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

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CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the study of recently assigned RE teachers and the demands placed on them by the draft Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course (PAREC). It begins with an outline of the problem investigated as reflected in the primary research question and the subsidiary research questions. Next, the chapter reviews the methodological process that formed the basis for collecting data from the survey and two rounds of interviews. The chapter then describes the key findings from the survey and the interviews. This description is followed by recommendations in response to the research findings, and suggestions for further research in Religious Education and curriculum implementation. Lastly, this concluding chapter considers the outcomes of this research.

9.2 The Problem

In 1996, 'Working Draft' Units of Work from the PAREC were introduced into Catholic secondary schools in dioceses throughout Western Australia. One of the prime purposes of these Units was to provide curriculum materials and professional support to secondary RE teachers who had little or no teaching experience or formal training in Religious Education. This group of RE teachers, termed 'recently assigned secondary RE teachers' (RARE teachers), represented one of the largest cohorts of RE teachers teaching Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether, after this considerable investment by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA), RARE teachers were able to cope with the immediate personal and professional demands required of this RE curriculum implementation. The study focused on the perceptions of a sample group of recently assigned RE teachers as they implemented the draft RE Units in their classroom teaching over a two year period. To explore

how these teachers coped with the exigencies of the RE curriculum implementation, the following research question was proposed:

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

Initially, there were three component questions related to this primary research question. The three questions were:

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

After the first round of interviews, it became necessary to re-examine the primary research question to accommodate another crucial perspective, namely, the part played by the demands of the draft RE Units on the personal and professional formation of recently assigned RE teachers. An additional subsidiary question was developed and explored in the second round of interviews:

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

9.3 The Methodology

A mixed method approach was used to investigate the perceptions of recently assigned RE teachers about the demands of teaching the draft PAREC. A target population of RARE teachers was identified and a survey was administered to them. From the survey, a range of responses was collected to form a baseline of information or database. A purposive sample of respondents was then derived from this database. The sample selected represented 'typical groups' (Cohen and Manion 1994, p.89) of teachers who responded to three sections in the survey: use of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying curriculum principles. In each section, three subgroups of indicative teachers were identified: those teachers whose responses indicated they felt very positively towards that section; those teachers whose responses indicated they felt critical about that section; and those teachers who represented the norm or 'mean' responses of the target population within that section. This sample of RARE teachers became the potential pool of 37 participants for the interview phase of the study of which there were 28 participants who agreed to be interviewed.

The interviews were designed as semi-structured data collection conversations. The interview schedule consisted of key focus questions with the latitude to explore issues in greater depth. The design of the questions encompassed a validation mechanism for the survey findings. A computer software program, QSR NUD•IST version 4.0 (N4) (QSR International 1996) was used to collate, code and analyse the transcripts of the interviews. The N4 software was useful in identifying a pattern of shared perceptions among the interviewees and a conceptual structure of themes emerged (Richards and Richards 1991). These themes appeared to describe the experiences of implementing the draft PAREC by recently assigned RE teachers in ways that were not envisioned (see the section, 'Findings of First Interviews' p.322).

These emergent themes meant a re-examination of the primary research question and an additional subsidiary question was created (p.318). To explore this question, the research project became a longitudinal study and another round of interviews conducted the following year. The second round was structured less than the first round of interviews, and encouraged a more free flowing conversation. The questions were designed to engender reflection by the interviewees regarding the

changes in their perceptions in teaching the draft RE Units. The views of the interviewees were sought about what they saw as the ‘best and most special in teaching RE’ to evoke a deeper and more personal response. As before, the interviews were recorded and transcribed, then collated and analysed using N4 computer software. Once again, conceptual themes emerged (p.324) and formed the basis for a model on the formation of recently assigned RE teachers as they implemented the draft RE Units (p.328).

9.4 Significant Findings

The following summary highlights the significant findings that emerged from the research project. The findings from the survey are outlined first as they were used as a context for the first round of interviews. The extent of change in perceptions by the participants and the new concerns that arose are outlined in the findings of the second round of interviews.

9.4.1 Survey findings

Recently assigned RE teachers responded on a number of key issues related to the use of instructional resources, changes in teaching approach and adoption of new principles.

Use of Instructional Resources (Chapter 5, p.176): Three issues were explored in the survey regarding the use of instructional resources. These were the accessibility of the resources, their frequency of use, and the attitudes of these teachers towards the use of these resources.

Many teachers reported that the resources in the draft RE Units were readily accessible. When teachers were asked which resources they preferred to use most frequently, they overwhelmingly reported that they used the Mastersheets from the Teacher’s Manual and the Student Book (Chapter 5, p.179). Teachers also reported they supplemented these resources with their own materials or those from the RE department in the school. This response suggested that the draft RE Units satisfied one of the major concerns: ease of access to instructional resources for recently assigned RE teachers. Teachers also reported that they used the resources supplied in the draft RE Units as a mainstay for their teaching but also wanted to draw on other resources that were suited to the needs of their students (Chapter 5, p.179).

Teaching Approach (Chapter 5, p.184): RARE teachers were asked about their experiences in using the teaching approach as presented by the draft RE Units.

Teachers reported that they preferred to use strategies that stimulated active student participation and creativity. Many of their responses (Chapter 5, p.191) reinforced this preference for student-centred learning. An overriding concern for teachers was the need to engage in genuine dialogue with their students. The majority of teachers also reported that the implementation of the Unit objectives, assessments, and journal work was comparatively easy. Overall, the responses indicated that teachers were very much in tune with these aspects of the teaching approach in the draft RE Units. Some teachers reported that they used the strategies and resources in the Units as a foundation or springboard for other class activities. One significant aspect to emerge was the difficulties RARE teachers perceived about the catechetical or faith dimensions of their teaching such as organising liturgies and strategies that linked the life experiences of students to the Gospels.

Underlying Curriculum Principles (Chapter 5, p.196): The third section of the survey asked teachers to consider their involvement in the religious dimension of the school, their attitude towards RE teaching, and their beliefs about the aims and content of RE.

