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

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

Chris Hackett

Doctor of Philosophy Thesis

University of Notre Dame Australia
ABSTRACT

This research is a longitudinal study, conducted in Catholic schools of Perth and its environs. From 1998 to 1999, recently appointed secondary Religious Education teachers were surveyed and interviewed, and re-interviewed eighteen months later.

Initially, a comprehensive survey of three dioceses in Western Australia was conducted and formed a contextual database for the study. The database acted as the foundation for the selection of a purposive sample of teachers for the first round of interviews. Follow-up interviews with this sample cohort were carried out the following year. The research design used in this study assisted the development of a representative, grounded analysis of the perceptions of recently assigned RE teachers.

In the first interview, participants were asked to comment on their experiences of implementing a new draft RE program in Catholic schools in Western Australia. The teachers were invited to relate their experiences and perceptions of implementing the curriculum materials, the advised teaching approaches and understandings of the theological and pedagogical principles underlying the new Units. In the second interview, teachers were invited to reflect upon their personal and professional growth as they became more familiar with the demands of this RE curriculum. What emerged were insights into the nature and depth of formation these teachers experienced as they introduced the draft Units of Work.

Using qualitative analysis techniques such as NUD•IST, findings emerged about the importance of the personal spiritual and faith formation of teachers during this period. Teachers felt passionate about why they were teaching RE and implemented the Units with enthusiasm. They were initially optimistic about the future of their RE teaching but were then confronted with challenges to their personal, spiritual and faith formation. Most teachers continued to look forward to teaching RE, while some were relieved when they had the opportunity to discontinue. These findings suggest that there is a need to consider how these teachers can be personally and professionally supported as they face the transition from a ‘crusade of delivery’ to a ‘pilgrimage of formation’ in their RE teaching lives.
DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis is the work of the candidate and contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of the candidate’s knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

______________________________  _________________
Candidate’s Name               Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The thesis would not have been possible without the generous support of many people involved in Catholic education in Western Australia. I am especially grateful to the recently assigned RE teachers who gave of their time so generously and shared their experiences in such a candid manner throughout the surveys and interviews.

My special thanks go to the Principals and RE Coordinators for their encouragement and support for this research work. Thanks also to the former Director of the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, Mrs Therese Temby; to the past and present Deans of Education at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Professor Tony Ryan, Professor Jennifer Nicol and Professor Michael O’Neill for their logistic support and encouragement in conducting the research and completing the thesis writing.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my Supervisors. Initially, to Associate Professor Eileen Lenihan rsj who prepared and sent me calmly on this journey of discovery, and later, to Associate Professor Roger Vallance fms. Roger has been a bastion of encouragement, insight and patience throughout the trials and tribulations of this thesis. To those generous people who became critical readers for me: Kevin Treston and Shane Lavery cfc, thank you.

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## CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2
Declaration of Authorship .................................................................................................................. 3
Acknowledgement .............................................................................................................................. 4
List of Tables .................................................................................................................................... 10
List of Figures .................................................................................................................................... 14
List of Appendices ............................................................................................................................. 15
List of Acronyms ............................................................................................................................... 16

### Chapter 1  The Research Problem Defined ................................................................. 17
  1.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 17
  1.2 The Research Problem .......................................................................................................... 17
  1.3 Purpose of the Research ....................................................................................................... 19
  1.4 Evolution of the Research Questions .................................................................................. 20
  1.5 Design of the Research ....................................................................................................... 21
  1.6 Significance of the Research .............................................................................................. 22
  1.7 Limitations of the Research ............................................................................................... 24
  1.8 Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................. 26
  1.9 Format of the Study ............................................................................................................. 30
  1.10 Chapter Summary ................................................................................................................ 34

### Chapter 2  Context of the Research: Religious Education ........................................ 36
  2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 36
  2.2 Models of Religious Education ............................................................................................ 37
    2.2.1 Catechetical and Educational Orientations .................................................................. 37
    2.2.2 Catechetical and educational orientations embedded into the draft RE Units ............. 38
  2.3 Religious Education in Western Australia ......................................................................... 40
    2.3.1 Educational philosophy of Catholic schools ............................................................. 40
    2.3.2 Catholic education system in Western Australia .......................................................... 41
    2.3.3 Administration of Religious Education in Western Australia ...................................... 42
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1  Accreditation to Teach RE Status of RE teachers in WA Catholic secondary schools in 1993 ................................................. 48

Table 3.1  The Plight of Beginning Teachers ........................................ 58

Table 3.2  Taxonomy of Change Models (Ellsworth 2000) ...................... 70

Table 3.3  Stages of Teacher Development (after Fuller and Bown) .......... 72

Table 3.4  Stages of Concern ............................................................... 74

Table 3.5  Levels of Use ................................................................. 75

Table 4.1  Accreditation to Teach RE Status of RE Personnel in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton in 1997 ......................... 141

Table 4.2  Initial Criteria for Selection of the Sample Sub-Groups ............ 145

Table 4.3  Potential Pool of Interviewees in each Curriculum Implementation Category ................................................................. 146

Table 5.1  Surveys sent to Schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton .............................................. 157

Table 5.2  Surveys returned from Schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton .............................................. 157

Table 5.3  Year of Graduation for First and Second Tertiary Qualifications among recently assigned RE teachers ............................. 162

Table 5.4  Tertiary institutions attended by recently assigned RE teachers ....................................................................................................... 163

Table 5.5  Tertiary qualifications of recently assigned RE teachers ............ 164

Table 5.6  Tertiary studies in Religious Education for recently assigned RE teachers .................................................................................. 166
Table 5.7  Tertiary institutions attended by recently assigned RE teachers to complete studies in Religious Education .................................................. 166
Table 5.8  Time of First Degree Graduation with tertiary studies in Religious Education ................................................................. 167
Table 5.9  Progress towards Accreditation to Teach RE ........................................... 168
Table 5.10 Distribution of classes among recently assigned RE teachers .......... 172
Table 5.11 Accessibility of instructional resources as perceived by recently assigned RE teachers (Survey Questions 1-4) .......................................................... 177
Table 5.12 Item 2: ‘RE Units are useful in my classroom teaching’ by Age Groups .................................................................................. 178
Table 5.13 Ranking of Frequency of Use of Instructional Resources (Survey Question 5) .................................................................................. 179
Table 5.14 Stipulated Item: Resources from the Coordinator of RE by Region .................................................................................. 180
Table 5.15 Volunteered Item: Use of the Bible by Gender .................................. 181
Table 5.16 Volunteered Item: Own resources collected by RE Teaching Load .................................................................................. 181
Table 5.17 Stipulated Item: Resources created by the teachers by Age Groups .................................................................................. 182
Table 5.18 Advice from recently assigned RE teachers about using the Instructional Resources (Survey Question 6) .................................................. 183
Table 5.19 Experience of the RE Teaching Approach as perceived by recently assigned RE teachers .......................................................... 186
Table 5.20 Item 8: ‘Following the sequence of objectives in the RE Units useful’ by Age Groups ........................................................................ 187
Table 5.21 Item 8: ‘Following the sequence of objectives in the RE Units useful’ by RE Teaching Load ........................................................................ 187
Table 5.22 Item 15: ‘Formal assessments are easy to include as part of my teaching’ by Accreditation to Teach RE: Study component ............... 188
Table 5.23 Item 7: ‘Presenting content as outcomes of learning useful’ by RE Tertiary Qualification .......................................................... 189

Table 5.24 Item 7: ‘Presenting content as outcomes of learning useful’ by Age Groups ........................................................................... 189

Table 5.25 Ranking of Preferred Learning Strategies (Survey Question 16) ......................................................................................... 190

Table 5.26 Stipulated Item: Reinforce student understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices by Gender .................................................. 191

Table 5.27 Stipulated Item: Stimulate active participation and creativity within students by Gender ......................................................... 192

Table 5.28 Volunteered Item: Provide students with experiences of God by RE Teaching Load ................................................................. 192

Table 5.29 Volunteered Item: Promote prayer .................................................................................................................................................. 193

Table 5.30 Advice from recently assigned RE teachers about applying the Teaching Approach of the PAREC (Survey Question 17) ........ 194

Table 5.31 Participation in the Religious Dimension of a Catholic school as perceived by recently assigned RE teachers (Survey Questions 18-23) ........................................................................................................ 197

Table 5.32 Attitude towards teaching RE as perceived by recently assigned RE teachers (Survey Questions 24-28) ..................................... 199

Table 5.33 Ranking of Aims of Religious Education by recently assigned RE teachers (Survey Question 29) ............................................. 201

Table 5.34 Stipulated Item: Relate the Gospel example of Jesus to their lives by RE Teaching Load ............................................................. 203

Table 5.35 Stipulated Item: Develop social justice and tolerance for others by RE Teaching Load .................................................................. 203

Table 5.36 Stipulated Item: Understand God’s intervention in human history by RE Teaching Load .................................................................. 204

Table 5.37 Ranking of emphasis on the Content of Religious Education by recently assigned RE teachers (Survey Question 30) ............. 205
Table 5.38  Stipulated Item: What helps a person to reach full human potential by Gender.................................................................206

Table 5.39  Stipulated Item: Consequences of social issues and trends on human nature by RE Tertiary Qualification.................................207

Table 5.40  Stipulated Item: How the Gospels relate to significant life experiences by RE Tertiary Qualification........................................207

Table 5.41  Stipulated Item: Consequences of social issues and trends on human nature by RE Tertiary Qualification........................................207

Table 5.42  Advice from recently assigned RE teachers about what was crucial for students to learn in Religious Education (Survey Question 31).................................................................209

Table 5.43  Background to the Interview Participants.................................................................211

Table 5.44  Distribution of Interviewees across the Curriculum Implementation Categories.................................................................212

Table 6.1  Initial Coding of First Interview Transcripts by Curriculum Implementation Dimensions.................................................................218

Table 6.2  Indicator of Support for Themes emerging from First Round of Interviews.................................................................219

Table 7.1  Initial Coding of Second Interview Transcripts by Second Round of Interview Questions.................................................................246

Table 7.2  Themes emerging from Second Round of Interviews.................................................................247

Table A6.1  Instructional Resources.................................................................................................................................365

Table A6.2  Teaching Approach.................................................................................................................................366

Table A6.3  Underlying Principles.................................................................................................................................367
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1</td>
<td>Steps of the Teaching Process</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2</td>
<td>Staffing trends of religious and lay teachers in WA Catholic schools between 1976 and 1999</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Outline of the Key Themes in the Literature Review</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1</td>
<td>Sample Selections across Likert Item Scores</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2</td>
<td>Diagrammatic Summary of the Research Design</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.1</td>
<td>Distribution of Teachers by Gender and Vocation</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.2</td>
<td>Distribution of Teachers across Three Age Groups</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.3</td>
<td>Distribution of Teachers by Age Group and Gender</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.4</td>
<td>Distribution of Teachers by Major Teaching Area</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.5</td>
<td>Distribution of Teachers by Significant Areas of Learning</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.6</td>
<td>Study Component of Accreditation to Teach RE by Region</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.7</td>
<td>Inservice Component of Accreditation to Teach RE by Region</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.8</td>
<td>RE Teaching Experience by Age Categories</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.9</td>
<td>RE Teaching Experience by Two Significant Regions</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.10</td>
<td>RE Teaching Experience by Region</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.1</td>
<td>Diagrammatic Summary of how recently assigned RE teachers cope with the curriculum demands of the draft RE Units</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.2</td>
<td>Integrated Model of Teacher Formation in response to Curriculum Exigencies</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.3</td>
<td>The Five Forces of Catholic Educational Excellence</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.4</td>
<td>The Dimensions of Excellence in Religious Education</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST of APPENDICES

Appendix 1  Letter to Director of Catholic Education seeking permission to conduct research .............................................. 349
Appendix 2  Letter to Principals seeking permission to conduct research .................................................................................. 351
Appendix 3  Letter to RE Coordinators outlining procedure for completing surveys ................................................................. 353
Appendix 4  Introductory Letter about Survey to recently assigned RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton, 1998 .................................................................................................................. 355
Appendix 5  A Survey on the Teaching Practice of recently assigned RE Teachers ........................................................................ 357
Appendix 6  Initial Criteria for Selection of the Sample Group ........................................................................................................ 365
Appendix 7  Letter to RE Coordinators about contacting participants for the First Round of Interviews ................................................. 368
Appendix 8  Letter of Invitation to Participant to be involved in the Interview Phase of the Study ........................................................ 369
Appendix 9  First Interviews Schedule ............................................................................................................................................. 371
Appendix 10 Letter and Questions for Participants who agreed to do a Written Response .......................................................................... 374
Appendix 11 Letter of Invitation to participate in the Second Round of Interviews ............................................................................... 380
Appendix 12 Second Interviews Schedule ........................................................................................................................................ 381
Appendix 13 Second Interviews Written Responses .......................................................................................................................... 382
Appendix 14 Follow Up Letter to Second Round Interviewees ......................................................................................................... 384
Appendix 15 Sample Group of Participants and Changes to their Circumstances .................................................................................. 385
Appendix 16 Distribution of Quotations from Participants ...................................................................................................................... 386
# LIST of ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANOVA</td>
<td>Analysis of Variance</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBAM</td>
<td>Concerns Based Adoption Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBCEW</td>
<td>Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales</td>
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<td>CC</td>
<td>Congregation for the Clergy</td>
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<td>CCE</td>
<td>Congregation for Catholic Education</td>
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<td>CECWA</td>
<td>Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia</td>
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<td>CEO(s)</td>
<td>Catholic Education Office(s)</td>
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<td>CEOWA</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIWA</td>
<td>Catholic Institute of Western Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSPAWA</td>
<td>Catholic Secondary Principals’ Association of Western Australia</td>
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<td>PADRE</td>
<td>Perth Archdiocesan Department of Religious Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAGRE</td>
<td>Perth Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators entitled <em>The Truth Will Set You Free</em></td>
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<td>PAREC</td>
<td>Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>QSR</td>
<td>QSR International’s Non-numerical Unstructured Data, Indexing, Searching and Theorizing (computer software)</td>
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<td>NUD•IST</td>
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<tr>
<td>RARE</td>
<td>Recently Assigned Religious Education (Teacher)</td>
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<td>RE</td>
<td>Religious Education</td>
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<td>REC(s)</td>
<td>Religious Education Coordinator(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCAA</td>
<td>School Curriculum and Assessment Authority in Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for the Social Sciences computer software by SPSS Inc.</td>
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<td>UNDA</td>
<td>University of Notre Dame Australia</td>
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</table>
CHAPTER ONE

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM DEFINED

1.1 Introduction

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

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

1.2 The Research Problem

In 1981, the Archbishop of Perth, L. J. Goody established the Perth Archdiocesan Department of Religious Education (PADRE). The task of this Department was to assist RE teachers with the difficulties of teaching RE by developing a comprehensive set of Guidelines for Religious Educators (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth 1983, p.4). In 1987, these ‘RE Guidelines’ were published as a series of documents called The Truth Will Set You Free: Perth
Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators (PAGRE). Between 1993 and 1996, these Guidelines were reviewed and superseded by the introduction of ‘working drafts’ of the Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course (PAREC). The PAREC was referred to as a working draft because Religious Educators had the opportunity to provide feedback about its viability in addressing particular curriculum issues and because it was yet to be officially approved (given an imprimatur) by the Archbishop of Perth. After a lengthy period of evaluation, revised editions were prepared for implementation in 2003.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. **What are the perceptions of recently assigned secondary RE teachers about the usefulness of instructional resources from the PAREC in their classroom teaching?**

2. **What are the perceptions of recently assigned secondary RE teachers about the appropriateness of the teaching approach conveyed by the draft PAREC in their classroom teaching?**

3. **What are the perceptions of recently assigned secondary RE teachers about supporting the curriculum principles underpinning the PAREC in their classroom teaching?**
After the first round of interviews, findings emerged that warranted a re-examination of the primary research question and an additional subsidiary question was developed:

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

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

1.5 Design of the Research

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

The research project incorporated some quantitative techniques to gather data such as demographic information about the years of RE teaching experience and training of the participants, the frequency of use of instructional materials, and the number of teachers supporting an understanding of a teaching approach. The database was used to identify a sample group of recently assigned RE teachers for the in-depth interviews as well as to assist in the development of interview questions. The study was longitudinal because the same participants were re-interviewed a year later to discuss questions of change and development in their outlook towards teaching the draft RE Units (Vallance 2005).
Qualitative techniques were used to allow for an exploration of the perceptions, beliefs, or understandings of a situation or event by participants as well as how they related to each other from the inside. The study explored the perceived understandings or shared knowledge of recently assigned RE teachers. These perceptions provided insights into how RARE teachers implemented the PAREC documents and their responses to the demands that arose in doing so.

1.6 Significance of the Research

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

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

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

The findings could also be significant to the Assistant Director of Religious Education and consultants at the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia in
planning future professional development programs, workshops and retreats for recently assigned secondary RE teachers. As the document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* states:

> The Catholic educator has an obvious and constant need for updating: in personal attitudes, in the content of the subjects that are taught, in the pedagogical methods that are used. Recall that the vocation of an educator requires “a constant readiness to begin anew and to adapt”. If the need for updating is constant, then the formation must be permanent. This need is not limited to professional formation; it includes religious formation and, in general, the enrichment of the whole person.
> (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, par.68)

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

The study likewise could be significant for RE teaching in other Catholic dioceses in Australia. Religious Educators may benefit from the findings of this study in the professional formation of their recently assigned RE teachers. More recently, the Archdioceses of Melbourne and Sydney have worked collaboratively on a new RE curriculum called *‘Know, Worship, Love’*. This curriculum has textbooks and online resources available to teachers. The findings in this research may prove useful in terms of providing insights into how RE teachers responded to the use of these curriculum materials for future curriculum implementation and reform initiatives. In addition, the findings of this study may be valuable to RE teaching in Catholic primary schools in WA and for religious instruction in other denominational schools or religious studies in State high schools.
Lastly, this study could be significant to a wider educational audience. As a study of the responses by inexperienced and under-trained teachers to the demands of adopting and implementing a curriculum, the findings may be valuable to educators similarly involved in providing ‘practical, professional development plus good support documents that outline accessible resources’ (Interim Curriculum Council 1997, p.11). It may also be valuable to personnel responsible for training pre-service and in-service teachers in other curriculum areas.

1.7 Limitations of the Research

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

The study focused on schools that were implementing fully the draft Units of Work from the PAREC. While this fosters a consistency in the data, the applicability of the findings to schools not fully using the Units of Work may be reduced because RE teachers in these schools may have different perceptions of the Course. Furthermore, the study focused specifically on the practices and understandings of recently assigned secondary RE teachers. It is this group of teachers that was recognised by Principals and the Perth Archdiocesan Director of Religious Education during the 1990s as having specific difficulties. The findings then may not be applicable to more experienced or more qualified RE teachers.
The application of findings in this study to other Catholic education systems may be limited because of variations in the professional formation of recently assigned RE teachers. Catholic education systems with a history of ongoing professional development for RE teachers may not find their recently assigned RE teachers facing the same challenges to the demands of implementing their RE curriculum. The nature of the demands may be different because of the differences in the curriculum approaches used in Religious Education across Australia. During the 1990s, the PAREC was more in keeping with the catechetical or ‘education in faith’ approach of the Guidelines for Religious Education of Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (CEO, Archdiocese of Melbourne 1995) than it was to the ‘educational outcomes’ approach of Faithful to God: Faithful to People taught in Sydney (CEO, Archdiocese of Sydney, 1994). Since 2003, the revised draft editions of the Units of Work in the PAREC and the ‘Know, Worship, Love’ curriculum used in the Archdioceses of Melbourne and Sydney have found further common ground in their approaches.

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

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

Accessibility

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

Accreditation

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

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

(CEOWA 1997c, p.15)

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

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

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

**Curriculum implementation**

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

**Exigencies**

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

**Perceptions**

For the purposes of this study, the perceptions of teachers were based upon two assumptions of the construction of knowledge: ‘(a) knowledge is actively constructed by an individual; and (b) coming to know is an adaptive process which organises an individual’s “experiential world”’ (Hendry 1996, p.19). It was assumed that a perception refers to how recently assigned secondary RE teachers express, give meaning to or interpret what they know about implementing the PAREC. This was their subjective reality as expressed through the experiences and responses of the RE
teaching: ‘People construct new forms of knowing through perception and action, and specifically through perception-action in communication’ (Hendry 1996, p.23). These perceptions build up an outlook towards the demands of using the instructional resources and teaching approach as well as understanding the underlying pedagogical and theological principles in the draft RE Units.

Recently assigned secondary RE teacher

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

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

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

Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course (PAREC)

PAREC consists of a series of draft Units of Work for lower and upper secondary students in Catholic schools. The Units included content and a teaching process and specified the outcomes and objectives to be completed. The PAREC had 19 draft
Units of Work, 12 in lower secondary and 7 in upper secondary school. Between 1996 and 2003, most schools used these draft Units of Work as part of their RE program. An important consideration for their implementation was their suitability for use by inexperienced and under-trained RE teachers. The documents were draft because the Archbishop of Perth and the Bishops of the Bunbury, Geraldton, and Broome dioceses had not formally mandated them.

Religious Education (RE)

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

Teaching load

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

Teaching practice

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

Topic

The curriculum writers of the PAREC selected content drawn from the teaching of the Catholic Church on Christian Salvation including the Church’s understanding of the human person. In the draft RE Units, this content was divided into two sections.
The first section dealt with the discovery of the human need for Christian Salvation. The second section described how Christians draw on the experiences of Christian Salvation. Both these sections were referenced to the Church documents: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) and *The Word Dwells Among Us* (Education Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference 1990).

*Unit of Work*

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

**1.9 Format of the Study**

The format of the study consists of nine chapters:

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Two – Context of the Research: Religious Education

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

Chapter Three – Review of the Research Literature: Curriculum Exigencies

Chapter Three reviews the literature on the responses of recently assigned teachers to intense curriculum demands. The chapter explores the characteristics of recently assigned teachers and the situations where these teachers are required to familiarise themselves with implementing a curriculum with which they have little or no prior training or experience. The responses these teachers make to an unfamiliar curriculum are compared with the models of curriculum implementation that
incorporate the perceptions of teachers. The Stages of Concern model proposed by Fuller (1969) and the Change Agent model by Fullan (2001) are described next. These models provided a framework for exploring how teachers are affected both personally and professionally by the demands of an unfamiliar curriculum. Lastly, the role of personal, professional, and religious formative experiences is discussed in assisting recently assigned RE teachers to cope with the demands of curriculum implementation.

Chapter Four – Research Design

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

Chapter Five – Survey Findings

Chapter Five presents firstly the demographic and professional backgrounds of the recently assigned RE teachers in the survey as a backdrop to the survey findings. The findings of the survey are then reported in terms of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying RE curriculum principles. Some statistical analysis was used to identify particular similarities and differences within the survey responses. Notably, the high level of agreement in the means and the narrow standard deviations indicated that recently assigned RE teachers held similar perceptions of
implementing the draft RE Units. Furthermore, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Post Hoc testing indicated some minor differences between teachers of different demographic and professional backgrounds. As a result of these findings, the selection of a purposive sample of RARE teachers as participants in two rounds of interviews was discussed. This selection was based upon identifying teachers who reflected the total mean, high and low scores on Likert items in the three categories of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying curriculum principles. From a potential group of 37 participants, 28 teachers agreed to be involved in the interviews.

