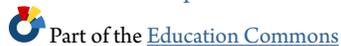

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A longitudinal study of the personal and professional responses of recently assigned secondary Religious Education teachers to curriculum demands

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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.
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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SECOND INTERVIEWS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the findings of the second round of interviews. These findings are developments of the themes that were emerging from the previous round of interviews. As such, the emerging themes provide a longitudinal perspective to the formative responses of recently assigned teachers to the implementation of the RE Units. In the first round of interviews, participants expected that the demands placed on them in implementing the draft PAREC Units were going to change, hopefully for the better. They anticipated that the challenge of implementing the Units would ease as they became more acquainted with the contents of the Units and more experienced in teaching RE in the classroom. Underlying this outlook seemed to be a focus on their own professional and faith development and how they witnessed their faith to their students as an important part of teaching Religious Education. The decision was made to interview the sample group again the following school year to discover whether the changes envisaged had occurred and to find out what was important in their outlook to sustain this period of implementation.

The manner in which recently assigned RE (RARE) teachers managed the interplay between the demands of the curriculum and their willingness to continue to teach RE was important. If the demands of implementing the draft RE Units were beyond the capacity of the professional and religious formation of RARE teachers, no amount of curriculum materials and inservice support was going to assist in maintaining the generativity of these teachers. Consequently, the considerable investment in curriculum innovation had the potential to be wasted. There was the possibility that recently assigned RE teachers were considering whether to discontinue teaching RE after a few years. Such a decision had the potential to lead to the predicament of continually introducing newly assigned teachers to the process of implementing the draft Units. Unlike other learning areas that can assume a continuity of teaching staff,

having new teachers with little training or experience constantly being introduced to teaching RE was perhaps tantamount to ‘reinventing the wheel’ and hindering the implementation of the RE Units towards any consolidation or enhancement phase.

7.2 The Experience of the Second Round of Interviews

Teachers who participated in the first round of interviews were asked to participate in a second round. Out of the 28 participants in the first round, 21 (75%) agreed to participate in the second round. The interviews were conducted in a similar fashion to the first round (Chapter 4, p.135). However, the interviews were less structured than the first and invited participants to discuss openly their perceptions about teaching Religious Education. Table 7.1 (p.246) outlines the pattern of responses from the second round of interview transcripts.

The initial coding of responses was based on the four interview questions (Chapter 4, pp.137-138) reflecting the interplay between the demands of the curriculum and the willingness of teachers to continue to teach Religious Education. The interviewees in the second round spoke at length about the changes they had experienced over the new school year. Most of the teachers continued to feel positive about the experience of teaching RE since the last time they had been interviewed. Two teachers, however, were relieved that their workload no longer included teaching RE (Appendix 15, p.385). During the interviews, many teachers spoke about the similarities between the approach used in teaching the subject matter of Religious Education and their own learning area (Table 7.1, p.246). Some teachers lamented that RE was becoming too much like an academic subject and had lost its focus on the human formation aspects they liked to emphasise before the draft Units were introduced. Many teachers commented on the special pastoral relationship they developed with their students and that this was one of the distinguishing features from their own learning area. A few teachers commented about the role of journaling, prayer and liturgy played in developing their students’ love for the faith.

Table 7.1 Initial Coding of Second Interview Transcripts by Second Round of Interview Questions

Dimension and Aspect	Number of Participants referring to the Aspect (n=21)
Question 1	
<i>Where do you stand now in relation to your RE teaching? Is it the same, different, worse, or better?</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better due to experience of teaching the Units <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Familiarity with Program & Resources • Better due to collegial support • Change in Teaching Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For the better ○ Change of attitude by teacher ○ Cater for attitude of students • Difficult due to circumstances of teaching RE • Better due to professional formation • Stronger commitment to RE • No change, no better, no worse 	13 (62%) 6 (29%) 13 (62%) 12 (57%) 8 (38%) 8 (38%) 7 (33%) 12 (57%) 9 (43%) 8 (38%) 3 (14%)
Question 2	
<i>To what extent do you feel teaching RE is similar to the other subjects you teach? Can you use an example to explain your response?</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject matter to be taught <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Familiar strategies • Managed like other subjects • Focused on content and tasks 	17 (81%) 14 (67%) 7 (33%) 4 (19%)
Question 3	
<i>To what extent do you feel teaching RE is different to the other subjects you teach? Can you use an example to explain your response?</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique nature of the learning area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Special subject matter ○ Unique relational environment ○ Focus on faith • Meeting diverse expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To be adaptable ○ Faith dimension ○ To be a witness ○ To be a mentor 	21 (100%) 18 (86%) 12 (57%) 3 (14%) 17 (81%) 10 (48%) 6 (29%) 6 (29%) 6 (29%)
Question 4	
<i>What is best and most special about teaching RE for you?</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close rapport with students • Mentoring as a teacher & person of faith • Personal and religious formation of students 	17 (81%) 16 (76%) 14 (67%)

Note: Percentages are given in whole numbers.

One interviewee, Anne, in her second interview wanted to make an apology about a statement made in regards to RARE teachers and how they used the curriculum materials. Earlier, she had expressed the view that most recently assigned RE teachers were lazy because they relied so extensively on the Mastersheets and the Student Books (Chapter 6, pp.226-227). In 1999, Anne had shifted to teaching RE to a new year group after two years of teaching Year 8 students. As a result of having to teach new RE Units, she now empathised with what RARE teachers were going through for the first time. Another interviewee, Steven, had previously provided a written response and now wanted to expand on his comments by participating in the second round of face-to-face interviews.

The question that created a strong resonance with the interviewees was the last question: ‘What is best and most special about teaching RE for you?’ For many interviewees, there was a strong emotive reaction; one teacher cried through her response. RARE teachers related their strong desire to teach RE as a personal ministry to make a real difference with their students. Some teachers commented that they wished they had been asked this question earlier in their RE teaching experience because they wanted to share their responses with others but had never been given the opportunity until that interview.

7.3 Findings of the Second Round of Interviews: Key themes

Recognising the more free flowing nature of the conversation in these interviews, the text was analysed in terms of the grounded experience of the teachers in coping with the demands of implementing the draft RE Units. From this analysis of the second round of interviews, five key themes emerged as shown in Table 7.2 (p.248).