Most teachers responded that they would be involved in promoting the religious dimension of the school such as missions, prayers and retreats. However, allied with this desire was apprehension and uncertainty about leading or becoming directly responsible for organising liturgical celebrations such as Masses and other sacraments (Chapter 5, p.198). Teachers expressed not only a strong desire to focus on the personal spiritual development of their students but also an enthusiasm for presenting Catholic beliefs and practices. However, teachers were divided about how these aspects of their RE teaching should be emphasised. Some teachers believed it was essential to promote the personal spiritual formation of students. Other teachers believed the emphasis should be to deepen the understanding of students about Catholic beliefs and practices. Another group of teachers wanted to link Catholic beliefs and practices to the daily challenges faced by students (Chapter 5, pp.201-202).

9.4.2 Findings of the First Interviews

The survey findings suggested a range of issues for further investigation and formed the basis for the interview questions in the first round of interviews. A number of key concerns emerged from the first round of interviews as teachers gained confidence and familiarity with the draft RE Units. These key concerns revolved around coping with the demands of teaching RE at the personal and professional levels (Chapter 6, p.219). Four themes emerged from the first round of interviews. These four themes were:

- the need to survive;
- the desire for self-assurance;
- the quest to flourish; and,
- the desire for authenticity.

The Need to Survive (Chapter 6, p.220): Teachers confirmed that the demands of lesson preparation were offset by the availability of readily accessible curriculum materials. This allowed them to survive the hectic weeks of lesson preparation and become familiar with the content of the Units. Teachers felt secure in the belief that the materials accurately portrayed the teachings of the Church and therefore they would not be subjected to unwarranted scrutiny from the school community. However, while initially reliant on the curriculum materials, interviewees identified content shortcomings since students were not responding in ways the teachers would have wished. They began to use the resources as a ‘starting point’ towards other activities or as a catalyst for class discussion (Chapter 6, p.225). For some teachers, this initiative created a dilemma because other colleagues were using the draft RE Units as ‘textbook’ materials and the interviewees felt they had to do the same. Interviewees recognised that their repertoire of skills in teaching RE was limited. Most teachers could manage a class discussion while some felt more confident in organising ‘creative activities’ like role-plays or artwork. When teachers had access to suitable resources, attended professional development opportunities, or had assistance from other, more experienced colleagues, they felt they were able to cope fairly well with a variety of learning strategies.

The Desire for Self-assurance (Chapter 6, p.226): Teacher self-confidence and competence grew as recently assigned RE teachers became familiar with the draft RE Units and sought support from their more experienced colleagues.

Most interviewees reported having read the Teacher Resource Section within the draft RE Units and attended the ‘Content of RE Inservices’ provided by the CEOWA or listened to the experiences of other colleagues. Many RARE teachers wanted to discuss useful ideas, strategies and helpful hints on managing the RE classroom with a more experienced colleague, someone in the role of a professional mentor. By observing the style of teaching presented by the mentor, teachers felt they might learn to develop more meaningful and engaging activities for a wider range of students.

Two areas represented a ‘fear of the unknown’ for recently assigned RE teachers. Firstly, they were reluctant to use Scripture because they feared misconstruing the Church’s interpretation of the Scriptures. RARE teachers were also concerned about how the students reacted to studying the Bible. Secondly, when it came to liturgies, the interviewees were concerned about the reactions of the celebrating priest to how the Mass and other liturgies were organised and the attitudes of the students towards these liturgies. Teachers felt they lacked confidence in the area of liturgy because of insufficient background knowledge and the curriculum materials did not provide direct support. This lack of confidence and knowledge was compounded by possible deficiencies in the personal faith formation of the teachers.

The Quest to Flourish (Chapter 6, p.232): Recently assigned RE teachers believed that to flourish, they needed to relate the curriculum materials in interesting and relevant ways to their students, and to be committed to what they were doing in both professional and religious terms. Teachers felt the aim of RE was to facilitate the human, spiritual and religious formation of students. Many interviewees reported they wanted their students to grow in their understanding and appreciation of their own personal faith as an integral part of their development as a maturing person. RARE teachers with this perspective felt energised and affirmed as a person and RE teacher. However, some interviewees were reluctant to adapt their style of teaching and focused on teaching the content in spite of the reactions or needs of the students. These teachers felt in conflict with their students and some found teaching the draft RE Units to be particularly draining.

The Desire for Authenticity (Chapter 6, p.237): Interviewees believed that teachers should be RE teachers who were authentic people with a faith commitment. Teachers felt vulnerable in portraying such a persona because they had to share something of themselves with the students. For some teachers this demand for authenticity led to an inner turmoil from the moment they were employed to teach Religious Education. Some teachers felt their integrity was compromised because of a perceived gap between their personal faith commitment of the teacher and the faith stance presented in the draft RE Units. Coupled with the difficulties of inadequate professional formation, they became less eager to teach the subject. Some interviewees, already somewhat discouraged, resented those teachers who lacked enthusiasm for the subject or who they perceived as not taking RE seriously enough. They believed that to teach RE required energy and personal faith commitment to cope with the curriculum demands of the draft RE Units.

Recently assigned RE teachers wanted to develop a greater depth in their knowledge of the content of the Units. They wanted greater skill in managing and teaching the students and they wanted greater insight about themselves and their job. Such a thirst to become an accomplished RE teacher went beyond that provided by the Accreditation program to teach RE. They perceived that their role was beyond being a competent RE teacher and linked to a vision of why they taught RE as a mission or calling.

9.4.3 Findings of the Second Interviews

The second round of interviews was conducted because the first round of interviews identified significant factors that related to personal and professional formation as recently assigned RE teachers implemented the draft RE Units. If these factors were not addressed, it was feared that the study would be incomplete and unable to describe properly the formative experience of RARE teachers over the first years of RE teaching.

There was something more going on than just teaching experience and familiarity with the draft RE Units of Work that improved the confidence of teachers in the quality of their RE teaching. Interviewees reported that, with increased confidence, they changed their use of instructional resources, modified their teaching approach and re-examined the underlying curriculum principles of the draft Units. However,

there was another important factor: the influence of the personal, professional, and religious formation of teachers in coping with the above curriculum demands. Teachers expressed a strong passion for teaching RE but the motivation to do so was not clear. In a learning area where teachers perceived the need to have the same faith commitment to the commitment presumed in the draft RE Units, questions of integrity and continuity were raised. As a result, five key themes emerged from the interviews. These five themes were:

- RE is like other subjects and a lot more;
- pastoral rapport;
- genuineness;
- collegiality; and,
- question of teacher generativity.