Chapter Six – The First Interviews

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

Chapter Seven – The Second Interviews

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

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

Chapter Nine – Conclusions

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

1.10 Chapter Summary

This first chapter sets out the rationale for examining the personal and professional responses of recently assigned RE teachers to the exigencies of implementing the draft RE Units. The problem concerned the capacity of inexperienced and under-trained teachers in coping with the intense demands associated with implementing the RE curriculum and how the situation was compounded by a high expectation
upon their commitment and formation as RE teachers. Such difficulties were common where teachers were unfamiliar with a learning area. With regard to recently assigned RE teachers in Catholic schools in Western Australia, there was much anecdotal evidence but little research previously undertaken to investigate the veracity of the data.

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

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH:

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

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

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

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

2.2.1 Catechetical and Educational Orientations

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

The ‘education in faith’ or catechetical orientation leads to a curriculum model where the intent is to allow students to deepen their faith through an understanding of the integration between their lives and the Christian message. The RE classroom becomes a place where significant human experiences are explored and the Gospels and Church Traditions are seen as responses to these experiences. It is assumed that most students have come from a family background where students have received the Sacraments of Initiation and were exposed to Catholic beliefs and practices through the parish or Catholic primary school communities. The catechetical curriculum model focuses on a
specific teaching process and content framework that drives the teaching and learning program. The curriculum writers of Perth Archdiocesan RE Course (PAREC) require teachers to understand and follow particular steps beginning with the life experiences of students then connect this experience to the Gospel or Christian Story experience. Such a model may draw upon ‘Life Experience’, ‘Kerygmatic’ or ‘Praxis’ approaches to Religious Education (Ryan 1999).

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

2.2.2 Catechetical and educational orientations embedded into the draft RE Units

The draft PAREC Units have a strong catechetical orientation and the Units also incorporate current educational practices. The Units attempt to mesh ‘… catechetical insights, curriculum directions and pedagogical practices that will ensure a balanced approach to religious education’ (White 2003, p.24). The approach taken by PAREC not only recognises that RE is a learning area that reflects other learning areas in teaching, learning and assessment but also, as a Ministry of the Word, has a part to play in the evangelisation of students (Holohan 1999). The draft Units of Work incorporated a content framework and teaching process in a teaching and learning program. Figure 2.1 (p.39) illustrates this integration of the content framework and the teaching process. Teachers begin the Unit by assisting students to reflect on their significant life experiences and to identify how a Catholic understanding of the human person can assist them to recognise how these experiences are a part of their human potential and human weakness. This process then leads them to consider how Catholics understand these
experiences because they are made in the image and likeness of God. Due to their sinfulness, people require Salvation through Jesus Christ. The teacher assists students towards an understanding of how Catholics can draw on this Salvation in their lives. Lastly, the students reflect on how these Catholic faith experiences can help them in their own lives.

**Figure 2.1 Steps of the Teaching Process**

Each unit adopted a significant faith-life theme and was packaged with seven sections that included: an overview section; a content section; a teaching and learning program (with objectives and suggested strategies); teacher resources; student resources (including a student resource book); and, evaluation procedures (including formal assessments). The Units consisted of content that was based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) as well as focused on the personal and religious needs of
students. In 1996/97, the Upper Secondary RE Units were accredited with the Curriculum Council of Western Australia (formerly the State Education Authority) as fulfilling the outcomes of their phenomenological Beliefs and Values Courses. The Units had the flexibility to satisfy the common assessment requirements for these Courses. Students received recognition for the subject on their Certificate of Secondary Education and the results from the subject were used for entrance into Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Training Colleges.

2.3 Religious Education in Western Australia

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

2.3.1 Educational philosophy of Catholic schools

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

the development of [people] from within, freeing [them] from that conditioning which would prevent [them] from becoming a fully integrated human being….
[Schools] must develop persons who are responsible and inner-directed, capable of choosing freely in conformity with their conscience. This is simply another way of saying that the school is an institution where young people gradually learn to open themselves up to life as it is, and to create in themselves a definite attitude to life as it should be.

(CCE 1977, pars.29 and 31)

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

2.3.2 Catholic education system in Western Australia

The Conference of Catholic Bishops of Western Australia holds responsibility for Catholic schools in Western Australia. There are four dioceses: the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Broome, Bunbury and Geraldton. The Bishop within each diocese has the canonical role to evangelise by providing systematic instruction (Vatican Council II 1965a, par.14). To support them in this role, the Bishops and the Major Superiors of Religious Orders established the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) in 1971 to pool their resources and coordinate their decisions regarding the management of the Catholic education system throughout Western Australia. The CECWA is responsible for policy development and resource allocation as set out by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Western Australia and the Major Superiors of Religious Orders in the Mandate and Terms of Reference of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 1993–1999 (CECWA 1993b). In 2001 a revised Mandate letter was published called Mandate, Mandate Letter and Terms of Reference for the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2001-2007 (CECWA 2001).
The CECWA directs the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) in managing policies of the Commission, distributing resources and providing support services to schools. The support services include the curriculum development and professional support of Religious Education. This is a daunting task considering the wide distribution of schools in dioceses across the State and the number of students and teaching personnel in Western Australia. In 1998, the CEOWA served 47 secondary schools of which 19 were composite (combined primary and secondary schools). These secondary schools educated 23,308 students and were administered by 47 Principals and staffed by 1,709 teachers (CECWA 1998, pp.42-44).

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

2.3.3 Administration of Religious Education in Western Australia

From the mid-1880s, Catholic schools in Western Australia had relied heavily on the availability of religious brothers, sisters and priests. However, the numbers of religious in schools have declined since the 1960s and decreased dramatically over the last three decades (CECWA 1985, p.15; 1996, p.38 and 2003, p.33). Concurrent with this change in teaching personnel were increasing school enrolments due to a number of factors such as an overall increase in the school-age population, increasing retention rates in secondary schools and changes in economic and government policy.
The combination of these factors resulted in a threefold increase in the number of lay teachers teaching in Catholic secondary schools (CECWA 1985, p.15; 1996, p.38 and 2003, p.33). Figure 2.2 (p.44) shows the trends in the staffing of religious and lay teachers in WA Catholic schools between 1976 and 1999. Overall, the total number of teachers had risen from 1557.7 full-time equivalents in 1976 to 2321.1 full-time equivalents in 1986 and further again to 3473 by 1999. In 1976, there were 455.6 full-time equivalent teachers from religious congregations. By 1986, this had decreased to 243.3; and in 1999, there were only 48 of these teachers working full-time in Catholic schools. By contrast, there were 1100.1 full-time equivalent lay teachers in 1976 representing 70.7% of the total number of teachers. This figure increased to 2077.9 (89.5%) in 1986 and continued to rise to 3425 or 98.6% of the total number of teachers by 1999. As a result, Catholic schools in Western Australia had experienced a rapid increase in the total number of teachers who were predominantly lay teachers. Such a situation reflected the trends elsewhere in Australia (Canavan 1999, 2006). In turn, many of these lay teachers were called upon to teach Religious Education with little or no experience or training in this learning area.

In 1981, Archbishop Goody appointed a Director of Religious Education along with the establishment of the Perth Archdiocesan Department of Religious Education (PADRE). The task of PADRE was to assist these predominantly lay RE teachers experiencing difficulties with their classroom instruction by developing Religious Education Guidelines (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth 1983, p.4) using a ‘Guidelines Taskforce’ composed of experienced RE teachers, both lay and religious. In 1986, the PADRE was subsumed into the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia. The Director of RE became a member of the CECWA and continued the delegated responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of WA for RE in all Catholic schools in Western Australia.
In 1987, RE Guidelines were published as a series of documents called *The Truth Will Set You Free: Perth Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators* (PAGRE). The Bishops of WA mandated these documents to be used in Catholic schools in their Archdiocese and dioceses (CECWA 1993b, par.1.22). The Perth Archdiocesan RE Guidelines documents were also cross-referenced to *The Word Dwells Among Us* (Education Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 1990) that outlines the Catholic beliefs and practices to be taught in all Australian Catholic schools and parishes by the Education Committee of the Conference of Australian Catholic Bishops. Between 1993 and 1996, these Guidelines were reviewed and superseded by the draft *Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course* (PAREC).

In 1996, RE curriculum support materials and professional development programs on the content and methodology of RE were provided for Catholic secondary schools by the Director of Religious Education and five RE consultants of the CEOWA. The Catholic Education Office in Perth had three RE consultants and the WA regional Catholic Education Offices in Broome and in Bunbury had one each. Within schools, the Principal delegates the coordination of the RE programs usually to one other person.
most secondary schools, this person is called the RE Coordinator (REC). The task of the REC was to coordinate the activities of the RE program within the school and provide support and resources for RE teachers (CEOWA 1997c). Many RE teachers teach this subject as a part of their minor teaching load.

2.3.4 Review of the Perth Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators

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

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

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

Therefore, it was assumed that this ‘self-help’ with the support of RE Coordinators, would assist the formation of all RE teachers for them to learn how they might better cope with the demands of teaching the Religious Education programs within the school. However, these Guidelines were soon suspected to be inadequate and Catholic
By 1989 some sections of the Catholic community were becoming increasingly concerned about the quality of RE teaching in Catholic secondary schools in WA. Phelan (1990) was commissioned by the Knights of the Southern Cross to survey its members on their perceptions as parents about the quality of RE teaching in Catholic secondary schools. One of the findings of this survey claimed that many lay RE teachers were not sufficiently equipped to teach RE because they lacked the necessary professional or religious formation.

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

At the end of 1991, the Catholic Secondary Principals Association of Western Australia (CSPAWA) formed a working party to investigate the teaching and resourcing of RE and the difficulties RE teachers experienced in using PAGRE documents. Much of their evidence was anecdotal and relied upon their own observations of RE teachers and on discussions with other Principals and RE Coordinators. In 1992 the working party presented to the CSPAWA its findings in the document: The Teaching of Religious Education in Catholic Schools. After deliberating on the findings of the working party, the CSPAWA (1992, par.1.4) agreed to endorse this document. The CSPAWA advised the Director of RE of their concerns for the teaching of RE in Catholic secondary schools, in particular, the problems inexperienced and underqualified RE teachers had in using the RE Guidelines (CSPAWA 1992, par.5[i]). The Director of Religious Education in Western Australia was asked to act on the recommendations within the document concerning the accessibility and resourcing of the PAGRE. The CSPAWA believed that the PAGRE had value as curriculum overview documents and in assisting the professional formation of teachers but:
as day-to-day teaching resources, they present difficulties of accessibility, particularly for inexperienced teachers or those without a solid training in religious education. (CSPAWA 1992, par.3)

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

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

Data collected by the CEOWA regarding the Accreditation status of RE teachers also highlighted the vexed issue of a lack of professional formation and the limited capacity of recently assigned RE teachers to access the PAGRE documents. Table 2.1 (p.48) illustrates the impact of the changing professional composition of RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools. With the introduction of PAGRE, teachers who began teaching RE after 1986 were required to have a professional qualification to teach RE called Accreditation to Teach Religious Education or Accreditation B. Initially, teachers who had taught RE before 1986 were not required to have this Accreditation. In 1994,
the CECWA revised its policy statement on Accreditation and advised that all RE teachers were required to have *Accreditation to Teach RE* (CEOWA, 1997c). On the basis of this division, 203 teachers (37%) were ‘pre-1986’ and 342 (63%) were ‘post-1986’ RE teachers. This implied that after the Guidelines were introduced the majority of RE teachers (63%) belonged to a group with less than seven years experience in teaching RE.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of RE Teachers</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Pre-1986’ RE teachers</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Post-1986’ RE teachers</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of RE teachers</strong></td>
<td>545</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accreditation status of ‘Post-1986’ RE teachers</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation completed</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation inservice component only</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation tertiary study component only</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Accreditation component</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total ‘Post-1986’ RE teachers</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**

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

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

Table 2.1 suggests that these inexperienced RE teachers lacked formal training in the content (as indicated by the tertiary study component) and methodology (as indicated by the inservice component) of Religious Education. By 1993, 61% of ‘post 1986’ RE
teachers did not possess the mandatory professional qualification, *Accreditation to Teach RE* advocated by the CEOWA. Only 39% of the ‘post-1986’ teachers had completed this Accreditation, a significant number (25%) had no training in teaching RE, 30% had completed the CEOWA inservice component on the teaching approach of PAGRE and only 6% had undertaken tertiary-level study in RE. While they may be specialist teachers trained in other learning areas, they were not familiar with or experienced in the pedagogical processes used in RE. This issue is taken up further in the next chapter (Chapter 3, p.54).

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

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

### 2.3.5 *Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course*

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

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

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

Even as the Units were implemented, the curriculum writers of the PAREC continued to promote a consultative and collaborative process of curriculum change. From the formation of the joint CEOWA/CSPAWA Working Party (1993) to the Pilot RE Project (1994/95) through to the ‘Working Draft’ of the PAREC (1996/97), the CEOWA,
CSPAWA, RE Coordinators and RE teachers collaborated in developing more effective ways of implementing and accessing the new RE Course. The curriculum writers claimed that the 19 Units of Work were comprehensive and ‘user-friendly’ (CEOWA, 1996a) because of this collaboration.

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

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

2.3.6 Related curriculum developments in RE around Australia

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

The CEO at Parramatta published ‘Support Units’ for its Religious Education curriculum, *Sharing Our Story* in 1993. The Diocese of Bathurst produced Units of Work for its *Secondary Religious Education Program Years 7–12* in November 1994. In 1995, the *Guidelines for Religious Education of Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* were revised to take into account the substantial magisterial and theological
content outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Furthermore, a series of ‘Teaching Companions’ were included and, in 1997, student texts began to be developed. The Sydney Catholic Education Office also revised its secondary RE Guidelines: *Faithful to God: Faithful to People* in October 1994 with modules being published in May 1996 (Crotty, Fletcher and McGrath 1995, p.15). In 1997, the Brisbane Catholic Education Office also announced its intention to develop 52 ‘Sample Religious Education Units’ as part of the revised Archdiocese of Brisbane RE Guidelines (Barry 1997, p.25).

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

### 2.4 Context Summary

The intention of this chapter was to set out the context of the research problem within the Western Australian Catholic school system. Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the dioceses of Broome, Bunbury, and Geraldton are serviced by one Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA). During the 1990s, the Religious Education curriculum was mandated by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Western Australia and supported by the Director of Religious Education and secondary RE
consultants at the CEOWA. A significant curriculum development that was taken was the provision of draft Units of Work designed for inexperienced and inexpert lay RE teachers.

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

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

Within such a scenario, the difficulties recently assigned RE teachers experienced in implementing the draft RE Units seemed to be complicated by demands on teachers both personally and professionally. How recently assigned teachers cope with these intense demands are well documented in the research literature and is the focus of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

3.1 Introduction
The focus of this study is on recently assigned RE teachers and their responses to the curriculum demands placed upon them as they implement the draft Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course (PAREC). The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature concerning recently assigned teachers, with a special focus on how recently assigned Religious Education (RARE) teachers responded personally and professionally to curriculum exigencies. These responses were the subject of much scrutiny, especially with regard to inexperienced and underqualified RE teachers in Western Australian Catholic secondary schools (Chapter 2, p.46). This review explores the literature on the experience of recently assigned teachers as they faced the ‘subjective realities’ of curriculum implementation (Fullan 2001, p.32) and relates this literature to the experience of RARE teachers. Of particular importance in this review is how these teachers responded to the perceived intensity of curriculum demands placed upon them and the means they relied upon to assuage these demands.

3.2 Key themes in the Literature Review
Figure 3.1 (p.55) shows an outline of the key themes in this literature review. Firstly, the review begins by studying the professional experience of recently assigned teachers, especially when the assignment they are given is out of their field of experience and training. RARE teachers face a similar professional situation to other recently assigned teachers as they contend with the challenges of becoming competent and confident RE teachers. Many of these teachers are also not in their field of expertise and face pressures that parallel the circumstances of beginning teachers. Secondly, this chapter explores the models of curriculum change that focus on the responses of teachers to perceived demands of curriculum implementation and the effect these demands have on RARE teachers. Thirdly, the review considers the significance of formative experiences in
alleviating the intensity of these curriculum demands. The quality of professional growth to cope with these demands depends greatly on the teaching experience, collegial support, and professional assistance they receive in the school. Furthermore, the pressure of demonstrating a strong role model for students and a committed faith witness is an additional expectation placed upon them and reliant upon the quality of their personal and religious formation as RARE teachers.

Figure 3.1 Outline of the Key Themes in the Literature Review

- *Recently Assigned Religious Education Teachers*
  - Recently Assigned Teachers
  - ‘Out-of-Field’ Teachers
  - Recently Assigned RE (RARE) Teachers

- *Perceived Demands of Curriculum Implementation*
  - Models of Curriculum Implementation
  - Concerns of Teachers
  - Teachers as moral agents of implementation

- *Formative Experience of RARE Teachers*
  - Professional Formation in Content and Method
  - Religious and Spiritual Formation in Character and Witness
  - Collegial Support and Professional Assistance

3.3 *Recently Assigned Religious Education Teachers*

This section explores the literature into the professional circumstances of recently assigned teachers, especially in the RE learning area. There are three aspects to these professional circumstances to be considered in this section. Firstly, it explains the situation of recently assigned teachers in taking up new teaching assignments. Secondly, this section explores the consequences of such teachers complying for various reasons to teach in a learning area with which they are unfamiliar. Thirdly, it describes how the teaching of an unfamiliar learning area accentuates the demands placed on RARE teachers.
3.3.1 Recently Assigned Teachers

In the literature, there are various terms used to refer to teachers who are new to teaching at a school or in a learning area. Some terms connote specific characteristics about teachers that may or may not have acceptance across the literature. For example, definitions of ‘beginning’ and ‘recently assigned’ teachers do vary between authors. The term ‘beginning teacher’ is given usually for the teachers in their first or second year of teaching; alternatively, it could mean teachers with less than ten years experience and subdivided between teachers with 0-4 years teaching experience (‘truly beginning teachers’) and ‘experienced beginners’ with 5-10 years experience (Marlow, Inman and Betancourt-Smith 1997). For the purposes of this study, the term ‘beginning teachers’ will refer to teachers in their first or second year of teaching. The term ‘recently assigned teachers’ will mean teachers within their first five years of teaching at a school or, as in the case of this study, in a specific learning area. This latter definition was applied in the ‘Survey Instrument’ and ‘Initial Criteria for Selection of the Sample Group’ (Appendix 5, p.357 and Appendix 6, p.365) although the term ‘recently appointed RE teacher’ was used later in reporting the study instead of the original ‘beginning RE teacher’.

Much of the research into the responses of recently assigned teachers to perceived curriculum demands is concerned with first year or beginning teachers (Veenman 1984; Dollase 1992; Ganser 1999). Furthermore, the term applies to teachers in general rather than to the teaching of specific learning areas. However, studies of teachers with many years of teaching experience but assigned to a learning area in which they have neither experience nor training are rare (Kallery 2004, p.147). In this study of recently assigned RE teachers both groups were considered – teachers who were beginning their teaching careers and teaching RE as well as teachers who were experienced but teaching RE for the first time.

In many ways, the situation of recently assigned teachers is similar to the experience of beginning teachers. Like their neophyte colleagues, recently assigned teachers feel frustrated by their inability to teach students, as they perceive they should teach them:
[The recently assigned teacher] experiences all the frustration which comes the way of the new teacher who is not allowed by her pupils to teach as she wants to. She tries desperately to adapt to the situation but this brings her into conflict with her ideals and, worse, makes her doubt her value as a person as well as a teacher. The pain of this kind of experience does nothing to help the teacher to acquire the confidence to teach successfully.

(Hannam, Smyth, and Stephenson 1976, p.68)

Like beginning teachers, recently assigned teachers experience the dilemma of either admitting they do not want to teach the assigned learning area or continuing to struggle to achieve competency in an area in which they feel less than adequate. They find teaching the subject a test of their confidence and their initial enthusiasm tends to wane. Again, this does not appear to be unusual for new teachers:

Most young teachers have ideals to begin with: they want to establish friendly relations with children, they want to share their enthusiasm for learning and they hope to encourage their pupils’ curiosity and initiative. The experience of rejection which seems to be so common at the outset may lead them to doubt their position. They may be quickly driven to what seems an inevitable dilemma: how to establish themselves effectively in the classroom without betraying those ideals? It is not a matter between choosing between ideals and realism.

(Hannam et al 1976, p.72)

As shown in Table 3.1 (p.58), the personal and professional dilemmas experienced were confirmed more recently regarding the plight of beginning teachers in Malta (Bezzina, Stanyer and Bezzina 2005). A consistent portrait of the experience of beginning teaching is evident in the literature: ‘the story of beginning teaching usually revolves around several themes: reality shock, the lonely struggle to survive, and a loss of idealism’ (Feiman-Nemser 2003, p.27). These difficult circumstances may continue also beyond the first year (McCormack and Thomas 2003, p.126). Similarly, recently assigned teachers find they are:
planning lessons, often with few resources, as they are trying to learn how to apply what they learned in preparation and fill in the most important gaps in their learning. Often they are left with little time to actually think about what they are doing.

(Stansbury 2001, par.15)

Furthermore, a study of failing teachers, especially among novice teachers, found that most of these teachers did not possess sufficient knowledge background or skills even in their specialist areas (Wragg, Haynes, Wragg and Chamberlin 2000, p.218). The assignment of these teachers to a learning area with which they did not possess the training or the experience may exaggerate these deficiencies. Such a situation becomes symptomatic of ‘out-of-field’ teachers (Kallery 2004, p.160). The next section ‘Out-of-Field Teachers’ (p.60) discusses these circumstances further.

**Table 3.1 The Plight of Beginning Teachers**

- Feel over-whelmed and exhausted dealing with non-teaching duties
- Apprehensive about the lack of breadth and depth in their knowledge of the curriculum
- Feel perplexed with and inadequate in addressing the diverse learning needs and backgrounds of students
- Experience difficulties in improvising or changing plans to suit students’ needs and behaviour
- Experience difficulties in planning for the long term and to select suitable teaching materials and resources
- Very apprehensive about classroom management concerns, especially disruptive or unmotivated students
- Feel isolated and reluctant to ask for help (in case they are seen as incompetent) although want more assistance regarding school policies, procedures and teaching responsibilities.
- May experience difficulties in developing relationships with parents or lack of supportive relationships from administrators and colleagues
- Experience possible ‘transition shock’ where teachers not able to transfer classroom skills previously acquired
- Experience tension between their vision of a creative, dynamic and autonomous professional and the prescription of curriculum policies, teaching manuals and textbooks
- Experience a collapse of idealism (‘reality shock’) and growing disillusionment
- Have overly high expectations about teachers (and themselves) being dedicated, enthusiastic and fair people who are role models to students; they expect teachers to perform well and to invest time and energy into their teaching.