Table 7.2 Themes emerging from Second Round of Interviews

Emergent Generic Themes	Number of Participants referring to the Theme (n=21)
RE is like other subjects and a lot more <i>A recognition that RE is like other subjects but it requires more time and energy on the part of the teacher to implement the draft RE Units of Work.</i>	21 (100%)
Pastoral Rapport <i>A recognition and a desire by the teachers to establish and maintain a close and positive rapport with the students as one of the keys to implementing the draft RE Units.</i>	17 (81%)
Personal Authenticity <i>A strong personal commitment to be an authentic person in the eyes of the students and especially as a 'person of faith' in their role as an RE teacher.</i>	16 (76%)
Collegiality <i>A need for ongoing collegiality or support from the 'learning community' such as experienced RE teachers, the RE Coordinator and Principal, as well as from the students themselves. For the RE teachers, the classroom represents their immediate responsibility for a 'community of learning'.</i>	13 (62%)
Question of Teacher Generativity <i>An uncertainty about sustaining their enthusiasm for teaching the draft RE Units in the face of teaching disinterested students.</i>	15 (71%)

Note: Percentages are given in whole numbers.

7.3.1 RE is like other subjects and a lot more

In their reflections about what had changed since the last interview, most interviewees said that familiarity with the structure and content of the RE Units was helpful. Having taught the Units at least once before this second interview, most teachers now felt more confident about the nature of the content and what they needed to do to prepare for the Units (Table 7.1, p.246). The interviewees also felt a greater confidence in their teaching. They were willing to improvise with alternative strategies and resources from the draft RE Units or made use of their own which they felt were more interesting and relevant to their students. One teacher saw herself widening her repertoire of strategies as suggested in the draft Units, such as by using groupwork:

a lot of the content is supplied to you, it's because you become confident in what you're doing, the way you deliver, the way you approach every strategy, you might try a few of these group strategies.

(Olivia)

In the first round of interviews, teachers believed that once they were familiar with the content and the teaching and learning programs of the Units and had experienced a term or more of RE teaching, then the demands on their time and energy would be reduced. During the second round of interviews, this belief did not appear to have been realised for recently assigned RE teachers. Even though it was their minor teaching area, the RARE teachers found they had to continue to spend a disproportionate time on reading and researching the background of the Units or working on preparing strategies and resources for their lessons. Teachers did offer some insights as to why this was the situation. Firstly, the circumstances of teachers sometimes changed; for example, if they changed to a different year group, this meant that new content needed to be read and understood or new strategies needed to be developed. For Ursula, this change of circumstance was further complicated by shifting to a new school (Appendix 15, p.385):

Okay, well the fact that I'm dealing with a completely different year group The topics are different and because the topics are different (pause) like at the moment we're doing 'Community' which is completely different to say 'Abortion' and 'Euthanasia' which are very intense topics [topics taught at the last school]. So I would have to say that since last year my overall approach, given the year level, has definitely changed

(Ursula)

Teachers whose circumstances had not changed felt more confident in how they approached the Units again. While the change of circumstances is part and parcel of working in a school environment, it was considered an additional burden to those recently assigned RE teachers who were still coming to terms with managing their major teaching area as well. As Religious Education was a minor part of their teaching load, it took longer for these teachers to get to know the students because less class time was given to RE compared to other subjects (in 1999, the CECWA policy was that classroom RE in secondary Catholic schools in WA be given 160 minutes per week compared to 200 minutes or more per week for other subjects). In the face of this, most teachers felt compelled to cover the content of the Units in as much detail as they did in their major teaching area.

Secondly, teachers felt they needed to go beyond the resources provided in the Units, such as the Mastersheets and Student Books. They wanted to include strategies and resources similar to those used in their main teaching area or ones that at least they

felt comfortable in using (Table 7.1, p.246). They had reaffirmed in their first interviews the survey responses about the usefulness of the curriculum materials (Chapter 5, pp.176-177), but now they wanted to introduce recent and interesting materials (such as newspaper or magazine articles, songs and videos—both fictional and documentary) that were relevant to the academic ability and background of students. Teachers also commented on using a wider range of strategies. One example is Olivia, an experienced Technology and Enterprise teacher (Table 5.43, p.211). She initially based her teaching strategies almost exclusively on the Mastersheets but in the second round of interviews Olivia claimed she was developing her discussion techniques:

Barely use Mastersheets. I look back to the first year I did this Unit in Year 11, I would have probably used at least 6 Mastersheets from maybe one Unit in a term. So over a period of 10 weeks you're using at least one nearly a week. I wouldn't be doing that now, I'm getting more into discussion.

... discussion is better but it still takes time to get that discussion. You might not get that discussion for 5 or 6 weeks in the first term. Now I'm halfway through term 2, they know me, they know my expectations, vice versa. A bit more open to discussion and suddenly get kids offering their opinions a little bit more. I'd say as you become more experienced, your discussion techniques would definitely be enhanced. I'd see that as probably the key benefit at the moment.

(Olivia)

Olivia felt that by persisting with developing her discussion techniques, her class had responded positively and she was able to engage them more deeply in their learning. As Olivia gained more experience in teaching RE, she envisaged that the quality of this teaching would improve as well. This enthusiasm to engage the students more deeply meant teachers were prepared to change the learning environment in creative ways. Brian, a Drama teacher, wrote succinctly that he saw the classrooms where RE was taught as 'dead space' and he wanted to create an atmosphere where he could enhance the ideas presented in the draft Units:

Classroom atmosphere—you are stuck in unappealing environments; your space is a Maths space/English space—dead space. At times I use the drama room, with lights and darkness to enhance ideas.

(Brian)

Another teacher, Steven who was also an experienced Technology and Enterprise teacher (Table 5.43, p.211), described how he experimented with a student-centred strategy as a way of motivating his students to present the content from the draft RE Units. Steven was both surprised and heartened that the students responded seriously and were able to come up with the key ideas that he would have presented normally himself:

There was one day in Year 10 we did ‘Conscience’, rather than me delivering, I actually split the class into two and I said, “I want you to come up with 10 good things, or quite as many good things you people do, all your actions.” And the other group I said, “What are the actions you would do that were bad?” They went on their own and came back and they presented all up on the whiteboard. They took over, and there were things they presented that I would have presented myself but it came from them, that was the difference.

(Steven)

The interviewees found that when they adapted or modified the strategies of the teaching and learning program in the draft RE Units to suit the pastoral and learning needs of their students, they felt their classroom teaching of RE improved. It seemed that interviewees learnt to adapt teaching strategies to the needs of students from the experience of trial-and-error and ‘pure frustration’; for example, Hailey spoke about how she learnt this important approach to her RE teaching:

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.