RE is like other subjects and a lot more (Chapter 7, p.248): Interviewees perceived that teaching RE was like teaching other subjects but required more time and energy than originally anticipated. Although RE was their minor teaching area, they still spent a disproportionate time on reading, researching and preparing strategies and resources for their lessons. The desire to be well prepared came from an expressed anxiety to cope with challenging responses from the students. As a result, there was a declining enthusiasm among some of the interviewees.

Most RARE teachers continued to face a dilemma regarding their teaching approach. On the one hand, they felt an expectation to focus on the objectives of the Unit; on the other hand, they wanted to take a student-centred approach to their lessons. Additionally, interviewees felt that the situation was further complicated because their classes were very heterogeneous in terms of academic ability, personal development and religious formation. Teachers felt the language and conceptual understandings in the draft Units were beyond the comprehension of many students. They also believed the degree of compliance expected from the students to the content of the Units was inadequate. These complications left some teachers feeling exhausted and frustrated in not finding a common level at which to pitch their lessons. Interviewees felt their competence as RE teachers was undermined because they were not able to meet adequately the learning needs of such a diverse range of students. In the face of such demands, many recently assigned RE teachers were able

to contend with the challenges by focusing on developing positive relationships with their students and importantly, genuineness in their demeanour as faith witnesses. These themes are reviewed in the next two sections.

Pastoral Rapport (Chapter 7, p.254): RARE teachers believed that one of the significant changes in their teaching approach was to promote a pastoral rapport with students. They believed that in RE a different sort of relationship existed with their students than was the case in other learning areas. They felt they were able to get to know their students better and that the students would be able to do the same. Interviewees felt that RE teaching was better when a more open and trusting relationship developed between students and teachers. Teachers felt they could address pastoral issues or questions that students had and assist them to reflect on and cope with their personal problems.

Some interviewees saw the implementation of the draft RE Units as becoming too similar to other learning areas. They felt there was more pressure to cover the content rather than being concerned about the pastoral needs of students. They preferred to cater for the pastoral needs of the students as their first priority in teaching RE because they believed the students responded to their teaching better in this way. As a result, the teachers felt more comfortable in teaching RE and they were motivated to continue teaching in this learning area.

Personal Authenticity (Chapter 7, p.258): While credibility with students remained an issue, recently assigned RE teachers felt an increasing challenge within themselves to remain personally authentic. Many interviewees believed their personal faith commitment was an important part of RE teaching, as the learning area was significantly different from other learning areas. To model such a commitment, teachers believed they needed to share both their human and religious qualities with the class. This personal authenticity or genuineness appeared to be an extension of how they wanted their teacher persona viewed by the students.

RARE teachers reiterated their concern that a lack of a genuine faith commitment would lead to RE teaching becoming difficult and frustrating. Dedication and integrity were felt to be important aspects in teaching the draft RE Units well. The degree of commitment did produce inner turmoil for some recently assigned RE teachers. The responsibility of teaching the 'official Catholic view' in the RE Units,

and remaining true to their personal views was unresolved. Teachers felt that to be a genuinely dedicated person of faith as presented in the RE Units was still some way to attain in their personal lives.

Interviewees recognised that teaching RE could be challenging and exhausting, but it was a rewarding venture. They believed that they were a significant role model to their students, a person who gave an authentic Christian witness. Some RARE teachers had moved from expressing a desire to be authentic to some sense of having achieved this authenticity. The teachers saw RE teaching as having become an extension of their teaching as a calling or vocation. Hence, an important part of the motivation of RARE teachers to continue to teach RE depended upon the depth and integrity of their faith formation. Such formation was not achieved in isolation but instead required the support of others and this is discussed in the next theme, 'Collegiality'.

Collegiality (Chapter 7, p.263): Interviewees expressed a desire for ongoing collegiality. They wanted a mentor, an experienced Religious Educator, who could show them how to teach RE well. This mentor would be able to demonstrate effective RE lessons and be an advisor to the recently assigned RE teacher faced with the challenges of implementing the draft RE Units.

The participants also felt that there needed to be a venue in the school where RE teachers could gather to share their ideas and experiences, specifically, an RE department. The RE department would be a place where experienced and qualified RE teachers resided. RARE teachers relied on the experience and wisdom of their colleagues to supplement their limited RE teaching experiences and lack of familiarity with the draft RE Units. They also wanted access to further professional formation through staff meetings and professional development opportunities provided by the CEOWA. This formation was to focus on deepening their understanding of the content of the Units and, especially, to develop their skills in conveying the content to the students in interesting and relevant ways.

Question of Teacher Generativity (Chapter 7, p.266): Recently assigned RE teachers expended a lot of personal and emotional energy in teaching Religious Education. They felt an uncertainty about sustaining this energy for teaching the draft RE Units in the face of increasing demands, both personally and professionally. RARE

teachers were confronted by an eclectic and, at times, unabashed group of students, including those who were unreceptive to the value of Religious Education. This confrontation affected the generativity of teachers because lessons needed to cater for such a heterogeneous group of students beyond that experienced in other learning areas. Some RARE teachers were left wondering whether they truly wanted to continue teaching RE or not.

The demands of implementation became a draining experience and reduced the optimism of many interviewees. These were teachers who, during the first round of interviews, believed they would remain buoyant with further experience and familiarity with the draft RE Units. The teachers expected that the next school year would be better because they would possess the confidence to teach RE more competently. RARE teachers had attained the professional and personal competencies to manage the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching RE but had difficulty in articulating a profound personal and professional philosophy for teaching Religious Education. Implementing the draft Units involved more than simply teaching the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of RE: it included the role of ‘who’ teaches and ‘why should one want’ to teach RE. In any future curriculum development that involves recently assigned RE teachers, there is a need to consider the character and integrity of these teachers and their capacity to model authentically what the new curriculum offers to the students.

9.4.4 Towards a Model for the Formation of RE teachers

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

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

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

Instruction and Surety (Chapter 8, p.308): In the initial implementation of the draft RE Units, RARE teachers focused on ensuring they were familiar with as much of the content as possible and had enough activities and materials to keep the students occupied. In large measure, this initial implementation involved the frequent use of Mastersheets and Student Books. Teachers did not want to stray from what was provided by the draft RE Units because they were not confident in presenting the content accurately themselves.