(Source: Bezzina, Stanyer and Bezzina 2005, pp.19-20)

Studies suggest that the most intense concerns, at the start of implementing a curriculum, do tend to diminish over time with classroom experience and teacher formation (O’Connor and Fish 1998, p.2; Freiberg 2002, p.58; Bezzina, Stanyer and Bezzina 2005, p.21). How successful these teachers are in coping with the demands of teaching a new area is problematical (Jacobs 1996, p.5). Nonetheless, there are positive signs of which to be aware. While recently assigned teachers may have limited training or experience to
deal with these dilemmas, ‘they usually bring energy, enthusiasm, and new ideas’ to
their teaching situation (Martinez 1994, p.137).

There is an emotional dimension to recently assigned teachers facing the demands of
curriculum implementation. This dimension contributes to the stresses of beginning
teaching:

the first 5 to 7 years of teaching are a critical period during
which professional activity is accompanied by strong and often
negative emotions. [Teaching is]…emotional work that gives
rise to feelings of satisfaction, but also to tension, dilemmas and
even suffering, all of which have negative effects and result in
loss of efficacy.

(Ria, Sève, Saury, Thereau and Durand 2003, p.220)

It becomes clear that a significant outcome to intense curriculum demands is a ‘heavy
emotional toll’, especially for recently assigned teachers (Huberman 1993).
Consequently, recently assigned teachers ‘…experience an odyssey of emotions which
run the gamut – exhilaration, frustration, uncertainty, confusion, and isolation’ (Zepeda
and Mayers 2001). The result may be that many of these teachers leave the teaching
profession (Marlow et al 1997) because ‘without proper support and assistance,
beginning teachers are likely to experience higher levels of stress and teacher burnout’
(Martin and Baldwin 1996). Recently assigned teachers require the following conditions
for teacher satisfaction:

• reasonable teaching assignments;
• carefully designed mentoring programs;
• a comprehensive induction process;
• a network of collegial contacts;
• a supportive evaluation;
• preparation of new teachers to face challenges; and,
• an encouraging environment to connect to the profession.

(McCann, Johannessen and Ricca 2005, pp.31-34)
The level of teacher satisfaction seems to be an important criterion for teachers in continuing to teach. One aspect of the research question was to explore the extent to which RARE teachers experienced these conditions.

### 3.3.2 ‘Out-of-Field’ Teachers

A significant complicating factor occurs when recently assigned teachers possess neither the training nor the experience in the learning area assigned to them. Ingersoll defines this ‘out-of-field’ teaching as ‘teachers assigned to teach subjects for which they have little background training or education’ (1998b, p.64). Such a mismatch may be due to a lack of content knowledge. On the other hand, it may be a deliberate administrative ploy to fill vacant teaching assignments by fitting teachers from one field into another in which they have little expertise or experience (Ingersoll 1998a; Ingersoll 2001, p.44). Recently assigned teachers seem to be the ones who are often given such teaching assignments (Ingersoll 1998b; Evans 1999; Ingersoll 2001, p.43; Stansbury 2001; McCormack and Thomas 2003) and, with little in the way of direct collegial support (McCormack and Thomas 2003, p.126; Weitman and Colbert 2003, p.7). It is also true that highly qualified and experienced teachers may find themselves in the same predicament (Veenman 1984; Ingersoll 2001, p.43).

In a study of two groups of teachers, inexperienced and experienced primary teachers but unfamiliar with teaching science, some common concerns emerged. Both groups were apprehensive about a number of issues: their lack of content knowledge; with managing their classes while acquiring new resources and strategies; about the quality of their teaching performance; and, a loss of confidence and feelings of insecurity in their interactions with students (Kallery 2004). This finding parallels the ‘reality shock’ of many beginning teachers (p.57): ‘the assimilation of a complex reality which forces itself incessantly upon the beginning teacher, day in and day out’ (Veenman 1984, p.144). It is almost as if these teachers regressed professionally (Kallery 2004, pp.159-160) where control of the class dominates decisions about lesson planning rather than the learning needs of students (Martin and Baldwin 1996).

Furthermore, other studies of teachers teaching a learning area for the first time found differences in professional needs between beginning teachers and experienced teachers
Experienced teachers new to teaching science were concerned:

about capability, about the correctness of their work, about organizing and managing time demands, about the availability of materials and other instructional sources and about classroom management.

(Kallery 2004, p.149)

As a result, teachers new to a learning area experience similar concerns – based upon a lack of training in specific content and teaching methods – that places them in a professionally disadvantaged position even before they walk into the classroom. For example, a study of primary teachers found that many of them lacked a science background and were not confident in teaching science (Appleton and Kindt 1999). Teachers demonstrated a number of avoidance behaviours such as: not teaching science at all; postponing the teaching of science where possible; allowing other events or programs to take first priority; only teaching science incidentally or when an external science event arises; and, using a thematic approach to submerge science into the background (Appleton and Kindt 1999, pp.3-4). The teachers focused upon developing a pedagogical approach called ‘activities that worked’ (Appleton and Kindt 1999, p.4) using strategies they were familiar with or ‘hands on’, student-centred strategies to compensate for a lack of content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Often this approach was to keep students busy and allow the teacher to manage the class. However, where Education Departments have attempted to increase the amount of content in the primary science course, evidence suggests that this does not change the approach of the teacher to the subject (Appleton and Kindt 1999, p.3).

One worrying trend observed by researchers (Ingersoll 1996; Stover 1999; Jerald 2002) was the significantly high number of ‘out-of-field’ teachers teaching in remote and disadvantaged schools. A report by NSW Department of Education and Training on Teacher Education commented that:
too frequently new teachers are given the most difficult schools and classes. They are often required to teach outside their subject area of specialisation with little guidance and encouragement.

(McCormack and Thomas 2003, p.126)

In a Catholic school system and especially a learning area that proclaims the value of social justice, the replication of such a trend is a matter for urgent attention.

The emerging difficulties of ‘out-of-field’ teachers coping with the intense demands of the RE curriculum were apparent (Chapter 2, p.51) in Australia and elsewhere during the late eighties and nineties. The work of Australian religious educators and the findings from research overseas discuss this context further in the next section: ‘Recently Assigned RE (RARE) Teachers’.

3.3.3 Recently Assigned RE (RARE) Teachers

Religious educators over the past few decades have held disparate views about the nature and purpose of Religious Education (de Souza 2005; Marendy 2005). Some have tried to accommodate the changing catechetical and educational orientations of the learning area in the design of new curriculum (Chapter 2, pp.37-38). As a result, they may have misinterpreted the balance of these orientations in the classroom context (Crawford and Rossiter 1985). Teachers have become confused about how they should translate the curriculum for students in meaningful and purposeful ways (de Souza 2005, p.60). Consequently, some teachers emphasised cognitive practices and avoided affective ones. They perceived a faith element to their teaching was contrary to RE curriculum thinking at the time (de Souza 2005, p.64).

The implementation of RE Guidelines around Australia during the eighties and nineties has been the subject of comment and research concerning their accessibility by RE teachers. For example, while the introduction of RE Guidelines was seen as a valuable support to RE teachers, the lack of prior training created difficulties for teachers in coping with the demands of implementation. The prediction was that teachers would experience a:
lack of personal confidence and professional competence [that] must thereby reduce the ability to make good decisions. I would therefore see this as an urgent need for improving the curriculum development in religious education. Religion teachers seem to need skills to undertake a research stance towards their own teaching.

(Graham 1984, p.22)

To compensate for this loss of efficacy, the use of action research techniques to develop critical and systematic reflection on teaching practice was proposed (Graham 1984). As teachers became familiar with the materials and conducted their classes, they needed to evaluate their lessons on an ongoing basis and seek ways to improve their teaching. Such a proposal for more critical reflection on teaching practice has yet to find merit among religious educators and more immediate concrete solutions were sought to address the difficulties of implementing new RE Guidelines.

A study by Malone (1987) investigated the difficulties RE teachers had in the implementation of RE Guidelines from the Archdiocese of Melbourne and the Archdiocese of Sydney. These documents were not easily accessible to teachers because of the unfamiliar language used in the documents and the lack of a planning process of implementation as part of the school RE program:

[The Melbourne and Sydney Guidelines] … were published to help schools develop their own school-based religious education programs. Many schools have had difficulties in translating the guidelines into practice and although some of the problems have been related to the language of the documents and the newness of the ideas they contain, some are related to an inadequate appreciation of the process of planning and of the decisions that need to be made.

(Malone 1987, pp.143-144)

For many teachers the ecclesial language used to describe the nature of Religious Education and its content was too abstract and of little practical use. At that time, Malone believed that teachers did not have sufficient professional formation to implement RE Guidelines effectively. Consequently, teachers were more interested in strategies and resources for their next lesson. Malone (1987, p.144) argued that RE curriculum documents should be organised in such a way that they expressed theoretical considerations as well as practical suggestions for classroom use to be effective during
the implementation process. She proposed that teachers needed curriculum documents that explicitly covered six elements: an overview outlining the rationale and assumptions underpinning the program; a context describing how the program fits in with the needs of students and teachers; content to be taught; unit development containing strategies and resources; language suitable to teachers, particularly recently assigned teachers; and evaluation procedures. Malone also later observed that RE teachers had been restricted in their use of Archdiocesan or Diocesan RE Guidelines, even though Catholic Education Offices in NSW have supported their endeavours, since:

Many of the teachers … [have] … had very little formal Religious Education during the secondary years … and many have had little training since. These teachers therefore have no model of Religious Education …. Many of them have insufficient knowledge to approach the subject in a more formal way.

(Malone 1988, p.15).

The demands of implementing the RE Guidelines by ‘out-of-field’ teachers seem to have been too great without further professional formation. This situation was particularly the case for teachers with insufficient training or with experience limited to their own Catholic secondary schooling or practicum opportunities that occurred during their teacher training.

In another study, Crotty, Fletcher, and McGrath (1995) also lamented the difficulties experienced by teachers in implementing the Archdiocese of Sydney RE Guidelines. They found that:

many involved in developing school-based programs found this task far more consuming of time and energy than for other areas of teaching. What also contributed to the enormity of the task has been the high proportion of teachers who do not have Religious Education as their first or main subject area.

(Crotty et al 1995, p.15)

Such observations of teacher difficulties seem to reaffirm earlier findings (p.63) that teachers did not have the professional competence to implement the RE curriculum because they did not have specialist training in that learning area. This lack of professional competence meant that teachers found it difficult to cope with the exigencies of implementation. While there were instructional resources available and a
teaching approach outlined in the curriculum, the lack of formation about the nature and purposes of RE was becoming a serious problem.

The professional capacity of RE teachers to understand the curriculum principles underpinning the learning area came under the spotlight again (Malone 1997). In two research projects – one evaluating the Parramatta RE Guidelines, *Sharing Our Story* and the other, a series of case studies on the use of textbooks in Catholic secondary and primary schools – it was found that teachers were usually practitioners rather than theorists and made use of instructional resources in an uncritical fashion (Malone 1997, p.14). The conclusion drawn from observations of teachers using textbooks was that RE teachers did not appreciate the underlying curriculum principles nor did they implement RE curriculum documents in creative and relevant ways to students. This conclusion was despite the fact that these teachers attended CEO professional development programs outlining the curriculum principles used in the diocesan RE Guidelines. Teachers perceived the Guidelines and textbooks ‘… as a source of activities … [allowing the teacher] … to fill in the time allotted for the class’ (Malone 1997, p.19). The Guidelines were major instructional resources that required a sparse addition of other resources. Inexperienced and inadequately trained RE teachers look for ‘activities that work’ (Appleton and Kindt 1999) like the primary science teachers described on p.61. However, this response was not the complete picture.

Teachers perceived that the demands of implementing the RE curriculum required them to make a personal and professional response. This response was to be in ways that more than paralleled increasing professionalism in other learning areas (Skilbeck and Connell 2004, p.7). Religious educators increasingly perceived that the teaching of religion was no longer strictly catechetical and necessitated an appropriate tertiary educational background:
As with other curriculum areas, the teaching of the classroom religion program requires teachers to undergo thorough preparation prior to entering the classroom, as well as further professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills throughout their teaching career. … No longer is membership of a local Catholic parish community sufficient qualification for a religion teacher in a Catholic school. While not denying the necessity for formation in faith for all teachers, the classroom religion teacher will find religion teaching difficult and unsatisfying if they do not have an adequate academic preparation.

(Ryan, Brennan and Wilmett 1997, p.11)

The intensity and quality of the demands brought about by the implementation of new RE curricula meant that RE teachers faced challenges to their personal, professional, and religious formation. RE was like other learning areas, in some aspects, but it also required more from the RE teachers than did other learning areas (Rymarz 1997). There were broader religious differences among students with which to contend:

Students in contemporary Catholic schools have never been more diverse in terms of Church membership, religious affiliation, family religious involvement, preparedness to question religious claims and level in religious matters.

(Ryan 1997, p.95)

When RE Coordinators were asked about the quality of RE teaching, they believed that RE teachers had to relate a diverse array of content that was accessible across a wide range of students (Rymarz 1997, p.15). Such a task was proving to be daunting for many RE teachers.

There have been positive reports to emerge about teachers coping with the demands of curriculum implementation. In a study of Catholic Special Religious Education (SRE) teachers in NSW, Ivers (2002) noted that these teachers lacked formal teacher qualifications and were required to follow the Joy for Living series of Teachers’ Manuals. Nonetheless, rather than implementing the classroom materials as printed, many SRE teachers sought to identify and provide for the specific learning needs of their students (Ivers 2002, p.3). Consequently, they adapted the materials to meet the needs of their students. As part of the profile he developed about the characteristics of SRE teachers, Ivers found that this concern for the needs of students was more important than
adhering to the principles of the ‘Shared Praxis’ approach espoused in the Teacher’s Manuals. Not surprisingly, many SRE teachers did not have a good understanding of the teaching approach in the first place (Ivers 2002, p.6). He believed that these teachers wanted the flexibility to choose from a range of strategies and resources, to be able to see the connections between ‘content, principles and concepts’ and to provide a balanced and integrated program to their students (Ivers 2000, pp.50-51). Ivers (2000) concluded that as the new edition of the Teacher’s Manuals catered for these aspects and the teachers became more familiar with the materials, the teachers would be more willing and confident in implementing the RE program.

Moving beyond the exclusive use of curriculum materials appears to be a necessary part of the developing expertise of the recently assigned teacher. In similar fashion to findings reported by Ivers (2000), a qualitative study of religious educators in Newfoundland, Canada found that there was a movement away from the ‘set’ curriculum materials (English 2000). Such a shift ‘...is an indication of growth or learning in the educators’ role where texts are seen as guidelines, not as a canon.’ (English 2000, p.171). Inexpert and inexperienced RE teachers needed access to quality classroom resources to assist them in developing their background knowledge and competence to teach RE confidently (Rymarz and Engebretson 2005). In the responses from questionnaires on the use of textbooks in Years 7 and 9 in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, teachers commented upon the value of such texts as a mainstay to their teaching, reduced their preparation time and provided a catalyst for improving the quality of learning in the RE learning area. Rymarz and Engebretson (2005) also recognised that recently assigned RE teachers needed weaning from such a heavy reliance on one resource. This reliance was a transient measure until the teachers developed greater confidence as competent RE teachers. Discontinuing this reliance was part of a process of empowering recently assigned RE teachers to move beyond being purely technicians, that is, people who used instructional resources as a learning tool in a repetitive fashion. RARE teachers became more professional as they used the textbook as one of many components to their teaching repertoire (Engebretson 2002).
3.3.4 Summary: Professional Profile of RARE teachers

Recently assigned RE teachers consist of both beginning and experienced teachers who are new to the teaching of Religious Education. For both groups, their experiences of teaching RE tend to reflect the difficulties of teaching for the first time. These teachers are teaching outside of their field of expertise and comfort zone. They may experience a serious loss of efficacy as they face the dilemmas and challenges of curriculum implementation for the first time in a learning area in which they are inexperienced or inadequately trained. To alleviate the pressures they face, RARE teachers rely heavily on instructional resources such as textbooks. As they gain teaching experience, it is possible for these teachers to broaden their repertoire of strategies and resources. Furthermore, alongside this developing professionalism, RARE teachers felt they had to draw upon their personal and religious background in response to curriculum demands. For some RARE teachers, the personal cost of coping with the intense demands was too great leading to burn out or dissatisfaction with teaching Religious Education. These personal and professional responses are a part of the research base educators have studied over many years. From this research base, a number of curriculum change models about the perceived demands of implementing a curriculum are proposed and these models are the focus of the next section.

3.4 Perceived Demands of Curriculum Implementation

In this section, the review turns its attention to the curriculum change models that take into account the perceptions of teachers to the demands of curriculum implementation. In particular, those models that focus on how these demands effect the teachers personally and professionally. The first model described is the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) from the initial work of Fuller (1969) and then the subjective realities aspects of the Change Agent Model by Fullan (2001). Out of these models, emerge the moral dimension of curriculum implementation. Teachers want the best for their students and implement a new curriculum accordingly. This perception produces another set of demands on teachers that challenge their levels of efficacy, strength of character and depth of spirituality (Palmer 1998).
3.4.1 Models of Curriculum Implementation

A number of educational change models describe and analyse the processes of curriculum implementation. Firstly, those models that study the factors influencing the implementation; secondly, those that analyse the processes that occur at different levels of the implementation; or, thirdly, those models that explore the curriculum outcomes (Hall 1997, p.31). These models may fall into a number of conceptual categories (Ellsworth 2000, p.37) as shown in Table 3.2 (p.70). An examination of these categories was useful to this study because the focus was on a specific group of teachers. This group of teachers had unique perceptions and experiences of the way they implemented a curriculum. Some categories may not be applicable directly to this study and others may very much be in tune with the research focus. In turn, the selection of a model category assisted the direction of the literature review. This study was focusing on the implementation process at the classroom level or ‘the actual change in practice component of implementation’ (Hall 1997, p.31). The focus was on ‘… the teaching – learning dimension of religious education’, what Lee (1973, p.8) refers to as ‘religious instruction’ or in current educational language as teaching practice. A number of factors may influence the successful implementation of curriculum documents. Part of the purpose for the development of PAREC Units was to assist inexperienced or inexpert RE teachers cope with the demands of teaching RE. A key design feature of the Units was that they be accessible to recently assigned RE teachers as day-to-day teaching resources. A considered review of the models suggest two models dealing with teachers at a classroom level and their responses to a curriculum: the Intended Adopter or Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) first described by Fuller (1969) and the Change Agent model described by Fullan (2001).
### Table 3.2 Taxonomy of Change Models (Ellsworth 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question(s)</th>
<th>Component of Change Communication Model</th>
<th>Title of Flagship Publication (or Framework Name, if Different)</th>
<th>Principal Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- What attributes can I build into the innovation or its implementation strategy to facilitate its acceptance by the intended adopter? - How can the presence or absence of these attributes affect the rate of acceptance by the intended adopter (or prevent acceptance altogether)?</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Diffusion of Innovations</td>
<td>Rogers, E. M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are the conditions that should exist or be created in the environment where the innovation is being introduced to facilitate its adoption?</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Conditions of Change</td>
<td>Ely, D. P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are the implications of educational change for people or organisations promoting or opposing it at particular levels? - What can I, as a(n)...(e.g., teacher, administrator, parent) do to promote change that addresses my needs and priorities?</td>
<td>Change Agent</td>
<td>(New) Meaning of Educational Change</td>
<td>Fullan, M. G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are the essential stages of the change facilitation process? - What activities should the change agent be engaged in during each stage?</td>
<td>Change Process</td>
<td>Change Agent’s Guide</td>
<td>Havelock, R. G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What stages do teachers go through as an innovation is implemented? - What will be the major focus of their concerns at each stage? - What levels of innovation use are likely to be exhibited at each stage? - How do I identify which stage teachers are at right now? - How do I assess the extent to which teachers are actually using the innovation as its developers intended?</td>
<td>Intended Adopter</td>
<td>Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM)</td>
<td>Fuller, F. F. - Hall, G. E. - Hord, S. M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are the cultural, social, organisational, and psychological barriers to change that can promote resistance to the innovation? - What can I do to lower these barriers and encourage adoption?</td>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Strategies for Planned Change</td>
<td>Zaltman, G. - Duncan, R. B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are the factors outside the immediate environment in which the innovation is being addressed that can affect its adoption? - How can change efforts combine multiple, mutually reinforcing innovations to increase the likelihood of effective, lasting change? - What stakeholders and constituencies are likely to see their interests impacted by this change, and how can I work with them to ensure they see their concerns addressed?</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>Systemic Change in Education</td>
<td>Banathy, B. H. - Reigeluth, C. M. - Garfinkle, R. J. - Carr-Chellman, A. A. - Jenlink, P. M.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A significant purpose of the draft Perth Archdiocesan RE Course (PAREC) was to provide RE teachers, in particular, inexperienced and under-qualified RE teachers, with Units of Work and associated resources for use on a daily basis (Chapter 2, p.50). Earlier anecdotal evidence had suggested that there were a number of concerns about the Perth Archdiocesan RE Guidelines (PAGRE), the predecessor of PAREC (Chapter 2, pp.46-47), that resources needed to be accessible and the teaching and learning program needed to be embedded with an appropriate pedagogy that could be understood and translated by these teachers. Such an understanding about the concerns of teachers implementing a curriculum is reflected more broadly in the works of Fuller (1969) and the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) described in the next section.

3.4.2 Concerns of Teachers

Research about the concerns of teachers when implementing a curriculum has focused upon understanding the affective and behavioural responses of teachers to the demands they experience as they implement a new curriculum (Anderson 1997). For ‘the single most important factor in any …[implementation]… process is the people who will be most affected by the …[implementation]’ (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin and Hall 1998, p.29). The development of detailed Stages of Concern (Table 3.4, p.74) in the model developed by Hall and Loucks (1978) was based upon the conceptualisations proposed by Fuller (1969) about the concerns recently assigned teacher expressed in curriculum implementation about ‘self’, the ‘task’ of teaching and ‘impact’ of this teaching on students:

- **Concerns about Self:** In the early phase of curriculum implementation, teachers are concerned about surviving the stresses of teaching and gaining acceptance as a competent teacher from the Principal, their colleagues and students.

- **Concerns about the Task of Teaching:** After some experience with curriculum implementation, teachers begin to focus on the practicalities of teaching – ensuring access to instructional resources, developing a repertoire of strategies and seeking advice about improving their teaching from their colleagues.
• **Concerns about the Impact of their Teaching:** Later in the curriculum implementation phase, teachers become aware of the specific learning needs of their students and focus upon adapting their teaching strategies to meet these needs.