(Hailey)

As Hailey achieved successes with her new found understanding of RE teaching, she felt more confident in dealing with the demands of implementing the draft RE Units.

While the interviewees commented that they felt more confident in their teaching, some teachers still found the responses of students to be challenging and unpredictable (Table 7.1, p.246). As a result, they felt they needed to develop their lessons with more careful preparation and organisation, compared to the lessons they prepared in their major learning area. Yet, interviewees spoke about declining

enthusiasm for continuing with preparing and organising their lessons in RE. The keenness many recently assigned RE teachers expressed for being well prepared in the first round of interviews (Chapter 6, p.226) was replaced with concern for maintaining this high energy level, particularly as this was only their minor teaching area. As one teacher implied, this constant preparation was becoming a burden in covering the content objectives of the RE Units, especially when the teacher felt that it was important to prepare lessons that met the learning needs of students:

it does takes time and energy and forethought and planning to complete the objectives in the [Teacher's Manual] as well as meet the students where they are at. Where I have to make a choice, I'd rather meet the students to [sic] where they are at, but I'd prefer to do both.

(Diana)

The teacher seemed to feel that there was an expectation that the Units be focused on content objectives, but Diana wanted to be student-centred in her approach. As it was not possible to do the latter exclusively, she recognised she would have to do both. On the other hand, novice teachers like Victor (Table 5.43, p.211), working in a remote Catholic secondary school with no RE Coordinator, wanted to take a more 'easy going' approach to teaching RE. After all, it was not his major teaching area and he did not want to be drained of any more energy than was necessary:

RE is different from other subjects in that it is not centred by attaining high marks and a good grade. RE is accepted by some students, yet others are not responsive. I find I approach RE with less intensity in terms of work I give to students and try to approach the students in a friendly manner, [so that] there is minimal tension in the classroom. In RE I try to make [the lessons] more adaptable to meet the particular classes' needs, and their abilities rather than teaching a set course.

(Victor)

Victor's preference was to address the personal development needs of his students rather than ensure the content of the draft RE Units was taught. However, this preference was based more on his own gratification and reducing the stresses of 'teaching a set course'. Possibly, Victor's motivation was to create 'minimal tension' rather than develop a sincere rapport with students (see the next section 'Pastoral Rapport', p.254).

The interviewees recognised that, like other subjects, there was a subject matter or content language (a form of religious literacy) that students were expected to acquire

and apply (Table 7.1, p.246). However, the teachers re-confirmed the views expressed in the first round of interviews (Chapter 6, p.222) that the language used in the curriculum materials was too complex for the students to read and comprehend. In some respects implementing the draft RE units was like implementing any other learning area. However, there were additional demands on teachers to assist students in comprehending the language used, to understand the special nature of the subject matter, and to be adaptable and provide a wide range of strategies to assist the diverse learning needs of the students (Table 7.1, p.246). These additional demands became exhausting for recently assigned teachers with limited prior experience or training in teaching Religious Education.

Unlike their classes in other lower secondary subjects, the interviewees considered their RE classes to be more heterogenous and complex in their make-up. Students in these classes came not only from a range of academic abilities and human developmental backgrounds, but also from a diverse range of religious backgrounds, particularly in terms of commitment to Catholic beliefs and practices. The interviewees saw classroom RE teaching as trying to cater for a wide range of expectations from the students but they felt a sense of frustration in not being able to find a commonality to pitch their lessons:

That you have almost an impossibly eclectic range of backgrounds, of religious backgrounds in any one classroom. It makes it almost impossible to build competently or effectively on any base.

(Diana)

As a result, the interviewees felt their competence as an RE teacher was undermined when they were not able to meet the learning needs of a diverse range of religious backgrounds within the one classroom.

Teachers felt they had to be more adaptable and creative to cater for the diverse backgrounds of students and to cover the broad curriculum. They perceived themselves as having to 'be more' and to 'do more' for their students, beyond the demands of other subjects. These demands required teachers to do more background reading and preparation than they did in their other subject areas. Many commented that in order to cover the Unit, the teachers needed to dismantle the content further for students to understand the concepts involved.

7.3.2 Pastoral Rapport

In the RE classroom, teachers felt they had more opportunity to cultivate a different sort of relationship with their students than would be the case in other learning areas (Table 7.1, p.246). They felt they were able to get to know their students better and that the students were able to see their teacher in a more amiable way. As Anne, an experienced teacher, who recently began teaching RE (Table 5.43, p.211), related:

I have found so far that there is a different relationship with students I have taught RE than with students from other subjects. I have been able to get to know them better than students from other subjects. RE lends itself to that closer relationship and I value that. I believe students see me in a softer more available way.

(Anne)

Many teachers interviewed emphasised how important it was to develop and maintain this ‘different relationship’ with their students. They believed that as they were able to know their students more personally, they were able to address the issues or questions students had about their lives. Most of the teachers saw RE as an important pastoral vehicle to assist students to reflect on and cope with their problems:

I think it’s one of few subjects that we’ve got at school that actually look at or give the kids a chance to look at some of their issues they’ve got on their minds [RE is] one of the few subjects where you can actually do that with kids because most of the time you’re teaching content [in the other subjects]. ... Whereas RE you can really tackle a lot of problems in kids’ lives and help them with those problems in the future. It is an important subject.

(Kate)

This close relationship or ‘pastoral rapport’ was characterised by the teacher engaging the students beyond a mere conversational level to a caring interest and concern for them and the issues that they were facing in their lives.

The teachers saw RE as a learning area where students were able to develop important skills for living or ‘life-skills’ that were relevant to how students led their lives. Rather than only knowing content, the students had the chance to develop personal, social and vocational skills that were going to be important to them after they left school. As Olivia (Table 5.43, p.211) commented, RE is ‘... more about your morals, your ideas, what you value, what you believe, what the conscience is

telling you'. She saw her classes as an opportunity for students to discover more about their inner selves, to focus on moral conscience formation and for the students to clarify their own beliefs and values. Olivia believed that RE was designed for the personal or human formation of students. Through Religious Education, students explored aspects about their personal identity and the way of life they intended to lead. Her comments may be an indication that she assumed such formation was to occur in a Christian context but this was not articulated. This lack of articulation raised the question of whether the RE teacher saw the subject in isolation of the need for Christian formation in students.