Prowess and Confidence (Chapter 8, p.309): The frustration of the classroom experiences that resulted from the shortcomings of the curriculum materials led to RARE teachers re-examining what they were doing. They tried to accommodate the learning and pastoral needs of their students with a wider variety of interesting and pertinent resources and strategies. Teachers realised that a close pastoral rapport with their students was a valuable teaching approach to implementing the draft RE Units successfully. Teachers who adopted this approach sought to expand their repertoire of teaching skills with collegial support.

Empathy and Insight (Chapter 8, p.309): With greater confidence in their competence in teaching RE, RARE teachers began to consider the impact their teaching had upon their students. Teachers developed a closer rapport with their students and empathised with the issues and concerns students had in their lives. Such a relationship provided the opportunity for teachers to gain an insight into the personal spiritual and religious needs of students. These insights helped teachers to

reflect on the example they gave to the students about being a decent human being and a person of faith.

Modelling and Vocation (Chapter 8, p.309): Recently assigned RE teachers perceived themselves to be significant role models to their students. They felt they possessed decent human qualities and an authentic faith commitment, which they saw as essential components to teaching Religious Education. For many teachers, RE teaching had become a part of who they were and how they wanted to follow their calling as a teacher.

A model was proposed (Figure 8.4, p.313) outlining how recently assigned RE teachers could become initially, competent RE teachers and later, become excellent RE teachers. The catalyst for formation from competence to excellence seemed to be the result of the teaching experience and the response to challenges to the spiritual and religious integrity of the teacher. For RARE teachers to cope with the personal, professional, and religious demands of implementing the draft PAREC, there is a need to focus on the formation of the whole person as a Religious Educator of adolescents. This formation requires additional financial and human resources as well as time and support from the Catholic education community. The formation is about inspiring growth in Christ-like qualities (that is, faith witness or experiential content knowledge) supported by content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Rymarz 1999b) rather than achieving performance outcomes in isolation to this formation. The recommendations in the next section follow the principle of ‘pilgrimage’ in personal, professional, spiritual, and religious formation. Such a formation requires strategic planning at the personal, school and system levels that goes beyond the mandatory requirements of *Accreditation to Teach Religious Education*.

9.5 Recommendations

The recommendations proposed in this study are related to how recently assigned RE teachers can be supported and nourished as they cope with the personal and professional demands of teaching Religious Education. RARE teachers represent a significant percentage of the teachers who teach RE in Western Australian Catholic secondary schools (p.317). Their formation is crucial to the success of implementing the RE curriculum and validating the human and financial investment that has

occurred to effect such implementation. What appears to be necessary is to promote a culture of ongoing, holistic formation among recently assigned RE teachers that engenders excellence in RE teaching and a zealous spirituality to evangelise. Such a cultural development (or ‘re-culturing’) goes beyond pragmatic reform initiatives; it is about re-conceptualising the curriculum implementation process. The process needs to include the means for teachers to manage personally and professionally their new teaching assignments and obtain warranted support (Fullan 2001). Such means should not be reactive and short-term responses to the difficulties of professional and religious formation among RE teachers (Rymarz 1999a). The culture of formation described in this section is premised on ongoing and pro-active responses at the school and system level for recently assigned RE teachers. Five recommendations are made based on the research findings. These recommendations are:

1. that provision be made for ongoing, holistic formation for recently assigned RE teachers;
2. that a stable teaching environment for recently assigned RE teachers be developed and maintained;
3. that recently assigned RE teachers have sustained professional assistance from experienced RE personnel in their RE teaching;
4. that the development of a missionary spirituality be a part of the integration between personal and professional formation among RARE teachers; and,
5. that a professional learning pathway be developed for managing the personal and professional needs of recently assigned RE teachers.

9.5.1 Recommendation One:

That provision be made for ongoing, holistic formation for recently assigned RE teachers

Recommendation One focuses on recently assigned RE teachers having an ongoing and holistic formation that moves them towards a deepening sense of their vocation. They need to become not only excellent RE teachers, but also people of ‘apostolic intention’ for the Church, to use their faith in the service of God (Chapter 8, p.314). Teachers need to have a program of formation that allows them to develop an ‘intimate communion with Christ’ (John Paul II 1990, par.88). A key component of

this formation is further development of a reflective professional practice about their vocation as an RE teacher.

As part of this formation, recently assigned RE teachers could well benefit from a spiritual counsellor, a person they could rely on for personal advice, encouragement, and support. Such counselling is potentially more than professional mentoring (see Recommendation 3, p.336) and includes counselling in spiritual and religious formation. It is also a catechetical formation where committed, experienced, and mature personnel, familiar with Religious Education, could sponsor the apprenticeship of the personal and professional formation of the RARE teachers (Leavey, Hetherton, Britt and O'Neill 1992). These teachers need to be affirmed and encouraged, not only professionally, but also personally. This type of spiritual counselling could be organized within a school as a part of a collegial community (Chapter 3, p.109).

The Catholic Education Office has a role to play here as an organisational sponsor for teacher formation and could be responsible for training suitable personnel to become spiritual counsellors. Within the school, the counsellors could be the Principal, the RE Coordinator, experienced RE teachers, the parish priest or chaplain, or the campus minister. The sponsorship of RARE teachers does not remain only a system or school responsibility but involves the whole Church:

The different circumstances in which lay Catholics have to carry out their work in schools can often create feelings of isolation or misunderstanding, and as a result lead to depression, or even to the giving up of teaching responsibilities. In order to find help in overcoming such difficulties; in order, more generally, to be helped to fulfil the vocation to which they are called, lay Catholics who work in schools should always be able to count on the support and aid of the entire Church.

(CCE 1982, par.71)

Liddy (1999) contends that a formation in personal spirituality, also called 'spiritual reflectivity' (Mayes 2001, p.9), could begin during pre-service training by placing an emphasis on:

personal thinking, reasoning and valuing, making personal beliefs, values and spirituality ‘problematic’, and part of the explicit content of [RE training] courses, to be critically scrutinized, explored, expanded and refined.