Fuller (1969) also distinguished between the categories of concerns for beginning and experienced teachers. She felt that concerns for self and tasks were more associated with beginning teachers whereas task and impact concerns were common to experienced teachers. Later, Fuller and Bown (1975) proposed that these differences in concerns reflected stages in the professional development of teachers (Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3 Stages of Teacher Development (after Fuller and Bown)**

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

(Source: Kallery 2004, p.148)

Reviews of the research literature related to these stages of development by Veenman (1984) and later, Dollase (1992) and Whittaker (2001), have supported the model advanced by Fuller. The approach used by Veenman (1984) was to assess the frequency with which certain specific concerns or problems arose for beginning teachers across 83 studies. He found that beginning teachers frequently perceived problems with discipline, engaging the learning of students, and catering for the needs of individual students (Whittaker 2001, p.4). Dollase (1992) took a different approach to the problems of
beginning teachers. The focus of the study was on the severity of the problems cited rather than the frequency of the problems. Individual needs and engaging students ranked second and third, while the demands on the time of the teacher ranked the highest (Whittaker 2001, p.4). The study of recently assigned teachers in Wisconsin by Whittaker (2001) also supported the above findings about the lack of time but found the ‘burden of clerical work’ and a ‘heavy teaching load resulting in insufficient preparation time’ (Whittaker 2001, p.9) were high on the list. In this study, the perceived demands of recently assigned RE teachers were investigated and some comparisons were made with these studies about classroom management, catering for the learning needs of students and the challenge of limited preparation time.

The later research background for CBAM was drawn from studies of teacher responses to curriculum innovations that were often externally imposed. The model addresses such things as identifying the possible degrees of concern expressed by teachers, their probable level of use in adopting curriculum materials and teaching practices and the degree to which facilitators may assist teachers through the implementation process. The strength of this model is that it is ‘descriptive and predictive, not prescriptive, of teacher attitudes and behaviours in the process of learning to use new classroom ideas, materials, and practices’ (Anderson 1997, p.333). The CBAM bases its understanding of the responses of teachers to changes in their teaching because of the implementation of a new curriculum on a number of assumptions:

(1) change is a process, not an event; (2) change is accomplished by individuals; (3) change is a highly personal experience; (4) change involves developmental growth in feelings and skills; and (5) change can be facilitated by interventions directed toward the individuals, innovations, and contexts involved.

(Anderson 1997, p.333)

Anderson understands the implementation of a curriculum as being a dynamic one. The experience of each teacher is unique and significant to the teacher. The process of coping and the concerns expressed are subjective and intertwined with the personal and professional formation of teachers. Such a subjective dynamic seemed to be a crucial part of how recently assigned RE teachers cope with implementing the new RE Units.
Stages of Concern

Table 3.4 describes the seven stages that teachers may proceed through as they implement a new curriculum. Teachers firstly become aware of the new curriculum and begin to develop concerns about how to implement the curriculum. Next, as they begin to put the curriculum into practice there is intensification in their concerns based on their own needs. They may respond by modifying the curriculum in ways to suit themselves and later, to their students. It is possible that teachers will then seek to placate their concerns by working collegially and re-evaluating the value of the new curriculum. Some studies of this model (Table 3.4) have suggested fewer stages, for example, Kember and Mezger (1990), Bailey and Palsha (1992). Other studies by Belgian and Dutch researchers raise questions as to whether the stages are so clear-cut (Anderson 1997, pp.342-343). Nonetheless, three categories of concerns of Fuller (1969) for self, the task, and impact on students remain relevant (pp.71-72).

Table 3.4 Stages of Concern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Concern</th>
<th>Description of Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 0 AWARENESS</td>
<td>Teachers have minimal background about the implementation of the new curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 INFORMATIONAL</td>
<td>Teachers become interested or directed in learning about the implementation of the new curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 PERSONAL</td>
<td>Teachers express anxiety regarding the pragmatics of the curriculum implementation and its impact upon themselves personally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3 MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>Teachers’ anxiety becomes more intense and they begin to manage the curriculum implementation on their own terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4 CONSEQUENCE</td>
<td>Teachers become concerned about the impact of the curriculum implementation upon the students; they begin to adapt the curriculum to suit perceived student needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5 COLLABORATION</td>
<td>Teachers turn to their professional colleagues for advice and support in modifying the curriculum implementation to suit perceived student needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6 REFOCUSBING</td>
<td>Teachers re-consider whether the curriculum implementation has value by pursuing, adapting, or rejecting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Anderson 1997, p.334)

Levels of Use and Innovation Configuration

The CBAM also proposes a Levels of Use schema (Table 3.5, p.75) that shows the degree to which teachers may use and become familiar with new curriculum materials. It
suggests that initially teachers decide what materials they will use and how they will use them. Much of the attention of the teachers is upon personal preparation and resourcing to placate their own concerns (Levels 0 to III). Next, the teachers possibly progress to a routine pattern of use before making key decisions about whether to continue using the materials in the same way or make changes in light of their perceptions about the needs of their students (Levels IVA and B). If they so choose, teachers may seek the collaboration of their colleagues to modify the curriculum materials and make some further decisions about how they will use the materials in the future (Levels V and VI).

Table 3.5 Levels of Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Use</th>
<th>Description of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 0 NON-USE</td>
<td>Teachers are unaware of or not using the curriculum materials available in the new curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level I ORIENTATION</td>
<td>Teachers discover what new curriculum materials are available in the new curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level II PREPARATION</td>
<td>Teachers become familiar with and prepare to use the new curriculum materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level III MECHANICAL</td>
<td>Teachers decide about their own course of action in using the new curriculum materials to suit their own personal needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level IVA ROUTINE</td>
<td>Teachers develop a routine pattern of use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level IVB REFINEMENT</td>
<td>Teachers may begin to consider how they use the new curriculum materials in respect to their students’ needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level V INTEGRATION</td>
<td>Teachers consult with their colleagues about supplementing or enhancing the new curriculum materials to suit the needs of their students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level VI RENEWAL</td>
<td>Teachers may seek to radically modify the new curriculum materials or seek alternatives to substitute the materials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Anderson 1997, p.335)

The way in which teachers implement the new curriculum was recognized to be variable among the teachers themselves. This led to the notion of innovation configurations (Anderson 1997, p.336) whereby the stage of concern and level of use represents a pattern of behaviour that is unique for each teacher. Some of these behaviour patterns may be judged by curriculum developers as desirable, while teachers themselves may interpret these patterns to be contrary to the way in which they wish to continue to implement the curriculum. Such perceptions were often related to the way in which
change facilitators (Anderson 1997, p.336) such as curriculum developers, school leaders and experienced teachers assisted or hindered teachers during the implementation process.

A number of studies have focussed more on the validity and reliability of the CBAM or its measuring instruments (for example, Bailey and Palsha 1992; Buhendwa 1996; Shotsberger and Crawford 1996; Cheung, Hattie and Ng 2001). The quest seemed to be more about accurate categorisation of the concerns of teachers rather than seeking to understand why teachers feel this way and how this insight may assist in teacher development:

Clearly, the need remains … for more systematic inquiry into the interactions between teacher concerns, mastery of use, and patterns of use in implementing a change over time. Research on factors affecting the arousal, resolution, and intensity of teacher concerns at different stages is minimal.

(Anderson 1997, pp.356-357)

It was the intention of this study to explore such factors of teacher concerns in greater depth. The categorisation of concerns, while interesting, was not necessarily useful to understanding more deeply how RARE teachers coped with the intense and, at times, traumatic experiences of implementing the draft PAREC into their classroom teaching.

Some researchers have applied CBAM to understanding teacher responses to curriculum implementation. Whereas Hall and Rutherford believed that ‘meaningful change is a process that takes time’ (1976, p.227), Christou, Eliophotou-Menon and Philippou (2004) found that it was not so much the time it took to implement a new curriculum but rather the way the teachers managed its implementation based on their years of teaching experience (concerns more related to the ‘task’ category). The anxieties of recently assigned teachers about the immediacy or exigency of implementation did decline over the years (Pigge and Marso 1998) but, more importantly it was the manner of coping with that exigency that teachers focused upon. In particular, Pigge and Marso (1998) found that while self concerns declined and task concerns increased, impact concerns remained steady and the most intense throughout curriculum implementation which was in contrast to the model proposed by Fuller (1969). As was to emerge in this study, these three areas of concern were not independent but interact with each other according to the
circumstances. The impact concerns of teachers are always present but the intensity of each concern may take longer to arise. As discussed in the next section: ‘Teachers as Moral Agents of Implementation’ (p.78), such concerns are a response to the subjective dimensions of curriculum implementation.

While Fuller (1969) based her research on data collected from survey and interviews, CBAM studies have tended to concentrate on using an inventory measurement instrument. As Anderson points out, this approach has tended to obscure the value of the viewpoint of the individual:

In practice, individual data are rarely reproduced in published CBAM studies. Stages of Concern data are typically reported by computing mean responses for all prospective users of an innovation in a school. These are displayed as concerns profiles for the school at different points in an implementation process. For Levels of Use and Innovation Configurations, the distribution of individual assessments is often described by the number and percentage of respondents for each level or configuration component variation.

(Anderson 1997, p.362)

In this study, the intention was to consider not only the perceptions of the cohort but also to include the possible insight of individuals as is consistent with qualitative research. The focus was on looking:

less for central tendencies, and more for the distribution and patterns and linkages between individual responses across the organization. This approach would lead us to a better understanding of the nature and extent of organizational change without losing sight of the individuals.

(Anderson 1997, p.363)

This view expressed by Anderson (1997) is especially relevant to the assertion by Manuel (2003) about how educators understand the professional lives of recently assigned teachers. Educators tend to rely on anecdotal evidence (as in the case of recently assigned RE teachers, Chapter 2, p.46) rather than allow these teachers to contribute their experiences directly:
How frequently do beginning [and other recently assigned] teachers have the opportunity to chronicle their emerging professional identities in ways that enable the wider profession not only to support them more fully, but also to learn from them in their ‘newness’?

(Manuel 2003, p.140).

In this study, by giving individuals such as recently assigned RE teachers a prominent ‘voice’ to relate their perceptions personally, a possibility existed for a clearer understanding of their situation to emerge.

Recently assigned teachers are initially enthusiastic but apprehensive about teaching their new assignments. Their focus is on trying to provide the best teaching experience from which their students may learn. As a result, implementation depends much upon the disposition or commitment of the teacher (Huberman 1988). Teachers are moral agents and this is an important element in curriculum implementation to be discussed in the next section.

3.4.3 Teachers as Moral Agents of Implementation

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

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

(Smith and Lovat 1991, pp.12–13)

An effective translation occurs when teachers, as a group, have a common understanding or shared knowledge about the curriculum (Keeves 1988, p.168). This translation of the curriculum is dependent upon the perceptions teachers have about the curriculum and, in turn, how they deal with its implementation. Even a packaged curriculum can have a profound personal impact on teachers (Montgomery and Way 1995). Teachers may become uncertain as to their role in the translation process, whether they are technicians delivering the curriculum as recommended or whether they were experts in implementing the curriculum as they saw fit.
The translation of new curriculum documents during an implementation process at the classroom level does involve ‘learning how to do something new’ (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992, p.1). This learning process on the part of teachers is also a part of their professional development (Little 1992, p.170). As a result, there are three dimensions considered to be important when studying curriculum implementation at the classroom level (emphasis in italics by Fullan):

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

(Fullan 2001, p.39)

The process of implementation depends on how these dimensions effect the understandings and teaching practice of teachers. Fullan believes that changes in teaching practice along the three dimensions described above are ‘critical for the simple reason that it is the means [his italics] of accomplishing desired objectives’ (2001, p.70).

The model suggested by Fullan (2001) highlights the importance of translation processes involved in curriculum implementation at the local school level. Such translation processes base themselves upon the notion that teachers are moral change agents. Furthermore, teachers may perceive they are caught in a professional conundrum (Fullan 2001, pp.39-40). Should teachers implement the curriculum as advised by the curriculum developers (fidelity perspective) or should they implement and modify the curriculum as they see fit (mutual-adaptation perspective)? Teachers may perceive such a dilemma as a challenge to their efficacy and reduce their enthusiasm for teaching the subject.

Teachers make decisions about how they implement a curriculum based on what is best educationally and professionally for their students. However, they do not necessarily make these decisions collectively nor do they perceive the same reality about curriculum implementation:
it is *individuals* [author’s emphasis] who have to develop new meaning, and these individuals are insignificant parts of a gigantic, loosely organised, complex, messy social system that contains myriad different subjective worlds.

(Fullan 2001, 1992)

Therefore, an in-depth understanding of these individual perceptions about curriculum implementation is crucial. By studying the subjective realities of teachers implementing a curriculum, it may be possible to ascertain certain patterns of behaviour that shed light on how to address the personal and professional stresses on teachers. Such a study was the intent of this research project in how recently assigned RE teachers coped with the demands of implementing the PAREC.

Hargreaves (1997) takes the subjective reality of implementing a curriculum a step further and suggests this perception reflects the emotional dimension of teaching or the ‘passion’. Durka defines passion for teaching as the ‘power of possibility’ (2005, p.5). Those teachers who continued to teach seemed to respond to a ‘calling’ or vocation to teach even when the benefits of continuing to do so may not be apparent:

> teachers remember the passions that led them to become [teachers], and they do not want to lose the primal energy of their vocation. They affirm their deep caring for the lives of students, and they do not want to disconnect from the young. They understand the identity and integrity that they have invested in teaching, and they want to re-invest, even if it pays no institutional interest or dividends.

(Palmer 1998, pp.170-171)

Palmer (1998, p.4) suggests that in addition to the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of teaching, as suggested by Fullan (2001), there is a fourth more significant dimension to take into account, that is the personal sense of self or spirituality of the teacher. Spirituality is defined in this context as ‘… the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos’ (Palmer 2004). This spirituality of the teacher finds expression through the efficacy or self-confidence of the teacher (p.87). It refers to how teachers relate to how they see themselves as a teacher and their relationship with others in their immediate learning community as well as to the subject matter. As Palmer (1998, p.10) states ‘… good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.’ This love for teaching students is a
highly prized professional attribute that sustains teachers through the demands of classroom teaching (Vallance 2003, p.255). This ‘primal energy’ (Palmer 1998, p.170) is expressed intellectually, emotionally and spiritually for the benefit of students. Without a positive outlook to these three inner aspects, teachers questioned themselves about their identity and integrity. Consequently, teachers may experience ‘burnout’ that is, ‘…the culmination of a progressive disillusionment and lack of efficacy in which early enthusiasm and dedication ultimately yield to depletion and a loss of caring’ (Evans 1996, p.95). Energy levels of teachers will continue to wane unless there are personal and professional supports available from the school and the wider education system (Treston 1997, p.69). Furthermore, if teachers continued to teach without a positive outlook then they are in danger of harming themselves and their students (Palmer 1998). On the other hand, those teachers who have the authenticity and integrity to teach the truth derive great benefits:

when we are unfaithful to the inward teacher and to the community of truth, we do lamentable damage to ourselves, to our students, and to the great things of the world that our knowledge holds in trust.

… If you are faithfully with us, you are bringing abundant blessing. It is a blessing known to generations of students whose lives have been transformed by people who have the courage to teach – the courage to teach from the most truthful places in the landscape of self and world, the courage to invite students to discover, explore, and inhabit those places in the living of their own lives.

(Palmer, 1998, p.183)

A number of studies have focused on the first dimension of implementation suggested by Fullan (2001) – the provision of instructional resources to assist teachers in implementing a new curriculum and reducing the workload stress of teachers. The publication of curriculum materials as day-to-day resources for teachers to use in their teaching practice is a traditional method of curriculum implementation. Rather than leave the hunt for curriculum materials to teachers, professional curriculum writers provided teachers with content background, generic teaching and learning programs, and a textbook for direct classroom use. One issue to emerge from this approach is how well teachers are able to contextualise the use of resources such as texts in their teaching.
Teachers may misunderstand or overly simplify the manner in which they use these resources (Fullan 2001, p.77). The other issue is the quality and usefulness of the resources themselves, especially if they are the cornerstone to the curriculum implementation. Teachers may feel reluctant to use them or become cynical about their practicality if these resources do not satisfy the perceived needs of the teachers (Fullan 2001, p.79). The process of curriculum implementation becomes less onerous when quality resources are available and their use is explained carefully to teachers, as Fullan concludes:

> you get farther, faster by producing quality materials and establishing a highly interactive infrastructure of pressure and support. Finally, the materials do not have to be treated as prescriptive. Many judgements can and should be make [sic] during implementation as long as they are based on evidence linking teacher practices with student performance.

(2000, pp.23-24)

This conclusion about the implementation process may be optimistic in comparison to research studies into the introduction of new curricula. For example, this relationship between feeling more comfortable in teaching and exploiting new curriculum materials was observed by Harper and Maheady (1991, p.356) in their study of 407 teachers implementing a new Reading and Arts language program. Correspondingly, Givens (2000) conducted a small in-depth case study into how two teachers accessed new, commercially available curriculum materials in the Design and Learning Technology Area of the National Curriculum in England and Wales. The teachers selected a narrow range of strategies and, initially, overly relied on the text that was available to them. In another small in-depth case study, Grossman and Thompson (2004) investigated how three new secondary English teachers made use of curriculum materials in their teaching. They also found similar results to Givens (2000) – these teachers drew upon a range of materials and strategies that they followed initially very closely. However, as they gained more experience they became more critical of the materials and developed a greater confidence in adapting these materials and strategies.

In Religious Education, similar findings have emerged. The changes intended by the implementation of a new RE curriculum may not take place, even with the offering of resources and support, because teachers would adapt these to their own understanding of
teaching practice (Malone 1987, p.144). As a result, teachers could teach the curriculum in ways not originally intended by the curriculum writers. Hendry (1996, p.23) agrees with Malone that teachers may generate different meanings that were not intended by the curriculum writers. However, he believes that teachers understand a curriculum based on their existing knowledge and beliefs that include ideas about the world, and the processes of how they themselves teach and learn. The understandings teachers have about the implementation of curriculum documents depend upon the level of professional development these teachers possess in making decisions about the resources and strategies to use in the classroom.

Another study investigated how teachers used different strategies to achieve particular aims of RE in the Model Syllabuses of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) in Britain (Astley, Francis, Burton and Wilcox 1997). In contrast to Malone, Astley et al (1997) expressed a more positive view in tune with the suggestions of Hendry. They believed there was an interplay between the theoretical aims of a subject and ‘particular educational methods and strategies for achieving those aims’ (Astley et al 1997, p.171). These researchers pointed out that ‘RE teachers employ their professional judgement’ in how they implement the specific aims of a curriculum by choosing a wide and appropriate range of teaching practices (Astley et al 1997, p.173).

The views expressed by these researchers (Malone 1987; Fullan and Hargreaves 1992; Little 1992; Hendry 1996; Astley et al 1997; Hall 1997; Fullan 2001) suggest that the accessibility of curriculum documents and the empowering of teachers to make appropriate decisions are crucial to the implementation process of the curriculum. The implementation process is dependent upon the actions and decisions teachers make (Fullan 2001, p.115) in response to their concerns about the new curriculum. These actions and decisions depend upon the perceptions teachers have about the curriculum materials, teaching approach and beliefs about the curriculum. Furthermore, teachers prefer to learn through their experiences of curriculum implementation rather than through authoritative instruction. Therefore, implementation and appreciation for this implementation takes time (Fullan 2001, pp.79-80). Teachers need time to adjust cognitively and emotionally to the new tasks set upon them. Their pre-conceived ideas about how to teach need a period of adjustment to be married with the new curriculum.
principles presented to them (Evans 1996, p.60). This adjustment period as a part of curriculum implementation is crucial because:

When we seek genuine commitment and changes in belief, the people doing the changing…are in control of the transformation. This is particularly true when the ultimate goal…is to affect not just teacher’s behaviour but the very ways they think….

(Evans, 1996, p.61)

To examine how the actions, decisions, and perceptions of RARE teachers changed with the experience of implementation, a longitudinal study of the impact of a curriculum implementation on these teachers seemed appropriate.

Accessibility to resources is not the only factor that influences the implementation process. Prior training, teacher attitudes, and professional support may also be important factors at this level. Bezzina, Chesterton, Johnston, and Sanber (1993) conducted a study to investigate how RE teachers implemented evaluation processes which is also an important aspect of school-based curriculum development. Their study found discrepancies between what the curriculum writers advocated in the Sydney Archdiocesan RE Guidelines for secondary schools: Faithful to God: Faithful to People and the actual practice of RE teachers:

We see a group of teachers, for whom religious education has not been a major part of their training, making efforts to evaluate a subject which is not a major part of their teaching load. The evaluation practices in which they engage are largely subjective, are influenced by personalities rather than policy, and by methodologies of the other subjects taught.

(Bezzina et al 1993, p.112).

The discrepancies in evaluation practices also seemed to be the result of a lack of teacher formation. Compounding this lack of teacher formation is the extended preparation of school programs and the reduced classroom contact time teachers have with students. This study also sought to explore whether or not teacher formation influenced how recently assigned RE teachers coped with teaching RE as they implemented the Perth Archdiocesan RE Course.
3.3.4 Summary: Curriculum Implementation

Understanding the perceptions teachers have about the implementation of curriculum is important to the success of that implementation, especially their concerns and their responses to the demands placed upon them. Fuller (1969) suggests that the concerns teachers express often focus on their own immediate concerns (self-concerns), concerns about the way they teach (task concerns) and the effect the implementation has on the students (impact concerns). These categories of concerns emerge over time as teachers gain more experience in teaching the curriculum.

Teachers generally want to improve their teaching and to improve the learning outcomes of their students. During the process of implementation there needs to be an extended interlude for teachers to adjust to their new circumstances. As a result, their concerns may become more altruistic and their attention focuses on changing or improving their use of instructional resources, their repertoire of teaching strategies and their beliefs about the underlying curriculum principles (Fullan 2001). One significant phase is the level of use in instructional resources such as textbooks among teachers. Initially, the use of recommended resources is overly stringent but as teachers gain further experience and confidence, the level of use of these resources diminishes. Teachers begin to embark upon developing their own resources based upon a growing appreciation of new teaching approaches and understandings of the underlying curriculum principles.

However, the translation of the curriculum by teachers may not match the intention of the curriculum developers. Additionally, curriculum developers cannot rely on anecdotal evidence to provide a sound basis as to how teachers implement a curriculum. Rather, the gathering of evidence needed to be not only about the concerns of teachers but also about how each teacher responded to the intense demands of implementing a new curriculum. Evidence was needed also about how the demands of implementation affected teachers professionally and personally. The character or mettle of teachers is tested by curriculum implementation and they may become emotionally and spiritually exhausted. As a result, the formative experiences of teachers are crucial to developing the efficacy and character of teachers as they implement a curriculum with which they are unfamiliar and lack expertise. Such experiences are the focus of the next section.
3.5 Formative Experience of RARE Teachers

The demands of curriculum implementation on teachers are a part of the teaching experience (Huberman 1983). It is what teachers are trained to do; however, the degree of intensity is what most concerns the teachers. These concerns arise out of demands that exert what Huberman calls the ‘classroom press’ (Fullan 2001, p.33). The intensity of the press they feel may be due to pressures such as the immediacy and spontaneity of delivering lessons; catering for a multitude of educational needs; adapting to the unpredictable nature of teaching; and, developing a friendly and meaningful rapport with students (Huberman 1983, pp.482-483). The responses to these pressures are possible feelings of isolation, exhaustion, limited opportunities for reflection and a myopic view of classroom teaching (Fullan 2001, p.33). Furthermore, there is a danger in assuming the achievement of competence with professional formation (Wragg et al 2000, p.4). The definitions of the term competence is largely confined to a narrow range of teaching skills but what were demanded of teachers were a broader range of interpersonal skills and a deeper knowledge of the concepts and values of their subject. Inexperienced teachers may develop the skills of teaching Religious Education but may not develop a coherent knowledge or understanding of the theological and pedagogical principles underlying the learning area (Engebretson 1997).

