Bunbury, and Geraldton are serviced by one Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA). During the 1990s, the Religious Education curriculum was mandated by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Western Australia and supported by the Director of Religious Education and secondary RE

consultants at the CEOWA. A significant curriculum development that was taken was the provision of draft Units of Work designed for inexperienced and inexperienced lay RE teachers.

These Units are peculiar to Religious Education in Western Australia for while they may be predominantly catechetical in orientation, they adopt key educational outcomes features as well. The steps of the teaching process presumes teachers had the professional capacity to make the links between the life experiences of students and the Gospel experiences espoused within the Catholic Church tradition. To assist teachers, especially recently assigned RE teachers, the draft Units of Work provided ready access to background materials, teaching and learning programs and student resource books.

Furthermore, RE teachers were required by the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) to complete an accreditation process that entailed both tertiary study and inservice components.

Within such a scenario, the difficulties recently assigned RE teachers experienced in implementing the draft RE Units seemed to be complicated by demands on teachers both personally and professionally. How recently assigned teachers cope with these intense demands are well documented in the research literature and is the focus of the next chapter.