(Liddy 1999, p.36)

Tertiary training providers such as the Catholic Institute of Western Australia (CIWA) and the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) could explore the possibility of integrating such spiritual reflectivity into their courses. Otherwise, there seems to be a need to provide more substantive personal spiritual and religious formation during pre-service teacher training for those teachers who intend to teach Religious Education. There would also seem to be merit for tertiary training providers in identifying and encouraging young adults with an active Church background to consider a career in the Catholic teaching profession. These young adults may already have had the personal spiritual and religious formative experiences suitable for RE teaching. If a specific teacher-training course in Religious Education were to be offered, then perhaps young adults with on-going involvement in affiliated Church agencies or movements could be given recognition for prior learning or advanced standing in their studies.

Alternatively, the appointment of recently assigned RE teachers in schools could be drawn from experienced and energetic Catholic teachers. These teachers are more likely to have had the life opportunities to develop their Christian spirituality over a number of years. There may need to be a special apostolate such as a Catholic Teachers’ Society to provide this social, spiritual, and collegial support (see Recommendation Five, p.340).

9.5.2 Recommendation Two:

That a stable teaching environment for recently assigned RE teachers be developed and maintained

The second recommendation concerns the need for recently assigned RE teachers to work within a stable teaching environment. Before being required to teach RE, beginning teachers may need more time to establish themselves first as classroom teachers. The timeworn question still applies to the predicament of these teachers, ‘Is it fair of schools to give classes known to be so difficult to their less experienced colleagues?’ (Hannam, Smyth and Stephenson 1976, p.68), especially if such a teaching experience is ungratifying and ongoing collegial support is scant. It is no

wonder that, under such conditions, less experienced RE teachers lose their enthusiasm for RE teaching.

It is important that RARE teachers have the opportunity to teach the same Units again for at least another year, rather than be changed to another year level. This stability in their teaching environment would allow them to build a repertoire of strategies and resources as well as become familiar with the details of the content of the Units. Confidence would increase and, with subsequent reduction in preparation time, RARE teachers would have more energy to devote to developing a closer pastoral rapport with their students.

The time and energy devoted to preparation would be relieved if RARE teachers had ready access to the wisdom and resources of experienced colleagues, ideally, located within an RE department (Sullivan 2002, p.46). In this way, RARE teachers could have access to a collegial community, located in one place in the school, where they can seek professional advice and support. It may be as simple as experienced RE teachers developing a close rapport with RARE teachers and, from time to time, providing a forum for dialogue to share experiences of implementing the RE Units. In turn, recently assigned RE teachers might avoid feelings of isolation or spiritual dehydration and remain enthusiastic and optimistic in their outlook.

To nurture and sustain a hopeful outlook within recently assigned RE teachers, there is a need to provide courses in pedagogy that assist them with developing specialist skills in Religious Education. One of these skills to be developed is an awareness of youth culture and spirituality. If RARE teachers were actively involved in Catholic youth movements, they would have an advantage in this regard. Otherwise, this aspect needs attention so that teachers can develop a close rapport with students and be able to make links between the content of the draft Units of Work and student life situations.

Additionally, RARE teachers need to be reassured that their efforts in teaching RE do make a difference. There is a danger that recently assigned RE teachers will become further discouraged because of the climate of pessimism which they feel surrounds the teaching of Religious Education. After a few years, RARE teachers need to develop a coherent understanding about the value of Religious Education and be able to communicate this value clearly to students. While other learning areas

can use measurable data to evaluate their successes, Religious Education, as a Ministry of the Word, relies on intangibles. Teachers need to develop patience and tolerance in their interactions with teenage students. One important aspect to this interaction would be for RARE teachers to develop active listening and other communication skills as part of their close pastoral rapport with their students.

Within a school community, recently assigned RE teachers need to feel they belong to an RE department that conveys a pursuit of educational excellence. Other learning areas in a secondary school can rely on external results or awards achieved by students and teachers. For an RE department, there is a need to find similar extrinsic returns, perhaps results from the WA Curriculum Council's 'Beliefs and Values' Course could assist in this way (Chapter 2, p.40). However, another context needs to be kept in mind, that RE is more than a learning area; it is a Ministry of the Word (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, par.73). There is also a need to identify intrinsic returns, such as noting changes in attitudes among the student body, encouraging extra-curricular involvement by RE teachers and students alike or challenging complacency within the school community about the importance of Religious Education. RARE teachers need to feel their teaching has a purpose that goes beyond supervising the completion of tasks and ensuring students pass assessments. They want a vision of placing their 'faith in service to God'. Teachers need to feel they are a part of a bigger picture that will help them to persevere through the difficult times and to rejoice in times of success.

It is imperative that further curriculum changes are refinements rather than full-scale structural changes, or a new set of curriculum demands will be placed on these inexperienced and under-trained RE teachers. It may be possible for the CEOWA to form advisory focus groups, consisting of a range of experienced teachers, to advise the curriculum writers of PAREC on the usefulness of the curriculum materials and the demands these materials make personally and professionally on RARE teachers.

9.5.3 Recommendation Three:

That recently assigned RE teachers have sustained professional assistance from experienced RE personnel in their RE teaching

Recommendation Three highlights the need for recently assigned RE teachers to experience best teaching practice in Religious Education. RARE teachers need to see 'experts' in action; not only in terms of technique, but also in the 'art' of presenting a strong and respected personal faith witness. The need for a mentoring system for recently assigned teachers is well recognised (Szacsvey 1992). A co-mentoring program (Chapter 3, pp.108-109) at the school level would be the preferred option for the formation of recently assigned RE teachers. If possible, a RARE teacher could be linked with an experienced RE teacher where the two share an RE class or classes together. Alternatively, retired RE teachers could be trained and remunerated to work with RARE teachers. Experienced teachers studying RE at a Master's level could receive 'advanced standing' for their participation in such a program (Szacsvey 1992, pp.44-45).

Email and internet could also be used to connect recently assigned RE teachers, especially those in remote country schools, with centrally or regionally-based mentors. In doing so, a co-mentoring model could be devised whereby these 'virtual' mentors would be able to provide not only advice but also oversee the development of 'discussion boards' between RARE teachers. Visual resources could also be made available to teachers to see experienced RE teachers in action with a class. The purpose here is not only to show a teaching strategy, but also to highlight positive models of spiritual and religious character. Such resources could be developed at the school or system level, and made available through an information technology system.