A negative view of work stress need not override the value of having demands placed on teachers due to curriculum implementation. Curriculum implementation is worthwhile when teachers feel they have the support of their colleagues and their school communities. Manageable pressure and professional support go together (Fullan 2001, p.92). However, teacher workloads over the past 25 years have increased (Fullan 2001, pp.118-123) and the stress of daily classroom teaching has intensified, reducing the time to relax, reflect and re-energise creating a poorer teaching and learning environment (Hargreaves 1994, pp.118-119). Therefore, if teachers were experiencing these pressures on a daily basis, then the introduction of an unfamiliar curriculum would heighten their concerns about the additional pressures placed upon them. Furthermore, if teachers do not possess the professional expertise or support to implement a new curriculum adequately, then the demands would be felt more intensely.
Another important factor to their formative experience was the attitude of recently appointed teachers towards their posting to a new learning area. Teachers who had a positive disposition towards their teaching (called teacher efficacy, p.80) were more inclined to face challenges in their teaching and to take greater responsibility for student learning (Ross 1995). A begrudging teacher did not feel that any further learning would be of assistance to their ability to cope in the classroom (Kallery 2004, p.170). This negative disposition meant that the depth of knowledge and quality of instruction would be poorer, giving rise to further difficulties with disengaged or disruptive students (Kallery 2004, p.162).

Rather than discuss the achievement of outcomes as emphasised in other learning areas, RE teachers tend to talk about their teaching in terms such as ‘formation’ and ‘spiritual development’ of the students (English 2000). However, to have both the responsibility for imparting the content of Religious Education and for the personal formation of their students is a significant burden, particularly when there is a lack of collegial support:

Unwittingly, religious educators in denominational schools have assumed the major responsibility to provide the essential formational and informational basis in religious education for youth. They are expected to subscribe to the teachings of their denomination and communicate these teachings to others, despite the perceived lack of support.

(English 2000 p.169)

The demands on the commitment and professionalism of the teacher had increased over the nineties (p.65). Yet, at the same time, there were an increasing number of lay teachers becoming involved in teaching RE (Figure 2.2, p.44), especially recently assigned RE teachers who made up a significant proportion of the RE teaching profession (Table 4.1, p.141).

Groome, writing the Foreword to A New Vision of Religious Education by Treston (1993), remarked that most RE teachers actively seek to develop their pedagogical content knowledge in Religious Education. They also recognise it is their own personal faith and professional commitment to the subject that makes them highly effective (and by inference, a teacher who wishes to continue to teach RE as part of their teaching career):
Effective religion teachers do not depend primarily on their professional expertise or their knowledge of content and methods, important as these may be. They depend most on their own appropriation of Christian faith as their personal vocation and call to holiness of life. This “owned” faith commitment must permeate their content and methods if their teaching is to be integral and effective. … It is the personal faith of educators when woven throughout their curriculum (content, method, and environment), their spirituality as teachers if you will, that most shapes what happens at the core of intentional faith education. Such integration and integrity, in turn, point to the need for holistic and ongoing formation of our … teachers.  

(Groome in Treston 1993, Foreword, p.vi)

Through a holistic and ongoing formation, teachers have the opportunity to become authentic religious educators, to become leaders or role models to their students. These teachers are able to ‘build their practice outward from their core commitments rather than inward from a management text’ (Evans 1996, p.193). Regrettably, there is the possibility that enthusiastic, recently assigned RE teachers could lose their love for the discipline because of a lack of deeper commitment. Some teachers saw their RE teaching assignment as something to make up their workload:

it is unfortunate that in the eyes of many of the RECs [Religious Education Coordinators] interviewed in my research, some RE teachers find their rationale for teaching the subject not from love of the discipline but in finding a convenient ‘filler’ to make up a teaching allotment. This attitude makes professional development of RE teachers very difficult.  

(Rymarz 1999b, p.51)

What was to emerge in this study was the apparent need for recently assigned RE teachers to develop greater self-confidence both personally and professionally. This confidence was crucial in facing the exigencies of implementing the PAREC. This teacher efficacy constitutes ‘the realization of one's self-judgments and capabilities to create and organize instruction that motivate student learning’ (Onafowora 2004, p.36). Feelings of efficacy were important to how teachers coped with the demands of curriculum implementation. The experiences of teaching and professional development contribute significantly to such feelings:
Whether the early years of teaching are a time of constructive learning or a period of coping, adjustment and survival depends largely on the working conditions and culture of teaching that new teachers encounter. (Feiman-Nemser 2003, p.27)

Unfortunately, for many recently appointed teachers, formative experiences come under duress. They may be ‘constantly exposed to feedback about their functioning and personality, from the school establishment, their colleagues, the learners and their parents…’ (Shoham, Penso, and Shiloah 2003, p.195). In this section, the review concentrates on studies that have called for firstly, a professional formation in content and method that is relevant to the needs of teachers and collegial in nature. Secondly, for further consideration of the importance of religious and spiritual formation for RARE teachers and thirdly, the role of mentoring and other support programs in assisting teachers with coping with the demands of curriculum implementation.

3.5.1 Professional Formation in Content and Method

Shulman (1986) proposed that teachers are required to possess three key understandings about their teaching: content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge. Teachers need to know their subject matter (content knowledge) and how to teach (general pedagogical knowledge) and, importantly, to integrate these two domains (pedagogical content knowledge). There are four components to pedagogical content knowledge: an understanding and appreciation for the purpose of the learning area, an understanding and appreciation for the perceptions students have about the learning area, an understanding of curriculum principles and knowledge of a wide range of teaching strategies (Grossman 1990). It is concerning these components that teachers find themselves seeking further professional development.

When pressures to change how and what to teach confront teachers, then the key for this change to occur is a consequence of professional development opportunities. However, the types of opportunities available to teachers have come under severe criticism:
traditional approaches to professional development, such as short workshops or conference attendance, do foster teachers’ awareness or interest in deepening their knowledge and skills. However, these approaches to professional development appear insufficient to foster learning which fundamentally alters what teachers teach or how they teach.

… For the majority of teachers, professional development appears to be still characterized by fragmented ‘one-shot’ workshops at which they listen passively to ‘experts’ and learn about topics not essential to teaching.

(Boyle, While and Boyle 2004, p.47)

Nor do pre-packaged materials suffice to compensate for the lack of professional competence. For example, Appleton and Kindt make this warning in relation to primary teachers with inadequate science backgrounds:

An approach which relies on activities that work, where the teacher hopes that activities will inherently “teach” those engaged in them, appears to be a distortion of discovery learning. There seems to be the assumption that if the activity is any good then students will learn whatever it is the activity is about, simply by doing it. Texts and curriculum materials which respond to this teacher-need without providing appropriate background knowledge of how the activities fit into a broader science conceptual map are a modern version of the “teacher-proof” curriculum programs which emerged during the 1960s.

(1999, p.8)

Furthermore, this positivist approach whereby students learn that by ‘doing’, where answers always emerge through experimentation, may be antagonistic towards a constructivist philosophy of education. This may undermine more open-ended, problem-centred, inquiry approaches (Appleton and Kindt 1999, p.8) that allow for an appreciation of the mystery, wonder, and beauty of the world around them.

If there are to be changes in the ways teachers teach, then other professional development opportunities need investigation. These opportunities need to be characterised by a longer duration of time (Boyle et al 2004, p.47) at a more localised level as teachers adjust to the curriculum demands (Evans 1996). Grodsky and Gameron (2003, p.1) concluded that the best form of professional development was that held within the school because it had the added benefit of teachers being able to consult with their colleagues (called onsite mentoring, p.109). Furthermore, it can be more relevant to
teacher learning because it can relate to their specific school situation (King and Newmann 2000, p.576). As Grossman, Wineberg, and Woolworth recommend:

> We argue, therefore, for a vision of professional community that is located in the workplace, offering the possibility of individual transformation as well as the transformation of the social settings in which individuals work.

(2001, p.948)

However, rather than teachers collaborating with each other within the school, there was also the need to ‘network’ or establish cooperation with teachers in other schools (King and Newmann 2000, p.576). It is within these professional networks that experts and curriculum developers needed to work to support teachers. New teachers want firstly, to see good teaching in action and secondly, to discuss with experienced teachers (mentors) how they taught (Gilbert 2005, p.36). High stress factors were ‘time pressures, paper work and non-instructional meetings’ (Gilbert 2005, p.38).

Recently appointed teachers do not have a clear understanding of the principles of teaching and ‘tend to be less sure of how their ideology compares with that of others’ (Marlow et al 1997). They may fear that their ideas may be rejected by others and so develop a greater sense of isolation and insecurity. Reynolds goes further to warn that:

> teachers who do not have a deep and broad understanding of teaching in all its facets may be causing serious educational harm to students. …Guiding the redesign of professional development programs must be a map of the progression from novice to accomplished teacher that is grounded in a well-defined conceptual framework of teaching. Also aiding the redesign should be a plan for monitoring the competence of prospective teachers along the route to licensure.

(1995, pp.218-219)

Yet, the struggles of recently assigned teachers in facing the demands placed on them may be a contributing part to the making of excellent teachers:
One does not start out teaching in possession of all the fully developed qualities of a fine teacher. With experience and self-knowledge, however, these qualities grow and ripen; and after having felt intimidated by the demands of teaching and often discouraged by the dimensions and responsibilities of the work, one can come close to mastering its challenges and become a teacher in the fullest sense of the word.

(Banner and Cannon 1997, p.6)

The recognition that the recently assigned teacher still needs time to develop is not new. Banner and Cannon make the point above that it is precisely the years of teaching experience (with all its successes and failures) and an authentic integrated identity that make a better teacher. As Angelico notes:

This also points to the need for teachers who are confident in their own knowledge and understanding of the subject and whose personal commitment could enhance their teaching, thus enabling them to comfortably handle difficult issues.

(Angelico 1997, p.83)

Recently assigned teachers shared with all teachers the challenge of ensuring effective instruction and classroom management. How well they managed this fundamental demand formed their confidence to teach. It is a cornerstone trait in becoming ‘highly effective teachers’ (McEwan 2002, p.51). This effectiveness depends upon the capacity of teachers to learn. Arends (1983, p.235) found ‘that the most competent teachers were those who were avid learners’ and that they ‘use a substantial amount of time in learning/attending PD’ (Arends 1983, p.241). Recently appointed teachers begin with a ‘limited repertoire of instructional strategies’ (Freiberg 2002, p.56), but this situation changes when formation is encouraged in four ways through (emphasis in italics by the authors):

(a) *personal experience*, where an individual is consistently challenged by a range of task demands differing in the number and degree of difficulty; (b) *direct experience*, defined as on-the-job training under the supervision of an expert tutor or mentor;
(c) manufactured experience, in which an individual sharpens his or her perceptual abilities through simulations or role playing; and (d) vicarious experience, defined as the opportunity to read or visualize a complex task and asked to highlight the difficulties and problems encountered within the scenario and propose working solutions.  

(Klein and Hoffman 1993, p.215)

Personal experience plays a significant part in the professional formation of the teacher (Littleton and Littleton 2005). The day-to-day experience of teaching is a challenging one and, if taken in the right perspective, can lead to professional growth. On the other hand, experiences may lead to frustration and resentment causing stress and disenchantment in the teacher. Prolonged disenchantment may cause the teacher to leave the profession or become bitter or cynical about teaching. Flores (2003) found in her study of 14 beginning teachers that almost two-thirds of them experienced a loss of idealism within two years of teaching. However, she also found that while these teachers had become compliant and negative, the remaining teachers were dedicated and keen. These differences seemed to be focused upon personal dispositions towards teaching, the support the teachers received both personally and professionally and the nature of the teaching experience (Flores 2003 pp.23-24).

The value of the teaching experience itself can aid the formation of the teacher both professionally and personally (English 2000; Onafowora 2004, p.34). Such experiences occur over a lengthy period in different teaching situations:

Pedagogical experiences that contribute to the development of meaningful patterns about teaching, valuing and organizing information, retrieving information, and knowing when to use the information take place over time in diverse classroom settings.  

(Onafowora 2004 p.36)

This duration of actual classroom teaching allows recently assigned teachers to develop their pedagogical content knowledge and their skills in teaching. Such informal learning was an important contributor to the professional development of new teachers (Williams 2003). Yet, to rely on this incidental formation has its limitations and costs (English 2000). While professional competence in some cognitive aspects is acquired quickly, other affective aspects need a longer time to develop, perhaps several years such as the
efficacy or self-confidence of teachers (Onafowora 2004, pp.34-36). Throughout this chapter a number of studies have been cited regarding the significance of teacher efficacy (for example, pp.60, 63 and 87). Kieffer and Henson (2000) have developed a measurement tool to gauge the self-efficacy of teachers based on social learning theory. When there are intense curriculum demands placed upon teachers new to teaching a learning area, there are repercussions for the self-confidence of teachers. Penso (2002) suggests that the capacity of recently assigned teachers to reflect and act upon these demands is reduced and most of their time and energy is devoted towards surviving. In the area of Religious Education, the study by Engebretson (1997) of RE teachers and their need to have an understanding of an RE theoretical framework parallels this research (p.86).

The quality of professional formation, according to Boys (1989), influenced how the teachers implemented the RE curriculum. In her view, the catalytic role of the RE teacher was to make the Traditions of the Church accessible in such a way as to allow the students to be transformed towards a deeper level of faith (Boys 1989, p.203). The onus, then, was on the teacher to contend with the demands of teaching RE through:

- painstaking preparation, reflective practice, judicious analysis, and systematic evaluation. Talent and discipline, inspiration and deliberations combine. Both know-how [to teach RE] and knowledge [of the Church’s tradition] are required.  
  (Boys 1989, p.208)

Teachers were also responsible for developing critical thinking about beliefs within their students rather than stress only the transmission of beliefs (Boys 1989, p.210). However, such a responsibility seemed to be beyond many RE teachers. In his review of teaching styles in English schools, Hyde (1990) found that critical thinking would be the least likely skill promoted in Religious Education. The predominant teaching style in RE was passive and focused on the transmission of knowledge rather than the need of students for self-understanding, meaning, or values. ‘Knowledge was indeed acquired, but few [students] saw any use for it in the future’ (Hyde 1990, p.142). The consequent difficulties teachers faced in teaching disinterested students were not because of a lack of resources but rather limitations in their professional formation.
English (1999) took the discussion of the limitations of teacher formation a step further. In her study of RE teachers in Newfoundland, Canada, she concluded that teachers needed to have a proper religious formation. She believed that in order for teachers to have credibility with students they ‘… will have to be people who experience in their own lives that the religious journey makes a profound difference to them’ (English 1999, p.10). Teaching RE demanded a deep personal faith commitment that needed nurturing and reflection. RE teaching also required teachers to develop a strong conviction for teaching based on contemplation:

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\text{conviction about the holiness and power of teaching is the fruit of having spent time contemplating teaching from the inside, and thus beholding its inner nature. It is important that teachers, also take time to sit with this call to teaching, and allow its holiness and power to unfold in their lives. It is only a vision of teaching that sees itself from the inside that can inspire teachers in the face of daily pressures. (Manning 1992, p.8)}
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Longitudinal studies by Flynn (1975, 1979, 1985, 1993 and with Mok 2002) have highlighted the importance of committed teachers to students in their charge. However, there was an apparent decline in the religious influence of teachers on students over the last two decades (Flynn and Mok 2002). Coincidentally, lay Catholic teachers had been increasingly responsible for teaching RE over this time. While accepting that the decline in religious influence was a part of a Church-wide problem, Flynn and Mok believe that these teachers needed to have further professional and faith formation for the sake of the proper religious development of their students.

In relation to novice RE teachers, Engebretson (1997) conducted research between 1991 and 1995 about professional formation issues related to teacher education in Religious Education. She found that these teachers needed to be able to translate a ‘coherent and appropriate theory of Religious Education’ into the classroom situation; to be well acquainted with the content; to have the competence to plan lessons suited to the backgrounds of the students, and, to access professional support (Engebretson 1997, p.17). The data that emerged from her interviews suggested that the first of these four issues was crucial to how RE teachers taught because:
poor Religious Education results when the teacher is working in
a theoretical vacuum, or working from an inappropriate theory of
Religious Education. Indeed, not only poor Religious Education,
but disillusionment, disappointment and frustration are evident
when teachers tell stories about their practice.

(Engebretson 1997, p.18)

These stories illustrated the loss of personal confidence because of a lack of appropriate
teacher formation. Engebretson (1997) tracked her interviewees to see how they
responded to their initial teaching experiences. Those teachers who did not have the
flexibility to reconsider their understanding about the nature and purposes of RE were
least likely to continue to teach in the learning area.

Recently assigned RE (RARE) teachers begin with preconceived ideas about the
purposes of RE but quickly find that these preconceptions are inadequate or unrealistic
(Engebretson 1997). This situation leads to difficulties in coping with the demands of
teaching Religious Education. The teachers become perplexed with the seemingly
competing demands of the theory and practice of RE teaching (Engebretson 1997, p.19).
The lack of understanding among recently assigned teachers about the curriculum
principles underlying the RE curriculum echoes the findings described by Marlow et al

The successes or failures of RARE teachers in coping with the pressures of teaching RE
appear to be the result of a poor understanding of the theory of RE – an understanding of
the pedagogical and theological principles that underlie the Course (Engebretson 1997).
The combination of professional naivety and rigidity, coupled with inexperience, leads
to teacher frustration and dissatisfaction. As a result, recently assigned RE teachers
would quit teaching RE (Engebreston 1997, p.19). It is possible that the experience of
teachers adjusting to the demands of RE curriculum implementation parallels the issue
raised by Evans (1996) and needs further recognition and scrutiny (pp.83-84).

Other countries also have highlighted the problem of teaching a subject like Religious
Education without adequate professional formation for teachers. A survey of RE
teachers in 68 Catholic secondary schools in England and Wales found that 37% of
teachers who were ‘assisting with Religious Education’ taught RE as part of their minor
teaching load. Many of these assisting teachers lacked the Certificate of Religious
Education (CRE) required to teach RE in a Catholic school. The Certificate was a mandatory professional award undertaken through Diocesan inservices similar to the Accreditation to Teach RE inservice component in Western Australia. In addition, among teachers who taught RE as their main specialist area, 33.3% of these teachers had no RE tertiary qualifications and 15.7% had only the CRE. This meant that 49% of these specialist RE teachers did not have a specific RE qualification. A major recommendation was that such a situation needed urgent attention if RE were to remain an essential element of what made a secondary school ‘Catholic’ (Hanlon 1989, p.154).

Rather than highlight the deficiencies in professional formation, some studies have focused upon identifying the qualities teachers need to become good RE teachers Rymarz (1998). These RE teachers have the ability to dialogue in a ‘purposeful conversation’ with students, a justified means to a good end Rymarz (1998, p.11). By relating with students in sincere ways, it would be possible for teachers to hear the deeper questions and concerns students bring forward. Good RE teachers were able to answer student questions as they arose and viewed curriculum materials as one among other means (such as, collegial exchange and further professional development) of learning a wide range of topics quickly (Rymarz 1999b). They were RE teachers who were conversant in:

areas such as personal development, history, dogmatic theology and spiritual development. A good RE teacher should be familiar with many of these areas and be able to relate them to the developmental level of students in an engaging and interesting manner.

(Rymarz 1999b, p.48)

This array of knowledge, that recently assigned RE teachers required, was the ‘content knowledge’ of Religious Education (Rymarz 1999b, p.49). The term referred to how much teachers developed their background knowledge of or close familiarity with concepts and topics they taught in their learning area. Adjunct to familiarity with the content was the importance of teaching experience. Teaching experience was the means by which teachers developed the pedagogical skills of teaching RE in the classroom (Rymarz 1999b). These were skills that teachers trained for initially in their major learning areas as well as the teaching skills that are specific to Religious Education.
These advanced teaching skills assisted the RE teacher to transform the content in ways that met the learning needs of students (Rymarz 1999b, p.49). Rymarz (1999b) applied the term ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ to refer to this ability of the teacher to make the content relevant to the learning needs of the students. However, there are specialist skills that need to be learned either beforehand or through professional development. In the case of use of Scripture, Hartley (1999) suggests that RE teachers should have tertiary training in the critical study of the Bible. Teachers need to have opportunities to learn the various methodologies used in Biblical interpretation and be able to apply them in the classroom. When teachers do not use Scripture because they have a lack of knowledge and understanding of Scripture, they also have a lack of confidence in using critical method skills (Stead in de Souza 2005, p.66). Therefore, the confidence to use Scripture was dependent upon the personal appreciation of the Word of God of the teacher rather than the provision of Scripture-based materials (Stead 1994). Likewise the importance of using creative arts in RE has come under review, for the arts are a ‘…critically engaging teaching tool … [and] … greatly enhance text-book based curriculum approaches’ (Goldberg in de Souza 2005, p.67). Teachers require specialist skills in cognitive and affective aspects of the RE curriculum which are linked inexorably with their personal and professional commitment.

There seems to be a consistency between the findings of these religious educators in eastern Australia and elsewhere and the emerging difficulties reported by Catholic Secondary Principals in WA about the capacity of recently assigned RE teachers to access curriculum materials. As noted by Bezzina et al (1993, p.102), the assumption that a school-based curriculum development model was beneficial to the professional formation of teachers was flawed. Even if given adequate resources and professional support, RE Coordinators and other experienced RE teachers were not able to develop quality school RE programs from Diocesan RE Guidelines (Malone 1987 and 1988). In turn, these school-based programs became inaccessible to less experienced and less qualified RE personnel as part of their classroom teaching. This situation also emerged in Western Australia where PAGRE documents have not been accessible to recently assigned teachers because these teachers did not possess sufficient professional formation. Malone (1988), the CSPAWA (1992), Bezzina et al (1993), Crotty et al
(1995) and the Director of RE in Western Australia (1996b) have recognised that the extent of professional formation among RE teachers is critical for teaching RE at the classroom level. Since 1993, the CEOWA has actively pursued a policy that RE teachers possess a mandatory professional certification to teach RE in a Catholic school. This certification was later called ‘Accreditation to Teach Religious Education’ (CEOWA 1997c, pp.10–11). This accreditation also encouraged RE teachers to seek opportunities for further personal religious and spiritual development. Such formative experiences are the focus of the next section: ‘Religious and Spiritual Formation in Character and Witness’.