The interviewees also felt RE teaching was better when students were open and trusting enough to share their personal life experiences with the teacher (see the comments from Kate, p.254). When a pastoral conversation between teacher and students occurred, as a result of responses to journal writing, class or group discussions or by general chatting, the teachers felt that their RE teaching was successful:

I know when I feel successful when they engage and feel like they come up to me, mostly one on one, won't be two or three of them unless they're very close friends. And they will ask me something... . A lot of times they want to know about your own personal experiences. I think there is a place, a time and a place for it. Not all the time because the whole idea is to get them to talk about their experiences. But this is what you were talking about before – the role modelling. So I see that as quite important as well

(Olivia)

Olivia saw her efforts to develop a close rapport with students as important to her teaching of Religious Education. She felt that when students wanted to come to her to talk about their personal experiences, she was a positive role model for them. In talking about their students, the interviewees saw them as important individuals. Their knowledge of the character or personality of particular students was foremost in their minds when considering the manner in which students contributed to the learning process in the RE class. When Ian (Table 5.43, p.211) was interviewed, he expressed his concern for reporting the achievement of a Year 9 student in his RE class:

One boy that I'm quite concerned about how I'm going to go about writing his report because he hasn't handed any work in. His parents are aware of this but he's a great contributor, a very mature contributor to class discussions. And I'm finding it difficult to indicate that in his report because our reports don't have any written comments. It's just a tick-a-box. What I think I might have to do is write a letter home to the parents so that they're not going to be too shocked when the content is pretty low but his participation and his honesty and his openness in class is very good, I think. I need to recognise that and his parents need to be aware of that as well.

(Ian)

Ian saw the 'very mature' contribution of the student to class discussions as significant and the qualities displayed by the student to be commended to the parents. He felt the achievement of the student went beyond the academic and needed to be affirmed as an important part of the personal and spiritual formation of the student.

The teachers felt that a focus on the life experiences and values of their students were essential features of teaching RE and needed to occur with the delivery of the content. It was this close 'pastoral rapport' that allowed the teachers to make the content relevant and interesting for their students. Pastoral rapport focused on the personal needs of the students rather than just their learning needs. Nonetheless, pastoral rapport needed to be integrated with sharing faith and knowledge about Catholic beliefs and practices:

Needs both. ... needs balance, you need information, facts and traditions and you need personal witness and you need the warm fuzzy you know – self esteem type things and making them feel they're unique and special. ... it's all together you can't put it into compartments I don't think.

(Gwen)

The teachers believed that there needed to be a balance between the content of the draft Units, the role model presented by the teacher and the personal formation of the students. Once this pastoral rapport was firmly established, recently assigned RE teachers felt privileged by the openness and trust of the students as well as feel more 'vulnerable' and 'open to criticism' themselves in such a relationship:

I think the most special part is moving beyond the academic and into kids' feelings and things that are important to them. ... You are given rare moments of grace or privilege or gift.

... A kid will share something that's deep and important to them. ... And they get to see that from you as well. And you become vulnerable and you're open to criticism.

(Pat)

In turn, students were able to know their teacher more personally, become more comfortable in asking questions that were on their minds and also look upon their teacher as a mentor or person of faith (Table 7.1, p.246).

Teachers, like Ian (p.256) and Fran (Table 5.43, p.211), lamented that the process of implementing the draft PAREC Units seemed to be shifting the emphasis away from developing this pastoral rapport with the students to an emphasis on highly structured lessons of content:

In some ways I find that a bit sad because it does tire you somewhat. Instead of having that atmosphere of flexibility and relaxness [sic] to just talk.

(Fran)

Some interviewees felt RE was becoming too similar to their other subjects (Table 7.1, p.246). The demands of covering the RE course outcomes meant there was little time to be concerned about the pastoral needs of students since the priority was to cover the content of the RE Units. Teachers wanted to have the pastoral needs of the students as their focus to teaching RE and this focus meant developing a closer rapport with their class:

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.

(Gwen)

When the teachers were able to develop this special relationship with their students they felt energised and affirmed by the students. As Rose, working in a single sex school, fondly remarked in her experience about the reciprocal attitude of the Year 12 girls in her RE class:

[Students] have also been a great support to me. They care about me too, that's affirming, to be loved. At least the kids love me and that's what I'm there for [, to love them].

(Rose)

Teachers felt that when their students knew them better, the students were able to develop a greater respect for their teachers as a person. It seemed that as recently assigned RE teachers developed their pastoral rapport with their students, they felt more comfortable in teaching RE and these teachers enjoyed doing so. These positive feelings seemed to motivate the teachers to continue to want to teach RE. RARE teachers felt comfortable with sharing more of themselves with their students. This comfort in sharing themselves as an authentic person became a significant theme in the second round of interviews. The nuances of this theme were part of a growing awareness within the interview participants as part of their personal and religious formation as RE teachers. These nuances will be explored further in the next theme.

7.3.3 Personal Authenticity

Teachers expressed a desire to impress upon their students their own commitment to the Catholic faith tradition. In the survey responses there were overtures about the role of faith commitment shown by the RE teacher (Chapter 5, p.198). In the first round of interviews, some teachers like Diana (Chapter 6, pp.238-239) and Edward (Chapter 6, p.239) were quite strident about their feelings towards teachers who were not as committed as themselves. It seemed that interviewees in the second round of interviews were more self-reflective about their role and commitment as RE teachers. Interviewees saw their very presence in the classroom as a person of faith was an important part of their RE teaching. It was this dimension of their teaching that made RE significantly different from other learning areas (Table 7.1, p.246). Teachers felt this commitment required them to have diverse attributes. To be a faith witness and a mentor to the students was a sharing of oneself as a human person:

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.

(Anne)

The interviewees felt that students needed someone who was genuine and understood the deeper questions and concerns of the students. Such genuineness was a

significant personal quality that was not able to be simulated as part of their teacher persona. While interviewees expressed the desire to be considered authentic by their students in the first interviews (Chapter 6, p.237), they now felt the necessity to be absolutely sincere about this quality. Teachers felt that a genuine desire to share their faith and modelling to the students was a rewarding aspect of teaching Religious Education. Students were influenced by this example and were curious to know and understand the teacher's commitment. Interviewees also felt that students were able to develop a greater respect for the faith witness of the RE teacher as students came to know this teacher better (p.257). In turn, teachers believed they were then able to be more ardent in promoting their faith:

I think that they know that my faith matters to me, and it's a big part of my life and they respect that. I don't think that they think I'm a crackpot, sometimes they might!