The Catholic Education Office of WA could develop programs of professional formation especially designed for recently assigned RE teachers. These programs would provide professional support in RE content knowledge and, just as importantly, in the pedagogical content knowledge of this learning area (Rymarz 1999b). The breadth and depth of the content to be learned and the degree of specialisation in teaching method expected would suggest that RE is a learning area that requires professional formation commensurate with other learning areas. After completing their Accreditation, RARE teachers need professional development

opportunities that are practical and directly relevant to their classroom situation. Such opportunities could be considered to be a 'Tips and Tricks' program whereby RARE teachers could be advised by experienced RE personnel on how to prepare and implement the Units of Work at a particular year level. These professional development opportunities would also assist RARE teachers in sharing their experiences and developing a network of professional relationships with like-minded colleagues.

Recently assigned RE teachers need access to programs (including online resources) that provide both training and professional development in areas of RE teaching that extend beyond using the strategies and resources suggested in the Units of Work. One immediate area in which these teachers need further formation is their understanding of the curriculum principles that underpin Religious Education. There is a need to immerse recently assigned RE teachers in the philosophy of Catholic Religious Education. Teachers need to be able to articulate why they believe RE is more than on a par with other learning areas in a Catholic school not only to themselves, other staff members, and their students, but also to the wider school community (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, pars.73 and 74). Recently assigned teachers need to not only become more familiar with the socio-cultural and spiritual backgrounds of their students (p.334) but also be able to develop, '... an open, critical, informed and predominantly cognitive approach to Religious Education in the classroom' (Engbreton 1997, p.18). Other areas specifically identified in this study were a need to develop further understanding and familiarity with Scripture and liturgy. The quality of understanding in these areas required by recently assigned RE teachers seemed to be in two integrated ways. Personally, RARE teachers need opportunities to deepen their own appreciation of Scripture and liturgy in their lives. Professionally, they need further understanding about the critical study of Scripture; the celebration of liturgy; and, how to include these areas effectively in working with adolescents.

In looking to the future, there is a need for the system to identify and support enthusiastic and talented recently assigned RE teachers. Such support could involve the development of leadership programs in RE that enhance the abilities of RARE teachers as well as provide further grounding in Catholic educational philosophy and Religious Education. If RARE teachers have a clearer understanding as to why

teaching RE is important, then they may be more likely to want to continue to teach it.

9.5.4 Recommendation Four:

That the development of a missionary spirituality be a part of the integration between personal and professional formation among RARE teachers

This recommendation addresses the personal and religious character formation of recently assigned RE teachers. As part of their reflection on the vocation of RE teaching, RARE teachers need to include consideration of the interplay between their own personal faith commitment and the influence that the content they are teaching has upon themselves. A positive disposition, or the virtue of hope, is of utmost importance in curriculum implementation. It is what sustains teachers personally and professionally when the demands of teaching become great. Hope is linked with feelings that teachers can make a difference in the lives of students:

It represents the capacity not to panic in difficult situations, the belief that all is not lost, that problems can be solved and that one's actions and interventions can have an important effect.

(Hargreaves and Fullan 1998, p.57)

To remain buoyant and hopeful, recently assigned RE teachers themselves need to be able to manage challenges to their professional, spiritual and religious integrity.

In many ways, RARE teachers are called upon to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit as they witness to their faith and teach their students. Pope John Paul II has called upon all Catholics to develop a 'missionary spirituality':

This spirituality is expressed first of all by a life of complete docility to the Spirit. It commits us to being moulded from within by the Spirit, so that we may become ever more like Christ. It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit. This docility then commits us to receive the gifts of fortitude and discernment, which are essential elements of missionary spirituality.

(John Paul II 1990, par.87)

To have this spirituality means to be enthused by the Holy Spirit, to become like Christ with a zealous spirit to evangelise people who have lost a living sense of their Catholic faith (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, par.58c).

Before teaching a Unit of Work, it would be useful for teachers to have a set of questions about the key beliefs and practices presented so that they can reflect on how they came to accept these beliefs and practices themselves. Such an approach may assist RARE teachers to consider their faith stance before challenges on their spiritual and religious integrity emerge. The Congregation for Catholic Education notes, ‘... the effectiveness of religious instruction is closely tied to the personal witness given by the teacher; this witness is what brings the content of the lessons to life’ (1988, par.96). The process of reflection would be along the lines of, ‘If I am inspired to believe this faith concept, how can I communicate this inspiration to my students as they learn the value of this faith concept?’ Such a question commits teachers to use their content knowledge, to develop pedagogical content knowledge skills and to give testimony to their experiential content knowledge. If such a question disturbs RARE teachers, then the self-discovery may help them understand their limitations (and their strengths) and guide them further along their pilgrimage of formation.

Recently assigned RE teachers need to have a sense of their own personal mission, to have a vision of where they would like to take their RE teaching and what they will need to support this vision. Teachers need opportunities to help them develop the qualities of a Catholic lay educator described as:

men and women endowed with many gifts, both natural and supernatural, who are also capable of giving witness to these gifts; they must have a thorough cultural, professional, and pedagogical training, and they must be capable of genuine dialogue.

(CCE 1988, par.96)

RARE teachers may become people with a heightened appreciation of their own human spiritual gifts and the special spiritual gifts given to them by God through their Baptism and Confirmation. The religious integrity and leadership of aspiring RE teachers could be developed around groupings of the seven gifts of the Spirit described by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: Wisdom and Understanding; Right Judgement and Courage; Knowledge and Reverence; and, Wonder and Awe in God’s presence (1994, par.1299). Such a formation would nurture and sustain recently assigned RE teachers as they coped with the demands of the RE Units.

The formation RARE teachers need to experience goes beyond the professional aspects of teaching and requires a deepening of their own personal faith formation – a maturity of faith that is the goal of catechesis. This catechesis stems from the Holy Spirit ‘... who is the principle inspiring all catechetical work and all who do this work ...’ (John Paul II 1979, par.72). RARE teachers need to learn to turn, in prayer, to the Holy Spirit. They need to believe that, as they implement the RE Units of Work, the Holy Spirit forms them:

In accordance with each one’s spiritual capacity. And [the Holy Spirit] sets their hearts aflame with greater desire according as each one progresses in the charity that makes him [or her] love what he [or she] already knows and desire what he [or she] has yet to know.