### 3.5.2 Religious and Spiritual Formation in Character and Witness

New teachers come to realise that teaching entails character formation, not just for the students but also for themselves (Banner and Cannon 1997). Teaching requires not only imparting knowledge but also strength of character and wisdom. It requires great effort because it places demands for ‘moral and human responsibilities’ on teachers that surpass other vocations (Banner and Cannon 1997, p.6). In 1996, just prior to the implementation of the draft PAREC, the WA Director of Religious Education announced to Principals, RE Coordinators and RE teachers that:

> all the strategies in the world will fail unless we keep trying to deepen our personal conversion to Christ. Otherwise we cannot be effective … [educators] … to those we are trying to teach. We will be less successful if we do not pray explicitly for our students, especially resistant ones. We need too to place troubles we face before God during every Eucharist. Most of all, we need to be striving as best we can as Christ taught. Personal witness is essential…. Without witness, we are selling our students short.

(Holohan, 1996b, p.9)

Such an announcement is compatible with the thoughts of Pope Paul VI on the value of an active faith witness in Evangelisation for:
Modern man [sic] listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he [sic] does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.

(Paul VI 1975, par.41)

As a result, the qualities of character and witness Catholic educators are to develop in conjunction with their professional formation reflect established precedents from the Congregation of Catholic Education (CCE):

The norms of the local bishop should be faithfully followed in everything that has to do with their own theological and pedagogical formation, and also in the course syllabi; and they should remember that, in this area above all, life witness and an intensely lived spirituality have an especially great importance.

(CCE 1982, par.59)

For religious educators, developing professionally and personally with a deep sense of their Christian spirituality was paramount:

The concrete living out of a vocation as rich and profound as that of the lay Catholic in a school requires an appropriate formation, both on the professional plane and on the religious plane. Most especially, it requires the educator to have a mature spiritual personality, expressed in a profound Christian life…

(CCE 1982, par.60)

The Congregation exhorted lay Catholic educators to possess a vocation with an ‘apostolic intention inspired by faith’ (CCE 1982, par. 24). There is an expectation that the religious formation of the Catholic educator (which especially applies to the recently assigned RE teacher) would resonate with the faith position espoused by the RE program and would be complementary to their professional formation. The Congregation for Catholic Education recognised there was to be a personal integration of authentically human and spiritual qualities:

This means that religious formation must be oriented toward both personal sanctification and apostolic mission, for these are two inseparable elements in a Christian vocation. “Formation for apostolic mission means a certain human and well-rounded formation, adapted to the natural abilities and circumstances of each person” and requires “in addition to spiritual formation,
... solid doctrinal instruction ... in theology, ethics and philosophy.” Nor can we forget, in the case of an educator, adequate formation in the social teachings of the Church, which are “an integral part of the Christian concept of life”, and help to keep intensely alive the kind of social sensitivity that is needed. (CCE 1982, par.65)

Among the qualities promoted by the Congregation were:

such things as affection, tact, understanding, serenity of spirit, a balanced judgement, patience in listening to others and prudence in the way they respond and, finally, availability for personal meetings and conversations with students. (CCE 1988, par.96)

The Congregation for Catholic Education (1982) has not only outlined the traits that characterise the identity of a Catholic educator but also advised that the ‘identity of the lay Catholic educator is, of necessity, an ideal; innumerable obstacles stand in the way of its accomplishment.’ (1982, par.26). The Congregation suggested that the teacher should feel inspired by and aspire to these traits by developing ‘a personal identification with Christ’ (1982, par.26). Such statements may imply that Catholic educators should continue to enrich their Catholic spiritual identity, though it may never be accomplished. The CCE has noted also the disparity in formation in its discussion about the role of lay Catholic educators and would especially apply to the recently assigned lay RE teacher:

The need for an adequate formation is often felt most acutely in religious and spiritual areas; all too frequently, lay Catholics have not had a religious formation that is equal to their general, cultural, and, most especially, professional formation. (CCE 1982, par.60)

The issues raised by RE teachers about the nature of commitment in teaching Religious Education also compounds this disparity in formation (Crawford and Rossiter 1985). Some of the issues raised have direct bearing about the personal commitment of teachers such as teachers referring to their own beliefs and values about a religious issue. Another issue is whether teachers should avoid teaching aspects of a topic with which they do not agree personally. Should teachers teach RE if their lifestyle or personal circumstances are not reflective of the witness espoused? Lastly, whether the teachers in the RE classroom should exhort students to follow their example of a Christian lifestyle (Crawford and Rossiter 1985, p.53).
A study of the beliefs and values of Catholic high school teachers in the USA identified the asymmetrical nature of personal and professional formation of RE teachers (Benson and Guerra 1985). Benson and Guerra (1985) suggested that because teaching priests, brothers and sisters possessed a strong religious grounding, they were able to pass on the faith tradition. On the other hand, lay teachers did not have this grounding and placed more emphasis on ‘… developing compassion and tolerance for others and experiencing and giving affirmation’ (Benson and Guerra 1985, p.54). There is a danger that lay Catholic teachers (who would include almost all the recently assigned RE teachers), with a limited religious and spiritual formation, may tend to focus on the development of a narrow range of religious formation in their students:

Lay teachers tend to define their role in religious formation somewhat narrowly, with emphasis placed on nurturing compassion and tolerance. … It would appear that lay teachers are generally working to form good and compassionate students with a commitment to service, but there is some question about the extent to which they communicate an explicitly religious motivation for service.

(Benson and Guerra 1985, p.59)

Furthermore, while it may be attractive for personal and professional reasons that recently assigned RE teachers venture down this path, there is the danger that teachers will remain locked into this approach. Benson and Guerra (1985) make the criticism that such a teaching approach reinforces a secular, humanist philosophy:

there is reason to be cautious. The evidence suggests that, without encouragement, clarification, and support, some teachers’ efforts at religious formation [of students] could move in the direction of a kind of generalized humanism, in which emphasis is placed on social and personal values that are unconnected to the gospel message and to the Church and its teachings.

(Benson and Guerra 1985, pp.55-56)

It would not be surprising if students developed an ‘idiosyncratic faith’ (Fahy 1992) because that is how lay RE teachers seem to choose to present the curriculum materials. Nonetheless, it was quite possible that, with the advent of Accreditation to Teach RE in WA (Chapter 2, pp.47-48), such criticism was unfounded. In this study it was possible to
explore whether the professional and religious formation of RARE teachers had some bearing on their teaching approach.

This call for religious and spiritual formation was a focus in the United Kingdom as well, with the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) commenting in its Consultation on Religious Education that inservices:

should not just be about classroom practice but should include theological formation and spiritual and ministerial formation of teachers as adult Catholics so that they can engage and motivate pupils and establish the link between lived experience of young people and the content of the RE Curriculum.

(CBCEW 1999, pp.2-3)

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales also gave a word of caution about the differences between acquiring sufficient content knowledge and developing a personal commitment or witness to the Catholic faith: ‘Having a proper understanding of Catholic teaching was not … to be equated with a personal faith commitment’ (CBCEW 1999, p.4). Having religious knowledge and demonstrating faith commitment are two aspects of teaching Religious Education. However, they are not the same thing with the latter having more importance.

The Congregation for the Clergy (CC) called the personal religious and spiritual formation that occurs within like-minded adult groups as ‘catechesis’. It is a formation that:

includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life, it is a ‘complete Christian initiation’…. … As it is formation for the Christian life, it comprises but surpasses mere instruction … it incorporates into the community which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith. It fulfils, at once, initiatory, educational and instructional functions.

(CC 1997, pars.67-68)

Treston (1991) acknowledged that teaching RE demands a sincere witness to faith that requires a ‘metanoia’, a conversion to teach like Jesus:
Conversion is not a one event thing, it is ongoing. Our commitment to follow the path of Jesus is a series of starts, jolts, stops and restartings. It is rarely a smooth passage. Sometimes feelings of religious joy fill our beings but most of the time it’s dull plodding, holding fast to our trust in God in spite of lots of evidence to the contrary.

(Treston 1991, p.107)

The advice of Treston is to encourage teachers to see their formation as an ongoing pilgrimage over their teaching career. Teachers also believed that their strong personal commitment to educating the students in RE was a key factor in the religious development of their students (English 2000). This belief was despite the difficulties in teaching Religious Education when ‘it was not their first area of professional concern’ (English 2000, pp.171-172). The demands of personal commitment have led educators to focus on the dimension of spirituality as an important aspect to the personal and professional lives of religious educators (Healy 2005). This dimension is reflected as:

a sense of spiritual growth and transformation through experiences that are generative of new learning and which have the capacity to nurture creativity, enthusiasm and a desire for further learning and growth in the religious educator.

(Healy 2005, p.29)

During 2002 and 2003, the Archdiocese of Melbourne conducted ‘school-centred’ professional development in Religious Education. Notable changes in the disposition of teachers towards this learning area seemed to occur that resulted in greater creativity, enthusiasm and engagement (Healy 2005, p.33). Healy (2005, pp.31-32) has identified a number of positive and negative contributing factors to these changes in the disposition of teachers and some of these factors are identified in this study (Chapter 8, pp.274-275).

Research seems to reinforce the importance of teachers having an affirmative disposition as indicated by how secondary students view Religious Education (Angelico 1997). Students appreciated the focus on personal development and human formation and the ‘space’ teachers gave them to unwind and reflect:
The religious education curriculum is, therefore, considered by young people to be empowering when it facilitates holistic personal development, emphasizes the relevance of religion to their immediate world, builds a sense of community spirit and enhances inter-personal relationships. Most importantly, young people are positive about the religious education curriculum when it enables them to co-produce meaning, and when teachers treat students as equal partners in the exercise of co-production of religious meanings.

(Angelico 1997, p.54)

While the content knowledge and personal faith commitment are important, what also seems to be significant, especially for students, is the way RE teachers engage them in their learning. This engagement or pedagogical content knowledge seems to be a cornerstone to effective teaching in Religious Education. However, some religious educators would confine student engagement to the transmission of knowledge rather than assist students in their search for meaning (Finlay 2005). In this study, it was possible to explore whether RARE teachers perceived student engagement as important to addressing the demands of implementing the PAREC. This perception may not be immediately apparent to these teachers until they have taught the draft RE Units for some time and given the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences.

There is a need for Christian lay professionals to become more ‘theologically reflective practitioners’ (Barns 2002, p.8). However, there are factors that make this disposition difficult to develop. Some examples are the hectic aspects of their working lives; the narrow focus on technical prowess in professional training; the over-application of ethical rules rather than aspirations towards an ethos; and, limited access to theological formation opportunities or overly directed towards private rather than social matters. As a result, professional people do not have a strong connection to how the Gospels may relate to their personal and working lives (Barns 2002, pp.8-9).

There are several pedagogical steps to developing theological reflection (Barns 2002). Some initial steps are reflecting on ‘practice stories’; reflecting on the structural challenges of the profession; and, reflecting on the ethical framework of professional practice. These are followed by articulating the Gospel as a framework for public truth; living a Eucharistic way of life; recovering the vocation of the Kingdom of God; developing Christian casuistry in professional practice; and, fostering Christian
solidarities. Each of these steps has the potential to make a profound impact upon the professional person:

1. **Reflecting on ‘practice stories’**: Christian lay professional people need to reflect on the challenges (practice stories) in their working lives and to discern the deeper personal, religious and spiritual meanings underlying these challenges.

2. **Reflecting on the structural challenges of the profession**: They also need to analyse these challenges into the ‘bigger’ picture. To understand how these challenges fit into the broader challenges faced by the profession and envisage the common good.

3. **Reflecting on the ethical framework of professional practice**: Christian professional people need to go beyond a code of conduct that is simply about following rules. They need to develop a ‘mores’ or ways of behaving (virtues) that uphold the dignity of all, contest the secular separation of personal religious and spiritual life from working life and place God as a central part of the ethical framework.

4. **Articulating the Gospel as a framework for public truth**: The Gospel is not to be restricted to the private domain but to act as a forum for the salvation of the entire community. There needs to be greater awareness of social responsibilities and concern for those who are poor, marginalised, or powerless.

5. **Living a Eucharistic way of life**: Eucharistic celebration should be a central part of the life of the Christian professional person. It is a way of recalling the sacrifices Jesus has made; to give thanks for the gifts God has given each person. It is an opportunity to respond to God in prayer and community, to draw upon the strength of grace from God to face challenges of the lay vocation and in the workplace.

6. **Recovering the vocation of the Kingdom of God**: Christian professional people need to develop a deeper sense of their Christian vocation that reflects both cardinal human and theological virtues. Such a sense of their Christian vocation not only helps to improve society but also to bring that society into a realisation that God is present among them and that all can achieve the salvation offered through Jesus in the Kingdom of God.

7. **Christian casuistry in professional practice**: To develop integrity in professional practice such that the virtues mentioned above are integral to the way Christian
professionals face challenges and make use of their professional skills for the common good.

8. *Fostering Christian solidarities*: To seek the support and to stand in solidarity with other Christian lay professional people and form Christian professional communities. This may mean giving time and service to Christian associations and agencies that represent the profession or provide services to the poor and needy.

(after Barns 2002, pp.11-17)

In summary, it becomes clear that the experience of teaching may assist the personal and professional capacity of teachers to cope with the demands of curriculum implementation. In addition, attending professional development opportunities are useful as are opportunities for personal religious and spiritual development, especially if these opportunities occur over a sustained period. However, it was the collegial exchange for which recently assigned RE teachers clamoured that helped them to cope and this is the focus of the next section.

3.5.3 *Collegial Support and Professional Assistance*

One of the best approaches for sustaining and retaining recently assigned teachers, especially novice teachers is mentoring and induction programs (Skilbeck and Connell 2004, p.8). Recently assigned teachers need a comprehensive, local mentoring and induction program (Dinham 1993). A program that is ongoing, personally relevant and requires elements of ‘socialization and professional development’ (Dinham 1993, p.2) rather than one that deals with a one-off ‘this is how it is done’ approach and then leaves the teachers to ‘sink or swim’. For ‘without proper support and assistance, …[recently assigned]… teachers are likely to experience higher levels of stress and teacher burnout’ (Martin and Baldwin 1996). This ‘proper support’ tends to occur through quality mentoring and induction programs:

A number of studies have found that well-designed mentoring programs raise retention rates for new teachers by improving their attitudes, feelings of efficacy, and instructional skills.
These young teachers not only stay in the profession at higher rates, but also become competent more quickly than those who must learn by trial and error. Mentoring and induction programs will only produce these benefits if they are well designed and well supported.

(Darling-Hammond 2003, p.11)

The provision of such support may also occur through information and communication technology systems such as video conferencing (Dawson 2002, p.9), especially for recently assigned teachers in remote areas.

Many recently assigned RE teachers are young teachers who need personal and professional support because they are professionally disadvantaged (p.60 on ‘out-of-field’ teachers) and face personal character challenges (p.99). The sorts of experiences they may engage in are such things as:

- study groups in which teachers are engaged on regular, structured and collaborative interactions around topics identified by the group;
- coaching or mentoring arrangements, where teachers work one-on-one with an equally or more experienced teacher;
- networks, which link teachers or groups, either in person or electronically, to explore and discuss topics of interest, pursue common goals, share information and address common concerns; and
- immersion in enquiry, in which teachers engage in the kinds of learning that they are expected to practise with their students.


These experiences were to provide support that was concrete and non-threatening, especially those experiences that allowed for modeling and discussion with colleagues (Appleton and Kindt 1999; Wragg et al 2000; Boyle et al 2004, p.64).

The quality of collegiality recently assigned teachers experience in their working environment assists them in developing greater self-confidence or efficacy (Huberman 1988). Recently assigned teachers not only yearn to share ideas and seek advice from their peers but also to have someone to act as a mentor for them. Mentoring allows recently appointed teachers to clarify their principles of teaching and develop greater confidence in sharing their ideas. Clarke (2004) discerns three types of mentoring: formal mentoring, informal mentoring and co-mentoring. According to Clarke (2004, p.126), formal mentoring refers to a structured master and apprentice relationship,
informal mentoring to a relaxed sage and disciple relationship, and co-mentoring to a relationship of equality and reciprocity. Teachers seem to prefer a co-mentoring situation that takes place onsite at school.

This onsite mentoring provides teachers with a colleague who knows them and their classroom situation (Baptiste and Sheerer 1997, p.265). The provision of induction programs and onsite mentoring for ‘new, probationary teachers’ are now common practices in many overseas educational systems (Dawson 2002, p.3). Unfortunately, an onsite-mentoring program in any learning area is not a strong feature of Australian schools (Appleton and Kindt 1999, p.9). English (2000) has examined the contradiction between the importance of RE as a learning area in Canadian Catholic schools and the lack of a structured RE department in those schools. It became apparent in this study that while RARE teachers called for such support, there were very limited opportunities for this support to occur (Chapter 6, pp.230-231).

To support recently appointed teachers, a team approach may be conducive where a supportive environment can develop and these teachers can be socialised into a professional culture:

The experienced teacher would take the lead in instructional planning, lesson design and implementation, and other areas of substantive decision-making. Volunteer or paid classroom aides or periodic substitute coverage could allow the teachers involved the opportunity to observe one another in action. The [recently appointed] teacher would follow the lead of the experienced, successful teacher.

(Evans 1999, p.35)

The notion of mentoring is very much in keeping with the philosophy of Catholic education. Teachers are encouraged to have close collegial relationships and to ‘work together as a team’ (CCE 1982, par.34). Regardless of whether a team approach is used, recently appointed teachers need the wisdom of veteran teachers and to observe these teachers in action so that they may learn new skills in teaching and analysing their own circumstances (Stansbury 2001, pars.16-17). Furthermore, new teachers were able to cope better with the demands of teaching when they could work collaboratively with others and reduce their feelings of ‘professional isolation’ (Williams 2003, p.217).
When teachers are made to gather and provide each other with assistance, there is the
danger that collegiality becomes contrived (Hargreaves 1994). Instead a more positive
approach to creating collaborative structures needs to be put into place to minimise the
situation of professional isolation and encourage affirming relationships between staff
members (Ávila De Lima 2003, p.197). As Manuel exhorts (her emphasis):

> Importantly, we need to hear the voices of new teachers far more consistently than we presently do. This can be addressed through the infrastructures of individual schools and the actions of senior teachers within these schools. Providing meaningful contexts, on a regular basis, for beginning teachers to connect with other staff, to express concerns, and to contribute ideas and perspectives would go some way towards offsetting the isolation and professional disconnectedness that can lead to attrition. Professional teaching associations are also critical in effective ‘induction’ of new teachers.

(2003, p.36)

Virgilio and Virgilio (1984) and Wallace and Braunger (1998) have commended the role
of experienced colleagues, especially the Principal, in supporting and taking an active
interest in the responses of teachers during the implementation of a new curriculum. The
degree to which recently appointed teachers perceive the support they get from
Principals and peers relates to their feelings of security and surety in teaching (Marlow
et al 1997). A number of studies have made proposals about supporting recently
assigned teachers:

Principals can try to avoid assigning beginners the most challenging students, combination classes in elementary schools, or the schedule requiring many separate preparations in secondary schools. They can also make sure that beginners aren't overloaded with extracurricular activities and committee assignments. …

Time is one of the most precious resources in a school today. There are many competing demands on teachers' time. Principals have control over some of these demands. They also can provide access to resources (substitutes, scheduling) that can judiciously carve out time for teachers during the school day.

(Stansbury 2001)

Such a mentoring program was a useful way to nurture the professional formation of
recently assigned RE teachers (English 1999). Through such a program, recently
assigned teachers consulted and worked collaboratively with their more experienced colleagues. As a result, recently assigned RE teachers had available to them a source of ‘ongoing guidance and direction’ (English 1999, p.40). They had a mentor, a master of the craft who dialogued, guided and supported them through their first years of teaching RE. Recently assigned teachers needed a mentor who provided good counsel and helped them to reflect upon the challenges to their personal character and integrity. Such counsel needed to be a friendly dialogue rather than a formalised appraisal on the performance of recently assigned RE teachers. While a peer-to-peer or ‘buddy system’ helped at a professional level, recently assigned RE teachers wanted to feel they belonged to a community of RE colleagues who eventually referred to them as friends (Szácsvay 1992). The creation of such schemes focused on training mentors in the practice of using adult education principles known as andragogy (Szácsvay 1992). Mentoring became a part of the responsibilities of experienced RE teachers. It is what Leavey, Hetherton, Britt and O’Neill (1992) referred to as ‘sponsoring’. Yet, it is more than educational and instructional; it is a formative process in nurturing and deepening Christian spirituality within a faith community. It is to know, praise and love God as Jesus taught through prayer, liturgy, lifestyle and witness.

3.5.4 Summary: The Value of Formative Experiences

The formative experience of recently assigned teachers plays a significant part in how they cope with the demands of implementing an unfamiliar curriculum. This group of teachers finds these demands to be more intensive than the daily pressures they experience in other classes. In order to manage their concerns and to alleviate the stresses, recently assigned teachers rely on the incidental formation or wisdom they receive through teaching the subject; attending professional development opportunities in content and method; and, perhaps most importantly of all, seeking collegial support at a personal and at a professional level. As they gain further teaching experience, their concerns move towards the effect their teaching has on the students. The formation of these teachers begins to focus more upon their own capacity to act as role models to students as well as being competent teachers. These changes in professional and personal spiritual formation contribute greatly towards enhancing or diminishing the
efficacy and disposition of teachers to continue teaching the learning area. In the case of RARE teachers, the experience of teaching RE includes meeting the expectation of providing a committed faith witness that resonates with the underlying theological principles of the curriculum. While the ability to reflect upon their teaching practice is helpful, the ability to become contemplative, theologically speaking, is important also. In similar fashion, the capacity of RARE teachers to manage these expectations and skills is dependent upon the quality of their spiritual and religious formation. RARE teachers not only require professional assistance but also the example and guidance of experienced, well balanced, and religiously committed mentors. Such support should ideally be available at the school over the duration of becoming familiar and confident with implementing the RE curriculum (Buchanan 2006, pp.22-24).

3.6 Literature Review and the Research Question

What emerges from the literature review is that recently assigned teachers facing the prospect of teaching a learning area in which they are unfamiliar, inexperienced, and inadequately trained is a significant problem. How these teachers cope with the perceived exigencies of implementing the curriculum plays an important role in developing their competence in the learning area and sustaining their levels of efficacy. Therefore, if inexperienced, inexpert RE teachers are facing difficulties in implementing the new RE curriculum, then this situation parallels the plight of recently assigned teachers. Just as there is a need to study the responses of individual teachers who find they are assigned to an unfamiliar learning area (p.77), there is a need to explore the responses of RARE teachers to the implementation of the Perth Archdiocesan RE Course (PAREC) in Catholic secondary schools. The literature suggests that the research question is very much in keeping with contributing new knowledge to an area of curriculum change and implementation, especially within Religious Education:

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

As a result, this review highlights a number of issues. Firstly, who are recently assigned RE (RARE) teachers and what characterises their professional backgrounds? Secondly,
how can the concerns and responses of RARE teachers to the three dimensions of curriculum implementation proposed by Fullan (2001) provide further clarity about the success of the draft RE curriculum? Thirdly, to what extent do the personal, professional, and religious formative experiences of these teachers contribute to their competence and confidence in teaching Religious Education?