(Gwen)

The interviewees felt strongly about their sense of commitment to the witness or model they gave to their students (Table 7.1, p.246). This commitment was one of the most consistent attributes about which these teachers spoke. Some interviewees commented that, since the previous interview, they felt they had grown stronger, more comfortable or confident in their resolve to share their faith with their students. They saw this personal authenticity or genuineness as a significant aspect to the way they taught RE in the classroom. Commitment to faith was referred to throughout the interviews and, in particular, in the last interview question: 'What is best and most special about teaching RE for you?'

One interviewee, Clare (Table 5.43, p.211), found the experience of sharing her newfound faith very significant. At the first interview, this apparently devout Christian teacher had participated in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) program during her time while teaching RE in a country school. As a result, Clare felt very strongly about having made her commitment to the Catholic faith. Now that she had moved to a metropolitan school, Clare was very concerned about how the students were responding to her commitment:

As you probably know I've only just recently become Catholic myself since I last spoke to you. I was always Christian anyway, this sort of challenges my decision in becoming [Catholic] ... do you know what I mean?

But I think I'm stronger, I think I'm definitely strong enough because you can see that they know they've gone too far. Stronger in that I have to really push forward that I am strong in my beliefs and that. If they say derogatory things, they're insulting what I believe in. So I've had to become less sort of 'airy-fairy', like with Year 8s you can 'beat around' the bush and you know. But with Year 10 I have to be really forceful, this is what I believe and as a Catholic, this is what we like you to believe as well. So if you're laughing at it, you know, you need to take a deep hard look sort of thing. So you just become stronger in what you believe and putting that across to the kids.

(Clare)

For Clare, it was the strength of her commitment to her faith that kept her teaching Religious Education. She felt hurt personally by the negative reactions of the students to her personal choice (her family had earlier questioned the wisdom of her decision and this made the hurt particularly sensitive). She wanted to prove that she was a committed Catholic and desired for the students to respect this stance. Clare felt that her witness to her faith was truly a 'taking up of the cross' and imposing her stance on the students was her way of demonstrating that commitment.

Other interviewees also saw the strength of their faith witness as vital in continuing to teach RE to secondary students. As Gwen (cited earlier, p.259) reflected, it was this authentic commitment and personal character to witness their faith that sustained RARE teachers in teaching Religious Education:

It's the personal qualities and the commitment and believing in what you're doing. I think they're the people who probably end up staying in RE because if you didn't like it or weren't committed to it, it'd be hard work and it'd be very frustrating I think. You need to believe in what you're doing. It's not just a job, otherwise it would be awful.

(Gwen)

If recently assigned RE teachers felt they were not sufficiently committed, they were to find the experience of teaching RE overly difficult and frustrating, leading to a loss of job satisfaction. Teachers, who were previously teaching RE at the last interview, but were not teaching RE now (Appendix 15, p.385), held similar opinions.

The need for dedication and integrity were felt to be another important ongoing component to teach the draft RE Units. For example, Kate (Table 5.43, p.211) felt

that the demands of such dedication and integrity were too high for her to be authentic enough with the students. Her earlier comments (p.254) on the importance of developing a pastoral rapport in RE did not completely supplant the demands of teaching Religious Education. Kate had opted out from teaching RE after the first round of interviews:

I'm not actually teaching RE at the moment. ... Because I don't feel that I'm dedicated to that subject and so if I'm not dedicated to it I don't feel that I'd do a 100% job. Like I can be a really good teacher but if I'm not into the subject then it's really hard for me to do that.

Like I believe in the Catholic religion and I believe in a lot of the principles but there are a lot of things, flaws I feel I'm very critical. And when the kids ask me and tackle me about some of these things, it's hard for me to stand back and give them the proper view, the Catholic view when I've got my own view

And sometimes that's hard because kids can see through that. And I just find it really hard to do that. I don't think it's fair on the students. So that's my biggest problem. I mean I can teach it and I think I teach it fairly well, just in me I don't feel the dedication for RE.

(Kate)

The internal dilemma between the responsibility of teaching the 'Catholic view' and her integrity to be true to herself appeared to be a common characteristic among recently assigned RE teachers. For some, as in this case, the teacher felt that the only resolution open to her was to discontinue teaching RE. One wonders whether, given the opportunity to discuss her dilemma with other experienced staff members, she may have come to a different conclusion. As every person is on a faith journey, are RARE teachers adequately trained to teach RE as a dedicated person of faith? Like other teachers, they may have had the skills and knowledge to teach the subject but did the RE curriculum have greater expectations than was the case in other learning areas, requiring a level of commitment these teachers were still enroute to attaining?

Another factor the teachers highlighted was that teachers and most students were at different levels of faith commitment. RARE teachers felt they needed to be open to the opinions and thoughts of their students. Teachers expected to be challenged by the students but also they wanted to challenge the students about what they believed:

[RE teachers] ... have to be willing to challenge, they have to be willing to be challenged, they have to be willing to sometimes mention things which are not easy to understand or easy to listen to.

(Tim)

The commitment of the teacher to the 'what' and 'why' of teaching RE was challenged by the students. This challenge was a 'make or break' situation for the teacher; for Clare (Table 5.43, p.211), the challenges were not seen as engaging educational inquiry but as affronts to the personal stance of the teacher. Recently assigned RE teachers seemed to be highly subjective in their approach to student questioning and reactions rather than taking a more objective view about what was behind such attitudes and behaviours of the students. Interviewees felt that some students admired, but others challenged, or criticised the stance of the teacher. Nevertheless, the teachers saw themselves as trying to engage students in matters of faith or spirituality. This attempt to engage students was seen as one of the best things about teaching Religious Education (Table 7.1, p.246). For Nancy, it was the opportunity for the teacher to help students find a Christian sense of identity and meaning in their lives:

those are the best moments when I've got kids working in groups and I can get around and talk to them, one on one or one to three. And that's when they'll ask me more intimate questions and really talk to me about the things that are weighing on their minds rather than in the context of the class discussion....

To have someone who wants to talk to them about the faith, loves the faith and doesn't mind being with kids, talking to them and engaging critically with what they're presenting....

(Nancy)

For Nancy (Table 5.43, p.211), it was not the explicit aspects of teaching RE that were valued but rather the more intimate ones, where matters close to the heart were discussed. The sense of identity and purpose of the interviewee as an RE teacher was affirmed by engaging some of the students in meaningful conversations about the Christian faith while at the same time having the rest of the class working purposefully.