(John Paul II 1979, par.72)

This belief means that teachers should be a ‘living pliant instrument of the Holy Spirit’ who seek to ‘invoke the Spirit constantly, to be in communion with [the Spirit], to endeavour to know [the Spirit’s] authentic aspirations ...’ (John Paul II 1979, par.72). This catechetical formation acknowledges the role of the other divine ‘Teacher within’ – the Holy Spirit (John Paul II 1979, par.72). Appreciating the significance of the Holy Spirit in their RE teaching needs to be a fundamental cornerstone of the formation of recently assigned RE teachers. RARE teachers need to understand and draw upon the special power of the Holy Spirit in the teaching of Religious Education. The formation is a renewal and re-discovery of the ‘teacher within’ and can become the focus of retreat or other personal development programs for recently assigned RE teachers. Lay people or religious congregations involved in education and spirituality or the Faith Formation team within the CEOWA could run these programs. An important element in such programs would be for recently assigned RE teachers to share their experiences with one another of teaching RE as a person of faith (Rymarz 1997, p.15).

9.5.5 Recommendation Five:

That a professional learning pathway be developed for managing the personal and professional needs of recently assigned RE teachers

What does seem critical is that curriculum implementation in RE, especially by recently assigned RE teachers, is complemented with a professional learning pathway (Culton 2005) to manage the personal and professional demands placed on teachers. The creation of such a pathway builds upon the culture of formation

outlined in the first four recommendations. The learning professional pathway would require the involvement of key stakeholders in the formation of RARE teachers: Bishops, Catholic Education Offices, Principals, RE Coordinators, tertiary educational institutions and the teachers themselves. The development of the pathway would need to be resourced, widely promoted, and encourage open participation from recently assigned RE teachers.

The professional learning pathway would encourage RARE teachers to seek further personal and professional formation in five interrelated areas. These five interrelated areas are focused on:

- deepening the content knowledge of recently assigned RE teachers;
- refining and extending their RE teaching skills;
- forming partnerships with experienced Religious Educators;
- seeking opportunities to enhance their faith experiences; and,
- developing a positive outlook towards teaching Religious Education.

Deepening Breadth and Depth of Knowledge: RARE teachers need access to further study, professional development opportunities and on-line resources that cater specifically to further deepening their background of the content of each of the draft Units of Work. Regular departmental meetings and annual RE conferences could be held to discuss particular topics or themes in the draft RE Course.

Refining and Broadening of Teaching Skills: Recently assigned RE teachers need to experience and practise a range of teaching strategies tailored towards the teaching and learning programs in the draft Units of Work. Workshops hosted by a group of schools in a region or in departmental meetings could be devoted towards developing advanced teaching skills in RE to complement those skills already acquired by the recently assigned RE teacher.

Partnership in Formation: RARE teachers need to feel they belong to a special and significant community, a community that helps them ‘... find the light and the courage for authentic Religious Education in their unity among themselves and their generous and humble communion with the Holy Father’ (CCE 1988, par.44). Cook and Hudson (2003, pp.14-15) believe there is a need to ‘professionalize religion teaching’. A vibrant professional Catholic teachers’ organisation may need to be

created that credentials standards, certifies or licenses religion teachers, caters for their professional, social, and religious needs, and provides opportunities for collegial dialogue (p.333). The CEOWA could also establish an online ‘Ask the Expert’ service to advise RARE teachers on matters relating to implementing the draft RE Units.

Exposure and Immersion Opportunities: Recently assigned RE teachers need to be exposed to a range of people who daily live out their faith. This exposure could be in the form of guest speakers, video conferencing, or visiting specific Church agencies. The teachers could be given the chance to work with specific Church agencies or congregations (service learning), or go on pilgrimage to significant religious sites or celebrations to be immersed in ‘faith in action’ experiences. The CEOWA or other Church affiliated agencies could provide opportunities for recently assigned RE teachers to attend courses in Christian spirituality especially for teachers (Treston 1994), such as personal development programs, retreats, colloquiums or other prayerful activities.

Aspiration as a Religious Educator: RARE teachers need to aspire to become better RE teachers. The learning area should continue to be given priority as the most important work of the school in which teachers could be involved. There needs to be an affirmed career pathway for teachers who see their vocation as Religious Educators connected to the responsibilities of religious leadership in schools. A strong background in religious leadership should be an important criterion for future school leadership positions.

Recently assigned RE teachers need to believe in themselves and, more importantly, in the actions of the Holy Spirit in their own lives. They need to become people with a sense of purpose and mission for the work that they do, for ‘the key to good religious education is the religious educator, not only as a competent professional but as a person of conviction, vision and faith’ (Elliott 2002, pp.24-25). To this end, RARE teachers need encouragement and support to develop the drive and dedication to cope with the demands of Religious Education. In turn, they will become teachers who can inspire the young people in their charge about the Good News that is on offer. RARE teachers are the future leaders of Religious Education and, hence, are ‘... the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the [Catholic] school are to be achieved’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, par.96).

9.6 Further Research

In 2003, the CEOWA began the introduction of a revised version of the draft PAREC, starting with Year 8 and the following year with Years 9 and 10. The upper secondary draft RE Units of Work are scheduled to be revised in 2007. With the introduction of revised drafts, there is an opportunity to extend the longitudinal nature of this study by returning to the interviewees and analysing their perceptions of coping with the demands of these new draft Units. Many of the recently assigned RE teachers surveyed and interviewed in this study would now have more than five years RE teaching experience. It would be useful to investigate how these 'experienced' RE teachers cope with implementing the revised draft of PAREC and to track the teachers' 'pilgrimage of formation'. Such research would be useful to monitor changes in the use of instructional resources and teaching approach, and to gauge the deepening level of understanding of the pedagogical and theological principles underlying the Units acquired by RE teachers. Alternatively, or additionally, another sample cohort of recently assigned RE teachers could be identified and a comparative study of their experiences in coping with the demands of the revised draft could be made.

In conjunction with the above, it would be possible to track another cohort of recently assigned RE teachers as they begin teaching RE up to 5 years of RE teaching experience, revisit these teachers at regular intervals up to 10 years, then follow them during their years of RE teaching onwards. Such tracking of the formation of teachers may assist further understanding about the personal and professional needs of RE teachers. A longitudinal study of the journey in faith formation by RE teachers would also assist in a further understanding of the nature, complexity, and development of maturity in faith in teachers.