Therefore, in this study an exploration of such a scenario for RARE teachers teaching the PAREC was undertaken. A professional profile of these teachers required the identification of this group of teachers through the development of a database. Using dimensions of the implementation process proposed by Fullan (2001), namely, curriculum materials, teaching approaches, and beliefs, this study explored how recently assigned RE teachers perceived their implementation of the PAREC documents as part of their classroom teaching. As a part of the process of implementation, the curriculum writers intended that the PAREC documents would be accessible to recently assigned RE teachers and would contribute towards their professional development (Chapter 2, p.50). The design of these Units was to alleviate, in part, the pressures these teachers faced at the classroom level of curriculum implementation. The implication is that implementing the PAREC influenced the subjective reality of teachers, including the perception of the capacity of PAREC to meet their needs and help to improve the quality of their teaching practice in Religious Education. Alternatively, if the implementation of the Course did not influence the subjective realities or perceptions of recently assigned RE teachers, then the curriculum innovation would be a waste of educational, human, and professional resources within the Catholic education system in Western Australia. It is the task of this study to find out the extent to which recently assigned RE teachers possess a shared knowledge or understandings about their teaching of the draft PAREC.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature concerning the personal and professional responses of recently assigned teachers to curriculum implementation, particularly recently assigned RE teachers. The review developed around three significant themes. The first theme defined the professional characteristics of recently assigned teachers and described the circumstances with which they feel they have to contend. The second
theme described the contribution of curriculum implementation models with regard to the concerns teachers express, especially recently assigned teachers. This theme focused, in particular, on how teachers manage dealing with self, task and impact concerns at a school level using instructional resources and teaching approaches coupled with an understanding of the underlying curriculum principles. As teachers adjust to the curriculum demands, they increasingly turn their attention towards developing an altruistic professional capacity. The third theme explored the role of formative experience in developing the capacity of recently assigned teachers to face the challenges of curriculum implementation and sustaining their commitment towards teaching a learning area in which they may feel uncomfortable in teaching. An integral part of this formation is the professional assistance and mentoring recently assigned teachers receive over an extended period as they adjust to the curriculum exigencies. For RARE teachers, the formative experience also includes personal spiritual and religious formation. Lastly, the review lends itself to the value of researching how RARE teachers implement the draft PAREC as articulated in the research question:

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

This study explored how recently assigned RE teachers respond personally and professionally to the demands of implementing the draft RE Units. Are the resources readily accessible to these teachers? How do recently assigned RE teachers translate the teaching approach advocated in the Units into their classroom teaching? What understanding of the pedagogical and theological principles underlying the Units do these teachers possess? What are the personal and professional challenges recently assigned RE teachers face in teaching the draft RE Units to their students? These were some of the possible data collection questions for this study to investigate as part of the key research question. In the next chapter, the design of the research describes the manner of exploring the research question and its subsidiary questions.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

The focus of this study is recently assigned RE (RARE) teachers and their responses to the curriculum demands placed upon them in implementing the draft Perth Archdiocesan RE Course (PAREC). The purpose of this chapter is to describe how the study gathered data about these teachers, their professional and demographic backgrounds as well as their concerns and responses to the implementation of the new RE curriculum. As this research deals with the individual perceptions of RARE teachers about curriculum implementation, the research approach adopted was substantially qualitative.

The chapter begins by describing the context of the research design and its relationship to the research question. The section also includes a review of research designs that incorporate a mixture of qualitative and quantitative techniques to assist the researcher in clarifying the means of data gathering and analysis. Next, the chapter turns its attention towards describing the data collection strategies incorporated in the research design. Following this description of the survey instrument and the interview procedures is an outline of the process of identifying the participants for the interview phase of the research. The next section provides an account of the ethical considerations that needed approval. Lastly, the chapter presents a summary and a diagrammatic representation of the steps involved in the development of the research design.

4.2 The Research Design

The research centred around recently assigned RE teachers and permitted their responses without the encumbrance of pre-conceived theories, a form of inquiry known as symbolic interactionism (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, p.25). The benefit of emphasising such a qualitative research method, as distinct from a quantitative one, was that the qualitative method focused on the participants in a sociological or behavioural
context (Bogdan and Biklen 1992, p.9). Qualitative research serves four basic functions – to initiate, reformulate, refocus and clarify an understanding of the behaviour of a group (Hutchinson 1988, p.124). The approach employed in this study has a naturalistic paradigm that assumes that the explanation of events or experiences is as ‘real’ (or as true) for the participants as they express it (Guba and Lincoln 1988, pp.81–85).

The study also followed the premise that whatever research methods were used they should be guided by the type of research questions being asked rather than be ‘… slavishly committed to some particular method’ (Shulman 1981, p.12). Hence, educational research as in this study was open to using a variety of research methods because education is ‘empirical, interpretative, normative and critical’ (Soltis 1984, p.5).

The interrelationship of both qualitative and quantitative processes was recognition of the ‘epistemological unity of educational research’ and based on the ‘pragmatic relations between theory and practice’ (Walker and Evers 1988, pp.28 and 35). In this study, the research question dealt with the subjective realities of recently assigned RE (RARE) teachers in implementing an unfamiliar curriculum:

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

Using the model of curriculum implementation (Fullan 2001) – use of instructional resources, appropriateness of teaching approach and understanding of underlying curriculum principles – three subsidiary questions were developed. These 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?**
Later in the study as new data emerged, there was a re-examination of the primary research question and the development of an additional subsidiary question:

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?

Therefore, qualitative research methods offered a useful means of connecting the subsidiary research questions to the processes for gathering and analysing the responses from the participants.

The way in which RARE teachers interpreted the subjective realities of curriculum implementation was significant to the success of coping with the curriculum exigencies and for sustaining their confidence in teaching the learning area. The interpretivist approach used in this study drew upon the spoken and written word of RARE teachers to communicate their personal and professional experience when curriculum development decisions had relied upon second-hand anecdotal evidence about these teachers (Chapter 2, p.46). The participants themselves suggested the reasons for their actions, behaviours, and perceptions. This became the ‘raw’ data for analysis and during the study, distinctive patterns, or themes began to emerge. These themes allowed a comparison with and review of other research.

The research work of Fuller (1969) and Veenman (1984) into the concerns of neophyte teachers is a good illustration of such an approach. Using survey and indepth interviews, Fuller (1969) was able to gather data about how the teachers felt about their experiences of teaching and how these experiences influenced their perceptions over time. From the data she collected in the surveys, distinctive patterns of concerns emerged and were explored further in the interviews (Chapter 3, pp.71-72). Veenman (1984) also used survey techniques to gather data from beginning teachers about their perceptions of teaching. From his data, Veenman was able to discern particular themes or issues that were uppermost in the minds of these teachers (Chapter 3, p.72). One of the purposes of surveys in research is to establish, at a certain time, a knowledge base about a target group and to identify key issues or themes as well as possible relationships between data.
categories. To establish a database of the target population of RARE teachers in WA Catholic secondary schools, the survey instrument was an important strategy for the collection of baseline data for this study. The knowledge gained from surveys is useful in a number of ways. Three significant ways are described below.

Firstly, baseline data can be used to inform decision-makers about a particular cohort of teachers where limited data exists about these teachers. Hanlon (1989) used such an approach in his study of RE teachers (Chapter 3 p.97) and so did Astley, Francis, Burton and Wilcox (1997) as described previously in Chapter 3, p.83. Astley et al (1997) developed a questionnaire with items having a 7 point rating scale to assess how 27 different methodological components achieved the five aims of RE from the Model Syllabuses issued by the British School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA). This questionnaire was mailed to 207 secondary schools in the north of England. They received 210 responses from 125 schools (60.4% of the target schools) that they believed was a representative sample. Quantitative techniques were used also to analyse the data from the responses (Astley et al 1997, p.173).

Another way of using surveys is to conduct a series of them and detect the changes in attitude over time. Flynn (1975, 1979, 1985, and 1993), and Flynn and Mok (2002) investigated the religious and educational influence of Catholic schools on secondary students in New South Wales. Flynn and Mok (2002) surveyed 8,310 Year 12 students and their parents and teachers across New South Wales and compared the findings of this survey with data collected in previous works by Flynn (1975, 1979, 1985, and 1993). As a result, they were able to identify the factors that contributed to the religious development of students and, because of the nature of the longitudinal study, how the importance of these factors changed over time (Chapter 3, p.95).

A third use of surveys is to use them as a contextual basis upon which to explore further the significant issues in finer detail. The survey results provided both issues to examine and a basis from which to derive a sample group that typically reflected concerns for these issues. The survey becomes a context for more indepth studies as illustrated by Leavey, Hetherton, Britt and O’Neill (1992). Leavey et al (1992) studied the quality of faith development and formation among young Catholic women according to the faith
development theory of James Fowler. They used a nested case study approach to conduct an indepth examination of the faith development of a small number of adolescents from a representative group. A comparatively large but manageable sample was identified and its members invited to complete a questionnaire. From this questionnaire, responses were coded and defined according to pre-conceived categories of ‘faith-types’. From each category, one person who typified that category was invited to participate in a series of on-going indepth interviews. The transcripts of these interviews were analysed to draw out a profile of that particular ‘faith-type’. In using this technique, Leavey et al (1992) concluded that the religious development of young people needed the ‘sponsorship’ or ‘mentorship’ of adults such as teachers.

Bezzina, Chesterton, Johnston, and Sanber (1993) demonstrated how the combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques can be mutually enriching. They investigated the evaluation practices of RE teachers in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The design of the study wanted to:

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\text{yield generalisable results and \ldots to depict in some detail the reality of the evaluation of religious education curriculum for particular teachers in particular schools. To this end, a combination of interview, survey and case study methodologies was chosen.}
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(Bezzina et al, 1993, p.103)

They conducted their study in three phases. The first phase was composed of a series of interviews with a small group of RE teachers who volunteered to respond to the questions of the researchers. These interviews were thematic and conducted on a loosely structured basis. From these interviews, they used teacher perceptions about RE evaluation as a focus for the second phase. In the second phase, RE teachers from Catholic secondary schools in Sydney completed a questionnaire. The selection of schools from a stratified random sample occurred based on school size and region categories. The questionnaire included rating scale items for statistical analysis. From the responses to the questionnaire, there were three schools chosen based upon the range of responses received in phase two and their willingness to continue to participate in the study. These three schools became case studies for further investigation in the third phase. The case studies were also useful in comparing the questionnaire responses with
the perceptions of those interviewed in phase one to check the consistency and coherence of the data.

The studies of Leavey et al (1992) and Bezzina et al (1993) demonstrated the benefits of using a mixed method approach – using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Their works were congruent with the view of Shulman (1981) in using a research approach that combines quantitative techniques that maximise the ‘… generalizability of the findings to the widest possible population’ with qualitative techniques that portray the ‘… workings of circumstances that differ dramatically from what typically presents itself in the “natural” functioning’ of phenomena (Shulman, 1981, p.11). Leavey et al (1992) and Bezzina et al (1993) used these techniques to study the behaviour and perceptions of their subjects. Apart from the gathering of quantitative data, Flynn (1975, 1979, 1985, 1993 and with Mok 2002) also included qualitative data such as responses to open-ended questions. He drew upon the responses to these questions to complement the statistical data. This research project also used the survey as a data gathering technique and included opportunities for participants to respond to open-ended questions.

4.3 Data Collection Techniques

In this research project, there was a particular mixed method approach employed. A quantitative approach helped establish a context, then a qualitative approach was emphasised in the presentation of the findings. Initially, the study relied upon a survey to establish a data baseline and applied this data as a context for an indepth examination of the issues recently assigned RE teachers perceived as important to their teaching of the draft RE Units. Furthermore, the survey helped to define the target population from which the selection of a purposive sample was possible. This sample was characterised as a group of RE teachers whose responses reflected the range of typical responses in the survey (Leavey et al 1992). In this sample, there were participants who reflected the average of responses to items in the survey and there were participants who reflected the ‘outliers’ of responses. As a result, the study moved attention from the target population to the sample cohort under the assumption that further examination of the experiences of the sample cohort was transferable to the experiences of the target population. The study
focused on exploring what RARE teachers held in common, as direct knowledge about this group was limited. Furthermore, closer study of the differences between the categories of RARE teachers was to become the subject of a recommendation for later investigation (Chapter 9, p.345).

Guided by the findings that emerged from the survey, the next step was to examine in closer detail the perceptions of the sample cohort in implementing the draft Units. An interview approach was used because interviews have the potential to ‘… go deeper into the motivations of respondents and their reasons for responding as they do’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, p.268). There was an expectation that complex and personal concerns could have a significant bearing on the perceptions of the changes recently assigned RE teachers experienced, personally and professionally, in implementing the draft Perth Archdiocesan RE Course (PAREC).

Interviewing teachers in the first years of teaching RE about their perceptions of implementing RE curricula in the classroom is not new. Engebretson (1997) reported using this approach with her research of novice RE teachers and their experiences of teaching Religious Education. She was able to describe how these teachers envisioned teaching RE and provided an opportunity for them to reflect on their subsequent experiences of teaching in the learning area. Engebretson concluded that unless novice RE teachers developed a coherent understanding of the pedagogical and theological aims of RE, then the experience of teaching RE would be disheartening (Chapter 3, pp.95-96). Likewise, this study explored this significant aspect of curriculum implementation and whether recently assigned RE teachers in WA had similar experiences and if they changed their beliefs about the purposes of RE teaching.

Interviews also allowed the possibility for unexpected responses to emerge (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, p.268). In this study, it was possible for significant findings to come to the fore that, according to the practice of qualitative research, would mean a re-examination of the primary research question. Recently assigned teachers experienced not only changes in teaching practice in response to implementing the draft Units but also significant changes in their motivation towards teaching Religious Education. As changes were emerging, the research project had the flexibility to become a longitudinal
study to track these changes and to explore further, the motivation of the RE teachers for teaching in this learning area. Longitudinal studies that track changes in perceptions about RE curricula are also not new. Flynn (1975, 1979, 1985, 1993) and Flynn and Mok (2002) were able to track the changes in attitudes towards RE by students, principals, teachers and parents over a substantial period (p.95). This study, too, conducted more than one round of interviews. These interviews explored the changes in personal and professional responses of the sample cohort to the ongoing and possibly intense demands of implementing the draft PAREC (see Section 4.5 ‘First Round of Interviews, p.127 and Section 4.6 ‘Second Round of Interviews’, p.133).

Semi-structured interviews offered greater benefits to the research than what could be achieved by another survey or approach (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, p.269). Through the interview, participants were able to reflect on and discuss their perceptions about implementing the draft RE Units in greater depth. They had more time (than in the case of the survey) to consider their perceptions and feelings towards their RE teaching. This was an important part to understanding the rationale of the recently assigned teachers for managing the implementation process.

As a result, an indepth study developed and insights emerged about the teaching practice of recently assigned RE teachers using the PAREC documents. As a form of mixed method research with a qualitative emphasis, the study used a variety of methods such as document analysis, surveys, and indepth interviews to gather data. These methods were used together to increase the legitimacy and dependability of the findings. The following sections describe the development and execution of these research methods.

4.4 Survey Instrument

This section describes the instigation of the survey instrument to collect the initial data for this study. Firstly, it describes the preliminary analysis of RE curriculum documents using the three dimensions of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying curriculum principles. Secondly, this analysis became the basis for the development of the pilot survey instrument that was then trialled and modified. Thirdly, there is a discussion of the process for distributing this modified survey to schools as well as describing the manner of collecting and collating the data from the survey.
4.4.1 Preliminary Document Analysis

Before the research collected data, a context for studying the perceptions of recently assigned secondary RE teachers was established. A preliminary document analysis of the draft PAREC and related documents, for example, the *Draft Accreditation to Teach RE Inservice Participants’ File* (CEOWA 1997b) was conducted using the dimensions of curriculum implementation (Fullan 2001). This analysis indicated what the PAREC documents make available to RE teachers by way of instructional resources, teaching approach and pedagogical and theological principles. Of assistance to this analysis was the examination by Lenihan (1994) of the predecessor of PAREC, the *Perth Archdiocesan Guidelines for Religious Educators* (PAGRE). The examination of the underlying principles and themes within PAGRE revealed an emphasis upon published Vatican II conciliar and post conciliar documents from *Gravissimum Educationis*, in 1965, through to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in 1994.

4.4.2 Developing the Pilot Survey

The information collected from the document analysis of the PAREC provided a basis for a survey of the target group of RE teachers. Other sources, such as the findings of the 1994/95 Pilot RE Project by the CEOWA/CSPA working party, were useful also in the construction of the survey. The purpose of the survey design was to assist the researcher in gathering preliminary data about how recently assigned secondary RE teachers implemented the PAREC as part of their classroom teaching. Specifically, the survey explored how these teachers implemented the instructional resources and teaching approach of the PAREC and their understanding of the pedagogical and theological principles underlying this RE curriculum.

A pilot survey was developed the previous school term before the administration of the final survey to recently assigned RE teachers. The purpose of the pilot survey was to test the quality of the question items and the ease of the completion of the survey (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh 1990, p.422). The pilot survey was administered to a selected group of 25 experienced and trained RE teachers. In this survey, some of the rank order items had limited choices to evoke additional alternatives from the sample group of respondents (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh 1990, p.423). In the final survey, ranking items
were limited in keeping with the advice of Ary et al (1990, p.425) that ‘six options … becomes too difficult to make comparisons’. However, respondents felt that a voluntary ‘other’ option should be retained. Respondents had the opportunity also to comment upon the efficacy of the questions, the format, and duration of the survey as well as offer advice about how best to administer the survey to a wider group.

Some modifications to the survey were necessary because of the feedback and responses from teachers. Firstly, there was a reduction in the number of questions and the placement of easier questions related to demographic and professional background towards the end of the survey. The feeling was that the survey should not take more than twenty minutes if the survey was to be completed during a RE department meeting.

Furthermore, if the administration of the survey occurred at the conclusion of the working day, then easier questions in the last part of the survey would help avoid the teachers becoming tired or bored. In addition, there would likely be less reluctance to provide personal and professional information if left at the end (Ary et al 1990, p.426).

Secondly, respondents suggested that the majority of survey items should remain in the affirmative to avoid confusion in responses when there was a mixture of positive and negative responses. However, a ‘run’ or sequence of positive or negatives responses was considered appropriate as in the case of items 7 to 15 in the section on teaching approach (Appendix 5, p.357). Thirdly, the wording of some items seemed cumbersome and overly jargon laden; the recommendation was to simplify these items as much as possible. This recommendation particularly applied to the section on the understanding of the teachers about the underlying RE curriculum principles in the draft PAREC. The feeling was that this section should focus on the responses of the teacher to religious commitment in RE and their understanding of the aims of the learning area.

Through the pilot survey, the researcher was able to ascertain whether the questions were relevant to the target teacher population and whether they were likely to evoke information that addressed the problem and the research questions. Such a pilot survey allowed the researcher to define the parameters of the statistical data to be collected. However, there was the possibility that the perceptions of this pilot group may be different from those of the target population. Therefore, a sample of five recently assigned RE teachers was approached to trial the appropriateness of the survey items
after the pilot phase. The modified questions were then delivered to the target teacher population as part of the survey (Appendix 5, pp.357-364). The next section describes the procedure for conducting the survey.

4.4.3 Conducting the Survey

For the purposes of this study, the secondary Catholic schools approached were those implementing the PAREC Units of Work within the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton. This decision occurred after consulting with the Director of the CEOWA and the Director of Religious Education (Appendix 1, pp.349-350). A letter was sent to Secondary Principals in these schools outlining the nature of the study, its purpose and how the data was to be collected (Appendix 2, pp.351-352). The letter requested permission for the researcher to approach the Coordinator of Religious Education (REC) and recently assigned RE teachers about the study. Principals had the opportunity to reply to this request within the fortnight. The researcher was available by email, telephone or where possible, in person, to explain further the details of the study to the Principal, RE Coordinator and others seeking clarification and reassurance. Ten days after the posting of the letter, those Principals who had not replied were contacted by phone, and permission was sought to approach, in the first place, the RE Coordinator within the school and later, recently assigned RE teachers.

Once the Principal had given permission, the RE Coordinator was contacted by phone and explained the purpose of the research. At this time, the researcher made an inquiry as to the number of recently assigned RE teachers in the school who did fit the criteria of the target population. The RE Coordinator either gave an immediate response on the phone or given a week to reply either by phone or email to follow up the inquiry. This reply formed the basis for the number of surveys to be sent with an attached letter (see Appendix 3, pp.353-354) to the RE Coordinator for distribution to recently assigned RE teachers. The Appendices also contains the letter and survey distributed by the RE Coordinators to recently assigned RE teachers (see Appendices 4 and 5, pp.355-364). The RE Coordinator handed out the survey document to those recently assigned RE teachers who wished to participate. Each survey document had a one-page covering
letter addressed to the prospective participants explaining the survey and the survey items. The survey included a code to identify schools and participants while maintaining the confidentiality of responses. The Archdiocesan or Diocesan region became the basis for the school code and remained confidential to the researcher. The source of the participant code came from the day and month of the birth-date of the participant and remained confidential as well. Later, selected birth-date codes were used to identify a much smaller sample of the target population surveyed for the interview phases of the research. As a result, the survey responses of participants remained anonymous to the researcher. While the researcher knew which school the responses came from, at this point, only the RE Coordinator who administered the survey had access to the individual respondents.

Participants were invited to complete the survey within a week. As a guide, participants were informed that the survey would take approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete. Once they completed the survey, participants placed it into an envelope provided by the researcher via the RE Coordinator. The RE Coordinator was encouraged to collect the completed surveys in the sealed envelopes and place them into a large return-addressed envelope provided by the researcher. If after a week, RE Coordinators had not returned the surveys, a reminder letter, facsimile or email was sent to encourage participants to return the surveys by the end of that week. If by the end of this third week RE Coordinators had not returned the surveys then the researcher contacted them by phone and endeavoured to have participants complete the survey at a suitably arranged time. The aim was to obtain a return response of more than 65% of participants and a response rate of more than 80% was deemed excellent (Anderson 1990, pp.203–204; Greeley, McCready, and McCourt 1976, p.19). In this study, a very good return response of 73% was achieved (Table 5.2, p.157).
4.4.4 Procedure for the analysis of responses

The survey responses were recorded and analysed statistically using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 7.5 (SPSS Inc. 1997). The scores to each Likert scale item in the survey were collated and the average score and standard deviation for each item was calculated. Separately, responses to open-ended questions in the survey were transcribed in full, and later were analysed for common themes or topics using content analysis (Cohen and Manion 1994, pp.55-56). Further statistical analysis considered parametric assumptions (Wiersma 1995, p.372-273) about the data. A comparison of mean scores across teacher sub-groups was conducted according to demographic and professional variables. A one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Post Hoc test (Scheffé) was used for determining whether and what significant differences in responses existed between sub-groups of teachers. The ANOVA was ‘used to determine whether there is a significant difference between two or more means at a selected probability level [$p$-value]’ (Gay and Airasian 2003, p.467), in this case, the $p$-value was based on a two-tailed test set at 0.05. The Post Hoc test (Scheffé) of serial comparisons was chosen as a conservative estimation of Type II errors, errors in ‘failing to reject a false hypothesis’ (Wiersma, 1995, p.371). A Post Hoc test allows ‘multiple comparison procedures to be used to determine which means are significantly different from which other means’ (Gay and Airasian 2003, p.471). Again, a $p$-value of 0.05 was set to determine the level of significance. As a result of this analysis, particular traits emerged that described subgroups within the larger survey sample according to the three categories of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying principles. Furthermore, the analysis presented a range of teacher perceptions about implementing the draft PAREC. These traits are discussed in Chapter 5 (p.156).