The teachers saw their RE teaching as an extension of their calling or vocation. While they recognised that teaching RE could be challenging and exhausting, they were optimistic about the value and reward of classroom RE teaching because they

believed they were seen by their students to be significant mentors or role models and even as strong Christian witnesses (Table 7.1, p.246). As Rose related, teaching RE was her way of following the will of God:

because I can get to know them beyond what can be done in other subjects, like I can support them, share part of my own Christian witness. They have someone the students can talk to about their issues and concerns.

... I feel called by God, in Year 10 I wanted to be an RE teacher, have this vocation. Had thought it might be a religious calling but no, as a [lay] teacher to 'spread the Word', 'prayer', 'justice', 'relationships', 'getting to know God'. At the age of 18 being in a theology class, with seminarians, like something keeps me there. God just tells me to do this, have a constant dialogue with [God] to work this out. I let God speak through me, especially when praying.

(Rose)

For this teacher, teaching RE was an integral part of putting her faith into action, to be able to serve God by witnessing her faith to students and teaching them something of what it meant to live a Christian life. An important component to sustaining the implementation of the draft RE Units by recently assigned RE teachers, then, seemed to depend upon the depth and integrity of their personal faith formation.

7.3.4 Collegiality

Since the first round of interviews (Table 6.1, pp.230-231), the need for a supportive learning community became a significant concern among recently assigned RE teachers. Most interviewees commented on the role of community support in affirming them as competent RE teachers (Table 7.1, p.246). This affirmation was from the Principal, RE Coordinator, other RE teachers and even from the students themselves. The demands of teaching RE in the classroom meant that the teachers needed to have the confidence and support of those who were a part of the network of relationships that immediately influenced their teaching in the classroom:

My greatest need? To continue to get the support that I'm getting. Gosh, I don't really have many needs. Support is one, without the support it is extremely hard. And there'll probably be times when you feel alone, at this point I don't. [The REC is] wonderful, [the Principal] is fantastic.

(Ursula)

At a staff level, the interviewees felt the need to communicate with other RE teachers both in and out of school. While this communication was sometimes difficult because teachers were scattered throughout the school in other learning area faculties, there were still opportunities on formal (for example, departmental meetings) or informal (for example, a chat in the staffroom) occasions to share ideas:

when I was at [the other school], especially [specific RE teachers], we would bounce ideas off each other ... because it's in an area where it's often not your major teaching area, ... you don't get together with those people. So it's good when you do run into them; you can say, "Oh look I don't know what I'm doing here or this isn't working, do you have any ideas?"

(Jessica)

One of the reasons for this desire for collegiality seemed to be manifested in overcoming a sense of isolation, where the teacher was seen as the one driving the teaching and learning in the classroom. Teachers felt they needed the camaraderie, the emotional and spiritual support of fellow teachers, to deal with the particular challenges that confronted them in the RE classroom. Teachers commented on the benefits of working as a team whether it was by having regular RE staff meetings or in a Middle Schooling structure:

Just the fact that working with a team that I have been working with, I've noticed that the spiritual component, I suppose the camaraderie, the caring, the sharing has been brought out a lot more than it was before ... This community type teaching model, working together in the same room, to the same ends has I think a lot of benefits for the spiritual side of working with the school. ... And it would be a great environment if that could persist like RE teachers work together, with teachers who connected with RE actually worked together.

(Mark)

Unlike teaching in other learning areas, classroom RE was a minor teaching area for many RARE teachers. Perhaps there was a heightened tension in feeling that they were on their own. As a result they yearned for that departmental collegial exchange, to have a place and an opportunity to be with each other like in other departments. The teachers wanted a place to express their concerns and anxieties, to be reassured and comforted, to discuss new ideas and exchange resources, to build pastoral rapport among themselves in the face of sometimes negative or uncooperative students in Religious Education.

Recently assigned RE teachers wanted to build positive social relationships with other teachers as a support and direction to their personal quest for authenticity. They felt such collegiality assisted in broadening their competency as RE teachers:

Departments do have to think about teaching strategies and so on. So that there should be at a RE meeting, first half hour of the meeting should be no official matters, it should be somebody comes in and runs through a teaching practice. So everyone in the RE department knows that they've got one meeting they have to show what they've done in the class successfully. So there's a constant emphasis on sharing ideas in the RE class.

... I teach RE with a couple of other social studies teachers in the department. We both teach Year 10 RE. So there's 5 minutes of collegial exchange before we go into the classroom! But it needs more than that.

... I don't think we can carry out RE as though we're just mushrooms, in the dark the whole time. We've got to be told what's going on, be informed.

(Edward)

When RE was not the major teaching area for recently assigned RE teachers, the collegial support provided, as occurred in other learning area departments, was more difficult to develop. RARE teachers, like Edward (Table 5.43, p.211), relied on this exchange for professional and personal support to reduce feelings of apprehension and isolation. While still developing their familiarity with the RE Units, the insights gleaned from the experiences of other teachers guided RARE teachers as to the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of teaching RE, especially as their training and experience was still evolving.

On the other hand, a few recently assigned RE teachers enjoyed their independence, they did their 'own thing' or exercised more frequently their own professional judgement. They felt such collegiality was too restrictive and was a pressure to conform to other teaching approaches that stifled their creativity and initiative:

Other teachers come in, "What part of the [Student] Book are you up to?" And you sort of think, "Am I supposed to be doing this? I better do it." And the pressures there to conform and do the stuff that everybody else in Year 9 RE is doing But I think that teachers who come in and enjoy doing something different to be given the opportunity to do it. As long as you're covering the main themes. I think everybody has to cover something similar.

Yes, it's a feeling that you have to keep going to the [Student] Book. You have to keep using it or else you might be going off track. Even though, even if you are going off track but you are teaching something relevant, you feel guilty because you're not doing the Book.

(Kate)

Here was the professional dilemma for this teacher. To either 'keep going to the [Student] Book' like other teachers and not go astray, or to venture out and teach the Unit in a relevant way to the students, but possibly feeling guilty about not conforming. Without clear direction or guidance about how the draft RE Unit was to be taught, this teacher was left feeling perplexed, isolated and anxious. Underlying these feelings was a sense that this teacher needed the support and encouragement of her colleagues to be 'teaching something relevant' but also needed to appreciate the wisdom of these same colleagues, to advise her when she was 'going off track'. RARE teachers needed strong collegial support as part of their ongoing professional formation.