In 2001, the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia released their Mandate Letter for Catholic schools. The Bishops listed, among their responsibilities, the 'promulgation of the Religious Education Program' and approval for those who teach this RE program:

The diocesan Bishop alone gives the school community the mandate that allows it to be called 'Catholic'. It is for him to ensure that the school's formation and education programs are based upon Catholic doctrinal and moral principles, and to approve and, if necessary, withdraw approval from teachers of Religious Education.

(CECWA 2001, par.79)

In the current industrial and legal climate, such a responsibility requires the issuing of clear guidelines as to what constitutes 'approval' and the grounds for withdrawing such approval. The Congregation of Catholic Education, in the document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith*, described a series of qualities to which Catholic lay educators (and consequently, these qualities are applicable to RARE teachers) could aspire to, and become identified with, in their school communities (CCE 1982, par.26). It may be useful to research further the perceptions of the key stakeholders in the Catholic education system: Bishops, administrators, parents, teachers and students about these qualities among RE teachers. This research could then lead to the development of 'suitability indicators' for the appropriate appointment and continuance of teachers to teach RE in Catholic schools.

In relation to the above, this study finds that it cannot be assumed that recently assigned RE teachers fully possess the necessary professional, spiritual and religious formation when they begin to teach the draft RE Units of Work. This lack of necessary formation would particularly apply to young novice teachers. These teachers require a time of further catechetical and professional formation during their early years of teaching RE. It would be worthwhile if further research could be conducted into a number of areas. Firstly, to explore what the catechetical and professional needs of young novice teachers are as they journey on their RE teacher formation. Secondly, how these needs are integrated but why they are not uniform among these teachers. Thirdly, how a mentoring model could be applied, and fourthly, what opportunities could be made available that would best suit this group of teachers. Furthermore, the introduction of mentorship programs at the system and school level could be investigated. A scheme similar to Professional Practice Programs that support the internship of trainee teachers could be trialled and evaluated or the feasibility of developing a 'virtual' co-mentoring network (see p.336) could also be explored.

Another area for further research to emerge from this study is the relationship between certain demographic and professional variables and curriculum implementation in Religious Education (Chapter 5, p.213). There is a need to explore further the significance of such relationships on the quality of RE teaching. In the case of gender, most RARE teachers were female teachers. Does gender create important differences in the ways teachers interpret the curriculum and deliver the programs to the students? How does this delivery influence male and female students (Kallioniemi 2002)? For differences in age groups, do younger teachers connect the content better with the needs of students than do older teachers? Is the faith and life experience of older teachers more conducive to ensuring that the RE curriculum is implemented as intended by the curriculum writers? Concerning further tertiary study and teaching load variables, are experienced and trained RE teachers better able to contextualise humanitarian issues within the religious formation of their students? These questions raise a number of possibilities for research that provide avenues for developing excellence in the teaching of Religious Education (Figure 8.4, p.313).

Further research could also be done on the intricate connections between being witnesses to faith, the professional and spiritual demands of teaching and career aspirations for teachers working in Catholic schools. Where teachers in Western Australia are expected to promote particular community values (Curriculum Council of Western Australia 1998, p.14), the experience of RE teachers could form a useful comparison in researching the personal and professional demands on teachers in values education.

Lastly, one important aspect that was often expressed by the recently assigned RE teachers was the receptivity of students to the teaching of the draft RE Units. RARE teachers are very sensitive to the reactions of their students and channel a lot of energy into catering for their eclectic backgrounds. It would appear that this is an area of research in urgent need of further investigation. Secondary school students are the future Church, the future teachers in Catholic schools, the future RE teachers and, importantly, future priests and members of religious congregations. The perceptions of students about the teaching of Religious Education need to be taken into account and, particularly, what students perceive as the best models of teachers

to help young people become decent human beings and devoted witnesses to the Catholic faith.

9.7 Conclusion

The aspects discussed in implementing the draft PAREC uphold the model of curriculum implementation (Fullan 2001) described in an earlier chapter (Chapter 3, pp.79-80). This model of implementation incorporated three dimensions: changes in the use of curriculum materials; changes in teaching approach; and, adoption of new principles or beliefs about how to teach. These dimensions formed part of the baseline data that was gathered in the survey and used as the basis for discussion in the first round of interviews. Additionally, teachers preferred an approach that focused more on the students than the content or, an approach where teachers used their own professional judgement, rather than be expected to conform to 'set guidelines'. What did emerge out of the first round of interviews, and what was examined more closely in the second round of interviews, was another dimension that influenced the implementation of the curriculum – the personal and professional formation of the recently assigned secondary RE teachers. This formation had a profound impact on how recently assigned RE teachers coped with the demands of implementing the draft RE Units.

Recently assigned RE teachers respond initially to the demands of implementing the draft RE Units by assimilating an array of experiences in managing classes, preparing lessons, covering the content, and developing a close rapport with students. However, such assimilation has a profound impact on the personal, spiritual, and religious qualities of RARE teachers. As a result, these teachers search for ways to be able to integrate their teacher persona with their own human and faith attributes. Such integration allows them to sustain their energy in the face of the personal and professional turmoil created by the challenges of implementing the draft Units and to inspire them to continue to teach Religious Education.

The introduction of a new curriculum, such as the draft PAREC, was a significant step towards addressing the needs of recently assigned secondary RE teachers. The provision of instructional resources and generic teaching and learning programs are invaluable aids to establishing confidence in these teachers. However, this does not close the door on the formation of teachers as Religious Educators. On the contrary,

teachers are also formed and challenged by the Units to become role models who live what they teach. RARE teachers find themselves on a journey towards becoming better people, better Christians, and better RE teachers. Their personal and professional formation encompasses a deepening discernment in understanding Religious Education content, pedagogy, and mission.

This study has accessed the perceptions and feelings of a number of recently assigned RE teachers. These teachers reflected on their experiences of implementing the draft Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course. Their reflections suggested that such an RE teaching experience involves many teachers in a challenging and ongoing personal, spiritual and professional journey. This journey is an essential aspect of the personal, catechetical, and professional formation of RARE teachers. The journey can be facilitated by self-reflection, mentors, appropriate religious and spiritual formation, professional collegiality and a personal conviction towards the vocation of the RE teacher. Curriculum developers would be wise to consider and facilitate the interplay of these formative aspects as recently assigned secondary RE teachers respond to the exigencies of future RE curriculum developments.