7.3.5 Question of Teacher Generativity

Teachers felt they expended a lot of personal or emotional energy in teaching RE. As described earlier (p.248), teachers spent a disproportionate time in lesson preparation for a learning area that was not their major teaching area. Furthermore, teachers were confronted by classes with a diversity of academic ability and religious backgrounds (p.253). This significant consumption of emotional and psychological energy affected what Treston (1997, p.69) referred to as the 'generativity of teachers'. As a result, this decline in generativity left teachers wondering whether they really wanted to continue teaching RE if they no longer felt enthusiastic about doing so.

Teachers felt it was difficult to focus on academic achievement when they were faced with students of low academic ability or students unwilling to contribute class work in Religious Education (Table 7.1, p.246). While teachers like Ian (p.256) wanted to broaden their criteria for achievement in RE, other teachers felt that the draft RE Units presented a narrow range of academic achievement. One teacher, Nancy, who taught English Literature and Senior English, found she enjoyed her RE classes if the students were academically bright or motivated. She also felt she had few difficulties in teaching Senior English because she was well acquainted with the approach of this subject to course outcomes and its common assessment framework.

In contrast, when Nancy taught RE to a class of mixed academic ability, she found the experience was frustrating. She wanted the students to learn the content of the Units but found they were not motivated to do so. Though Nancy tried a range of strategies, such as research work, students did not respond positively:

I have ... quite a few kids who are low ability, with quite a few other problems which present themselves as attention seeking behaviours. And when you've got a whole group of attention seekers seeking attention in different ways and you get them into the library on a Friday, it's absolutely frustrating.

... I've got a huge class, lots of boys, lots of different problems. And ultimately it comes down to doing written work some times – and they don't even do that. So it's really frustrating.

(Nancy)

The frustration seemed to come from a sense of loss by the teacher to know what to do. The teacher wanted to be true to teaching the content of the draft Units but was not able to convince the students (especially boys) to learn about the Catholic faith in the way she wanted. Nancy felt challenged personally and professionally and was forced to minimise unruly class behaviour by having the class doing written work, even though this approach was neither to her liking nor successful as evidenced by the earlier comments from Nancy on teaching Religious Education (p.262). Such frustrations were personally draining for this teacher.

The feelings of frustration experienced by this teacher were further complicated by the demands of teaching RE as part of the WA Curriculum Council's 'Beliefs and Values' Course in Years 11 and 12 (Chapter 2, p.40). Like Senior English, the Beliefs and Values Course was based on course outcomes and a common assessment framework. Nancy felt she was professionally competent with managing the demands of teaching Senior English but she felt the expectations of Beliefs and Values were difficult to implement. In her opinion, there was a lack of curriculum support in clarifying what the students had to do to complete the assessment tasks. Nancy expressed the concern that RE in upper secondary years did not cater for a broader range of students especially those with lesser academic ability. As a result, it took more time and energy for the teacher to meet the needs of less able students. Furthermore, Nancy took the antics of the students to be personally affronting to her commitment to teaching the Catholic faith.

Such experiences seemed to have reduced the optimism that recently assigned RE teachers believed were to occur with further experience and familiarity with the draft RE Units. Instead, the example above illustrated a teacher who was committed to her faith but was not coping with the professional demands placed on her. Reflecting on Nancy's comments, there was speculation as to whether her experiences of frustration forecast a re-evaluation of her continuation in teaching Religious Education. Thus, the implication was that deficiencies in professional formation, that may be compensated for in other teaching areas, become acute problems in RE where students did not see the subject as a high priority.

The negativity of some students was felt acutely by other teachers and heightened their sense of frustration to the point of exasperation. Such frustration led some of them to wonder whether they should be teaching RE at all. The teachers had expected that the next school year would be better because they would be sufficiently familiar with the content of the Units and possessed the confidence to teach RE competently (Table 7.1, p.246). Confidence seemed to be transitory without a grounded personal and professional formation. When Pippa, a young Science teacher who had not completed the study component of accreditation (Table 5.43, p.211), was faced with a new class, her prior experience seemed to be of no avail:

I'm feeling this year that I'm being quite influenced by the negativity of some of the students. Which is kind of making me think, why am I doing this?

Yes, they're Year 11 and they're just, you know, more concerned about TEE. I mean they just don't want to do it.

So they're just being negative about everything I give them.

(Pippa)

The feelings of exasperation were deep. No matter what she did for her class, she felt the students were not appreciative of her efforts and did not value what she presented to them. Some teachers felt like they were 'hitting themselves against a brick wall' at times to engage students in their learning. When students were deliberately failing RE as the Wholly School Assessed subject, 'Beliefs and Values', Pippa was at the point of tears when she remarked:

I mean they're doing their RE assignments at the moment and we're doing the Beliefs and Values course. They're actually being assessed. And I was just speaking to one group, we were talking about the fact that they just ruined their last assessment.

And the fact that they virtually need to pass your [sic] outcomes to pass this subject. And they said, “Oh we don’t care.” One of them said, “Anyway I don’t care if I don’t pass, you know, it doesn’t make a difference.” “What about your attitude? The fact that you’re just not trying?” [the teacher replied] And they just didn’t care.

(Pippa)

While students had a limited understanding of the value of RE and concluded that there was no point in passing the course, the teacher on the other hand, was not able to provide a sufficiently profound educational rationale for the students to understand as to why they should pass Religious Education. As a result, Pippa perhaps had unwittingly reinforced the negative attitudes of the students towards the Beliefs and Values subject. The attempt by the teacher to persuade the students to value the RE course, like any other subject, had failed. The students believed the subject did not contribute to their immediate educational or employment prospects like the other learning areas and thus there was no motivation for them to try. The lament of the teacher, “And they just didn’t care” was a cry for help from a teacher who felt defeated and drained.

Pippa’s ability as an RE teacher had perhaps reached a limit, only while the students did the work was she able to cope. She seemed to not have possessed the depth in her own understanding of why RE was important for students to learn and this lack of depth appeared to become evident when the students did not work. Like other recently assigned RE teachers, Pippa was progressing towards attaining the professional and personal competencies to manage the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching RE with the training that she had acquired previously and with the support of the curriculum materials. However, she seemed to be at a loss in articulating a professional and personal justification for teaching Religious Education. When she was asked what was best and special about teaching RE, she became very upset. She found it very difficult to put into words what she was feeling inside and the interview had to be terminated. Later, she recounted how teaching RE for the past week had been very tough for her. Just at a time when she wanted to give up teaching RE, the question during the interview, ‘What is the best and most special about teaching RE for you?’ came as a shock to her. She was both surprised and embarrassed by her emotional reaction, as no one had ever asked this question of her before. Pippa

reported that, with all her heart, she wanted to teach RE but she felt she did not have the personal resources to cope with the negativity of the students.

Another recently assigned RE teacher, Mark (Table 5.43, p.211), commented that if he had not felt a strong commitment to teaching RE, and if he had been given a choice about teaching the subject, he would have declined. The burden both in time and energy that was required to teach the subject was difficult to manage:

Because it's hard work, basically! Because it's a lot of hard work. There's a lot of energy taken out. And now that I've got a family, I'd like to focus more on my own family. And sometimes I feel my family suffers because of the amount of time and effort I put into it being ... [an RE] teacher and working with the kids.

(Mark)

Mark felt that such quality time and personal energy should be devoted to his own family. He needed to share his faith with his own children and invest in their faith upbringing at home rather than expending such energies towards his students at school. Mark saw that his students needed formative assistance but felt he had to draw the line between his commitment to RE at school and to the religious formation of his children at home.

The weight of this emotional burden in teaching the draft RE Units was also highlighted by those who stopped teaching RE. Jessica, who changed schools between the first and second round of interviews (Appendix 15, p.385), commented that it was a 'relief' not to have to teach RE. Trained as an English teacher (Table 5.43, p.211), she felt that the additional emotional burden was too much while adjusting to a new school environment and new classes:

I'm relieved because going to a new school I didn't think that I wanted any more added pressure. But I mean I'm teaching Social Studies for the first time. So I'm relieved in that way because, as I say, I've got 3 upper school classes of English and I just think it would have made things more difficult—the transition from the [last] school.

(Jessica)

Interestingly, Jessica preferred to teach a learning area (Social Studies) that she had not taught before, as well as teaching three new English classes, rather than have the added burden of teaching Religious Education again!

A question of sustained enthusiasm for teaching RE arose for the teachers interviewed. Recently assigned RE teachers recognised that there were benefits certainly for placing their energies into sound preparation and planning, developing a close rapport with the students and being a faith witness to them (Table 7.1, p.246). On the other hand, they were confronted by the exhaustingly high cost involved in establishing a rapport and covering the content. Some teachers felt that their RE classes did not appreciate the efforts of the teachers and the generation of this necessary enthusiasm detracted from other more important personal and professional commitments. Some RARE teachers became exhausted or frustrated and reached the point of asking themselves, “Why am I doing this?” They felt they needed to turn to others in their community for support or they decided to opt out of teaching RE altogether.

Looking over the various themes that emerged, it became clear that recently assigned RE teachers sought to make their ‘mark’. Most were eager and passionate about teaching RE when they started, as was evidenced from earlier data collected (survey and first round of interviews). They hoped that within a short period of time, they were to accrue enough classroom RE teaching experience and familiarity with the draft RE Units to feel competent in teaching RE. They were indeed hopeful and optimistic in the beginning! However, from the time when they were a part of the survey to the end of the second round of interviews – a period of almost two years – their perceptions of teaching RE changed. They were less enthusiastic and more aware of the increasing demands that teaching this learning area had upon them personally and professionally.

Perhaps their experiences of teaching the draft RE units broadened their outlook as to the demands of ‘what’ and ‘how’ to teach Religious Education. Certainly, they needed to know the content of the Units and how to teach the materials using the strategies provided. However, as the interviewees reflected on their experiences since the first round of interviews, it became apparent to them that the what and how of teaching RE needed to be understood in terms of why they personally were teaching Religious Education.

7.4 Chapter Summary

In the second round of interviews, there emerged tensions within recently assigned RE teachers about how and why they implemented the draft Perth Archdiocesan RE Course (PAREC). Many still felt a great sense of optimism, while others felt a sense of discouragement; and, for a few, a great sense of relief they were not teaching RE anymore. What was apparent was that recently assigned RE teachers were coming to terms not only with the curriculum demands of the draft RE Units but also with their own personal and professional formation. They seemed to be facing personal dilemmas about their authenticity as persons and their integrity about the level of their faith witness in their role as an RE teacher. Whereas in their main learning area they remained objective about the philosophy of teaching their academic subject, RE teaching demanded a personal commitment of faith witness. Teachers found that they needed to reflect upon whether they were sufficiently formed in providing such a witness on an ongoing, permanent and genuine basis.

There appeared to be two groups of RARE teachers emerging from the second round of interviews: the majority who were relatively positive, the ‘optimists’, and a minority group who could be termed, the ‘discouraged’. The ‘optimists’ saw their implementation of the draft PAREC as a means of actualising their desire to establish themselves as a competent RE teacher. They expressed the desire:

- for assurance (confidence, certainty, control) as they furthered their experience of teaching Religious Education;
- to be a ‘faith and life’ mentor that was to model to and advise the students;
- to develop and maintain a pastoral rapport with students;
- for collegial exchange on a formal and informal basis; and,
- to be passionate about teaching RE as part of their vocation or calling to teach in a Catholic school.

In contrast, the ‘discouraged’ saw the implementation of the draft PAREC as part of their RE teaching as one where these desires had become frustrated or unable to be actualised due to:

- a loss of confidence because of inexperience or insufficient training;
- a lack of faith formation because of insufficient knowledge or overly stringent expectation of faith commitment;
- an inability to develop rapport because of expressed negativity or apathy of the students to the teaching and learning;
- feelings of isolation and expectations to conform to a rigid teaching and learning program; and,
- exhaustion by continually facing challenges from students related to teaching and learning and from questioning of the personal faith stance of the teacher.

The RARE teachers who possessed and sustained an optimistic view about their RE teaching tended to continue their involvement in Religious Education. They believed they were making a significant contribution to the religious and human formation of their students. This belief inspired them to 'do more' and to 'be more' for their students. Treston (1997, p.69) used the word 'generativity' to describe the energy teachers applied to teaching their students (p.266). This generativity was the energy that came from within the teacher to fulfil their aspirations of becoming a competent RE teacher. When teachers became discouraged, their loss of generativity was evident in feelings of being drained and wanting to withdraw from teaching Religious Education.

These findings were significant because they came from of the personal experiences of these recently assigned RE teachers. Their perceptions were grounded in a tension between their personal quest for becoming competent RE classroom teachers and the frustrations of not fulfilling such a quest. Rather than theory or speculation, this data exemplified a unique phenomenon in the field of curriculum reform and teacher formation; one that strongly resonated with the work of Parker Palmer (1998) and others in the professional and spiritual formation of teachers which will be the focus of the next chapter.