4.5 First Round of Interviews

The survey provided contextual data from which to identify a sample group and to develop a set of interview questions exploring the experiences of the recently assigned teachers. This section focuses the procedures for instigating the first round of interviews and the development of the interview questions. The intention in the first round of interviews was to explore more deeply how these teachers, with such diverse
professional and demographic backgrounds, related their perceptions and their experiences of implementing the draft PAREC.

By using the results from the survey as the basis for the first round of interviews, participants had a perspective from which to consider their own responses. Interviewer and interviewee were able to have a consistently focused conversation (albeit, initiated by the interviewer) around semi-structured questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000 p.269, p.271). Furthermore, this context reduced concerns about reliability and bias. The survey provided the context for the interviews and the responses from the participants were compared with the responses from the survey. Since the questions emerged from the results of the survey, the integrity of the interviewer was enhanced.

4.5.1 Interview Procedure

The use of semi-structured interviews provided further details about the teaching practice and understandings of sample participants within each category. During the interviews, participants were asked to explain in their own words three aspects of their teaching. These three aspects are now discussed.

Firstly, how they used the instructional resources in the Units of Work; secondly, how they described their teaching approach and thirdly, how they evaluated their teaching practice in terms of their understanding of the theological and educational principles underpinning the PAREC. The researcher also made field notes during the interview about points raised during the interview or observations of the temperament and interest of the interviewees. The interviews were recorded on a mini-cassette recorder, and later transcribed by the researcher. As a validation procedure, copies of the interview transcripts were given to the interviewees for clarification. If changes to the transcript were needed, due to an error in transcription, then the change was made. If due to a change of perception (such as, a negative remark to a positive remark), then the original comment was retained and the change of perception was noted for clarification in the second round of interviews (Chapter 7, p. 247).
4.5.2 Development of the Interview Questions

The schedule of interview questions (Appendix 9, pp.371-373) was developed from the results of the survey. Each question was related to an aspect that emerged from the categories of curriculum materials, teaching approach, and underlying principles. These questions were trialled with a small group of experienced and inexperienced religious educators. Two issues emerged, firstly, to structure the questions around significant findings from the survey; and secondly, to provide an opportunity for interviewees to relate their own personal experiences where possible. As a result, the interview questions provided a structure for interviewer and interviewee to follow and yet allow the interviewee to reflect and comment on their concerns and responses to the implementation of the draft PAREC.

*Question 1:*

*Refer to an RE Unit you taught last term. Before you started, what considerations were uppermost in your mind about teaching this Unit to your students?*

In the survey, respondents were concerned about the time for preparation and familiarizing themselves with the content of the Units. This question intended to ‘break the ice’ between interviewer and interviewee by focusing on a practical teaching question. The question also explored what priorities were uppermost for these teachers in preparing their lessons.

*Question 2:*

*Many teachers indicated that they used the Mastersheets and the Student Book frequently in their lessons. Why do you think this is the case? How do you feel about using these materials?*

Respondents in the survey indicated they frequently used the Mastersheets and Student Book. This question sought to explore why recently assigned RE teachers relied on the Mastersheets and Student Book, what changes they made in the use of these resources, and how they justified these changes.
Question 3:  
A number of teachers commented that the curriculum materials in the Units should be matched or modified to the background or experiences of students. Why should this be the case? How do you respond to the view that such an approach avoids students learning about Catholic beliefs and practices?

Survey responses indicated teachers preferred a student-centred approach but found making links between the life experiences of students and faith understandings in the Units were difficult to do. This question explored how recently assigned RE teachers used this teaching approach and how they attempted to make links between the experiences of the students and the content of the draft Units.

Question 4:  
A number of teachers found linking students’ experiences with the Gospels difficult. Why would that be the case? Should recently assigned RE teachers make more use of the Scriptures in their lessons? Please explain your response.

In the survey, respondents reported that they found linking student experiences with the Gospels was a difficult task to do. On the other hand, they indicated their preference for student-centred approaches to their teaching. The intention of this question was to explore why teachers have difficulties with using Scripture and what they did to cope with the situation.

Question 5:  
A number of teachers indicated that organising liturgies was difficult. What difficulties are they referring to here? Why do think many recently assigned RE teachers find organising class liturgies difficult?

Recently assigned RE teachers reported they had difficulties in organising liturgies even though they were supportive of being involved in such activities. Like the previous question, this question explored why they have these difficulties and how they coped with the situation.
Question 6:
Many teachers mentioned that developing social justice and tolerance for others was the most important aim of RE. How do you feel about this being the most important aim? What do you expect your students to have achieved by the end of a RE Unit and why?

There were diverse responses in the survey about the aims of Religious Education. By taking the resultant highest priority from the survey, the intention here was to clarify the understanding of the teachers about the aims and expectations in RE for students.

Question 7:
Can you describe for me the principles you follow or the vision you have in mind about the teaching of RE?

This question explored the personal vision or perceptions of teachers about teaching Religious Education. In the survey, many respondents saw RE as fulfilling a catechetical task rather than an educational one.

Question 8:
How did you come to follow these principles (or vision)? What influences were significant to you in developing your understanding of these principles (or this vision)?

A follow up question to Question 7, the intention here was to investigate the personal and professional bases teachers relied upon in developing their philosophy of Religious Education.

Question 9:
Many teachers commented that having a sufficient professional background and strong faith witness was important to teaching RE. What would you like to see happen in the future to the formation of RE teachers?

Two key aspects to emerge from the survey about RE teaching were the importance of prior tertiary study and the possession of a strong faith commitment. This question explored the extent to which recently assigned teachers needed these requirements themselves.
4.5.3 Analysis of First Round of Interviews

After the interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed then collated and coded using the *QSR NUD•IST* version 4.0 (N4) computer software program (QSR International 1996) into the three categories of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying principles. This ‘open coding’ process was used and the identification of patterns or themes was possible (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen 2006, p.492). A comparison and analysis of these coded themes called the ‘constant comparative method’ led to further recoding and created a series of generic themes that became the basis for the findings of this round of interviews (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen 2006, p.499). The generic themes tend to have three essential characteristics, namely, recurrence, linkage and explanation of the data (Hutchinson 1988, p.133). The generic themes are those that are identified frequently within the data, linked the data together and explained differences that occur across the data. Furthermore, the aggregation of data into these themes minimised the occurrence of ‘discrepant data’ or data that did not fit well with the themes identified (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen 2006, p.499). The findings to emerge from the interviews were reported under these themes. The researcher was cognisant of the interplay between the presentation of data and its interpretation:

In qualitative data the data analysis ... is almost inevitably interpretive, hence the data analysis is less a completely accurate representation (as in the numerical, positivist tradition) but more of a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data that are already interpretations of a social encounter.

(Cohen, Manion, Morrison 2000, p.282)

While it was possible to count the number of participants that referred to an aspect of the initial coding categories (Table 6.1, p.218 and Table 7.1, p.246), direct quotations were used to illustrate the importance and richness of the emerging themes. Furthermore, these quotations were drawn upon in a balanced way from across the research participants (Appendix 16, p.386) to reduce the likelihood of bias towards particular participants. The generic themes provided further insight into how recently assigned RE teachers viewed the use of instructional resources, their teaching approach and understandings of the curriculum principles underlying the draft PAREC documents.
4.5.4 Return of Transcripts from First Round of Interviews

Before interviewing the participants again, it was necessary to affirm the transcripts from the first interviews with them and invite the participants to be involved in a second round of interviews. A letter of acknowledgement (Appendix 11, p.380) and a transcription of the first interviews were mailed to each interviewee. The letter thanked the interviewees for their participation, and then asked them to consider a second interview since they were midway into teaching a new school year. As part of the integrity of the interviewing process, the interviewees were asked to review the transcript and to qualify or change their responses if they wished. The intention was to create ownership for the interviewees for what they had said and, secondly, to engender confidence in the interviewer that what they had said had been recorded accurately. Only two interviewees wanted to comment on their responses in their transcript (Chapter 7, p.247). The remaining potential interviewees from the first round cohort accepted the accuracy of their transcript record and agreed to participate in a second round of interviews.

4.6 Second Round of Interviews

A second round of interviews was conducted because the emerging themes from the first round of interviews suggested that recently assigned RE teachers were experiencing a significant change in their perceptions about implementing the draft RE Units (Chapter 6, p.242). This section describes the development of the interview questions from a re-examination of the primary research question and then outlines the findings from the second round of interviews. From the findings of the second interviews, a further series of themes emerged and are discussed that provide further insights into the experiences of recently assigned RE teachers as they implemented the draft RE Units. Lastly, there is a description of the procedures for the second round of interviews and the subsequent reappraisal of the research question leading to the development of another set of interview questions. The second round of interviews explored the perceptions of the teachers about the changes that had taken place in teaching RE and their reflections about what RE teaching meant to them after another year of teaching this subject. With a new school year, there were also circumstantial changes for the teachers in the sample
group. Teachers had a new class, perhaps a different year group (and hence, new Units to teach) and, for some, a new school to teach at. Teachers had the opportunity to review their responses in the first round of interviews from 1998 and discuss their perceptions of teaching RE within the context of their new experiences in 1999.

4.6.1 Re-clarification of the Research Question

During the course of the first round of interviews, there emerged key findings that influenced how the research would proceed. Certainly, how recently assigned RE teachers coped with the demands of implementing the draft PAREC Units was important, and this was underpinned by an appreciation for the theological and pedagogical principles of the Units. However, what seemed to become an increasingly greater imperative for recently assigned RE teachers was their outlook towards teaching RE and their continuance in this learning area. To investigate this emerging theme, the primary research question needed to be re-focused.

The original research question focused on how recently assigned RE teachers handled the demands of implementing the draft RE Units using the curriculum materials, their teaching approach and their understanding of the theological and pedagogical principles that underpinned the Units. The research question was:

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

The key factors to emerge from the first round of interviews were *experience* and *familiarity* in teaching the PAREC Units to the students (Chapter 6, p.219). It was these factors that recently assigned RE teachers believed helped them to meet the demands of implementing the draft PAREC Units. While an understanding of the principles underpinning the Units was appreciated, the teachers described their own ‘code of practice’ and rationale for teaching RE as a part of their faith witness. What seemed to be emerging was an expectation that the demands of teaching RE were going to change for them; many hoped that it was for the better. Such an expectation was a substantive issue as it indicated that this too was a major factor in the implementation process of the
Units. The research question thus extended beyond exploring how recently assigned RE teachers coped with the demands of implementing the draft PAREC Units into their RE teaching. The research focus now included an investigation into how the demands of implementing the draft Units affected the outlook of teachers towards teaching Religious Education. Specifically, the feelings of the interviewees about the value of their teaching RE were investigated as well their reflections about their personal and professional formation as RE teachers. A fourth subsidiary question to the primary research question was developed:

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

The implementation of the draft RE Units was demanding because there was a perceived expectation that recently assigned teachers required a level of personal, spiritual and faith formation beyond that expected from other learning areas. An investigation into this issue would make a valuable contribution to understanding the impact of curriculum implementation on recently assigned teachers not only in terms of their professional competence but also in terms of their personal teacher formation. The purpose of the second round of interviews was to find out what changes in their perceptions of the demands of teaching RE had occurred and to examine more closely the interplay between the teaching of classroom RE and their personal and professional formation.

4.6.2 Conducting the Second Round of Interviews

The interviews were handled in a similar manner to the first round protocol. Two teachers agreed to complete written responses to the interview questions as they were located in remote country schools while the remainder agreed to face-to-face interviews. They were conducted either during or after school in a comfortable venue and at an appropriate time for interviewees. The interviewees appeared less apprehensive and, indeed, seemed eager to expand on their experiences of teaching RE over the past year. Similar to the protocol established in the first round of interviews (pp.128-129), the interviewees were taped and a transcription was made. The transcript of their second
interview was sent later to them for validation (Appendix 14, p.384). Although the opportunity was available, interviewees made no further comment regarding their transcript or the study. As in the first round of interviews, the responses of the interviewees were analysed using the QSR NUD•IST version 4.0 (N4) computer software program (QSR International 1996).

4.6.3 Development of the Second Interview Questions

With a number of crucial issues emerging from the first round of interviews, the research question was re-evaluated and interview questions were created to allow scrutiny of these issues. Firstly, did recently assigned RE teachers believe experience and familiarity would facilitate how they coped with the demands of teaching RE? Secondly, could recently assigned RE teachers draw upon their experience and familiarity of teaching their main subject area in coping with the demands of teaching RE? Thirdly, what were the demands of teaching RE on the personal faith of the teacher and fourthly, how did they envisage their teaching of RE – was teaching RE important to them personally and professionally as an RE teacher?

For the second round of interviews, an interview schedule with a new set of questions was created (Appendices 12 and 13, pp.381-383). As in the case of the first round, the questions were trialled with a small group of religious educators. The new questions focused on whether the perceptions of the teachers about teaching RE had changed over the previous school year and how their aspirations for teaching RE had evolved since they were last interviewed. With a new school year, the sample group faced a different scenario to that of the previous year. The experiences of the teachers over this time may have influenced their outlook on teaching Religious Education. The design of the questions was to be more open-ended to allow teachers to reflect on their experiences since the first round of interviews.
4.6.4 The Second Interview Questions

The second interviews gave recently assigned RE teachers an occasion to discuss their feelings and concerns about RE teaching. Four key questions were developed to promote deeper levels of reflection in the participants about the experience of teaching the draft PAREC Units and their outlook towards teaching RE. Each question paralleled the key findings to emerge from the first round of interviews. The teachers were informed of the purposes of the second round of interviews as an opportunity for them to explore further their perceptions of teaching the draft PAREC, particularly when a school year had recently passed. The questions presented during the second interview and the rationale for these questions from the findings of the first round of interviews is outlined below:

Question 1:
Where do you stand now in relation to your RE teaching? Is it the same, different, worse, or better?

One of the findings from the first round of interviews was the importance of experience and familiarity with the RE Units of Work in improving the quality of RE teaching and how the confidence of the teacher developed as a result. This first question was designed to investigate if the value of experience and familiarity remained a priority in the perception of the teacher within the new scenario of the following school year – new class, perhaps a new Year group or even a new school.

Question 2:
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?

Teachers saw the curriculum materials and teaching approach in the draft RE Units as useful tools comparable to those available in their major learning area. This question sought to investigate whether teachers expected that, like their own learning areas, they would have the flexibility to choose from a wider range of resources and to go beyond the teaching strategies advised in the draft RE Units to suit the needs of their students.
**Question 3:**

*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?*

There were clear differences between RE and their own learning area in terms of the classroom dynamics which required different or additional skills of the teacher. These skills were needed to engage the students both personally and academically. The focus of this question was to explore whether teachers felt Religious Education, unlike other learning areas, had additional demands on their teaching persona. To see if teachers perceived the necessity to be faith witnesses to their students even though students might or might not be receptive to the stance of the teacher.

**Question 4:**

*What is best and most special about teaching RE for you?*

Teachers expressed a strong passion for teaching RE but the motivation to do so was not clear. They saw their RE teaching as an important extension of their personal faith and professional formation. The strong passion or ‘generativity’ expressed by teachers warranted further investigation as a possible factor in teachers sustaining a positive outlook towards implementing the draft RE Units.

4.6.5 **Analysis and Return of Second Interview Transcripts**

In similar fashion to the analysis of the first round of interviews, the interviews were transcribed, collated and coded (p.132). The coding protocol was implemented once more, and generic themes emerged. These themes either replicated or affirmed the themes in the first round of interviews or were new themes to emerge. The findings of the second round of interviews were reported according to these themes. The transcripts of the second interviews were returned to the interviewees for their perusal and were given the option to comment if they felt it was necessary. No further comments were returned.
The instigation of the first and second round of interviews was possible because the survey had provided initial data about particular concerns or issues. The survey also offered a means of identifying a sample group of recently assigned RE teachers to interview. The next section describes the criteria and process for selecting this group of RARE teachers.

4.7 Research Participants

In the past, the data regarding the perceptions of recently assigned RE teachers were anecdotal (Chapter 2, p.46). However, this research project sought to substantiate the perceptions of recently assigned RE teachers with primary data. Recently assigned RE teachers needed to be defined as a distinct cohort. A baseline or contextual data was gathered about their demographic and professional backgrounds and their perceptions of implementing the draft Units in terms of usefulness of instructional resources, appropriateness of teaching approach and level of commitment (Chapter 5, p.156). To establish a baseline, where none coherently existed before, a survey approach was used because of the range of data that could be gathered at one point in time (Cohen and Manion 1989). Such an approach is well documented in research in Religious Education (for example, Flynn 1975, 1979, 1985, 1993; Hanlon 1989; Leavey, Hetherton, Britt and O’Neill 1992; Astley, Francis, Burton and Wilcox 1997; Flynn and Mok 2002).

Before the research proceeded, it was necessary to identify the cohort of teachers that would fit the term of ‘recently assigned secondary RE teacher’. The Catholic Education Office of WA (CEOWA) and the Catholic Secondary Principals Association (CSPAWA) described this group of teachers as inexperienced and inadequately trained teachers. They had been largely identified anecdotally or indirectly through data on Accreditation to Teach RE. The CSPAWA (1992) considered recently assigned RE teachers to have limited experience in teaching RE and possibly inadequate formal training in RE content and methods. The CEOWA identified groups of RE teachers according to their mandatory professional status to teach RE called Accreditation to Teach Religious Education. The policy of the Catholic Education Commission of WA (CECWA) was that secondary RE teachers completed the tertiary study and inservice components of Accreditation to Teach Religious Education within five years of teaching.
Religious Education (CEOWA 1997c, pp.10-11). Recently assigned RE teachers were teachers who were in their first five years of teaching RE and were some way towards completing the study and inservice requirements of Accreditation to Teach RE. This group of teachers became the focus for the target population of the study.

4.7.1 Defining the target population

The next step was to develop a set of criteria for what constituted a recently assigned RE teacher. These criteria contributed towards providing a profile to describe these people. Furthermore, the criteria assisted in identifying the number of RE teachers who matched this profile for the survey phase of the research.

In 1997, the CEOWA again collated data on the number of RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools, along with their years of experience in teaching RE and their accreditation status (Table 4.1, p.141). The accreditation status of these teachers was determined by the completion of study and inservice requirements as part of Accreditation to Teach RE in a Catholic school. Unlike the previous table showing the Accreditation to Teach RE Status (Table 2.1, p.48), data was collated according to three categories of teaching experience (Table 4.1, p.141). The categories of RE teaching experience were divided into three five-year increments, namely, RE teachers with less than 6 years experience in teaching RE, RE teachers with 6 to 10 years experience and RE teachers with more than 10 years. These categories identify the number of years teachers have taught RE regardless of their actual teaching load in Religious Education. RE teachers with less than 6 years RE teaching experience were required to complete Accreditation to Teach RE during the first five years of their RE teaching.
Table 4.1  Accreditation to Teach RE Status of RE Personnel in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton in 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching experience of RE Personnel</th>
<th>0-5 Years (%)</th>
<th>6-10 Years (%)</th>
<th>&gt;10 Years (%)</th>
<th>Total RE Teachers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of RE Personnel</td>
<td>243 (46%)</td>
<td>106 (20%)</td>
<td>183 (34%)</td>
<td>532 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accreditation to Teach RE Status</th>
<th>0-5 Years (%)</th>
<th>6-10 Years (%)</th>
<th>&gt;10 Years (%)</th>
<th>Total RE Teachers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation components fully completed</td>
<td>91 (37%)</td>
<td>73 (69%)</td>
<td>130 (71%)</td>
<td>294 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Study component only</td>
<td>10 (4%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>7 (4%)</td>
<td>19 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Inservice component only</td>
<td>98 (40%)</td>
<td>25 (24%)</td>
<td>29 (16%)</td>
<td>152 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No components completed</td>
<td>44 (18%)</td>
<td>6 (6%)</td>
<td>17 (9%)</td>
<td>67 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial or non-completion of Accreditation (Totals of 1, 2 and 3)</td>
<td>152 (63%)</td>
<td>33 (31%)</td>
<td>53 (29%)</td>
<td>238 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (%) of RE teachers</td>
<td>243 (100%)</td>
<td>106 (100%)</td>
<td>183 (100%)</td>
<td>532 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:

Partial or non-completion of Accreditation to teach RE represents the summation of teachers who have either completed only one or none of the component requirements. Percentages are rounded to whole numbers. No data from the Diocese of Broome was collected because schools were not using the draft PAREC.

Source: Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 1997, Accreditation to Teach RE Data 1997. Used with permission of the CEOWA.
Table 4.1 (p.141) indicates that, out of the three categories of RE teaching experience, the largest group of RE teachers is the category with teachers who have less than 6 years RE teaching experience (46% of the total number of RE teachers). Recently assigned RE teachers are required to complete the Accreditation to Teach RE study component by the end of their fifth year of teaching RE (CEOWA 1997c, pp.10-11). However, this group has the smallest proportion of teachers by category with Accreditation to Teach RE status (37%). It was also the group that had the largest number of RE teachers in that category that had completed only one of the components of Accreditation to Teach RE: study or inservice component (44%) or had not completed either component (18%). These teachers were the most inexperienced or least professionally trained group of RE teachers.

Inexperienced and inexpert teachers were the cohort that concerns were expressed earlier about their vulnerability in using RE curriculum materials (Chapter 2, pp.46-47). As a result, these teachers became the target population of recently assigned RE teachers for this research project. However, not all of the recently assigned RE teachers were involved in the project. Teachers in their first year of full time teaching experience were trying to ‘survive’ their new teaching situation and did not have the time to articulate their perceptions or to relate their experiences of teaching very well (Schools Council 1990, p.105). For this reason, these ‘first year’ teachers were excluded from the target population.

The target population consisted of those teachers who had completed more than one but less than six years RE teaching experience. This group was chosen to highlight the recently assigned RE teachers under scrutiny in this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, teachers with two to five years experience were more likely to focus on the quality of their teaching practice rather than just their classroom management. Secondly, they were likely to be able to reflect upon their practice and have a desire to articulate the significance of their experiences (Schools Council 1990, p.106). These reasons were very much in accord with the interpretivist approach used in this study (p.117).
4.7.2 Selection of the Sample Group for the First Round of Interviews

The responses from the survey suggested that many teachers held common perceptions about different aspects of implementing the draft PAREC. To identify a sample group, there needed to be a transparent selection process. Purposive sampling was used as a means of selecting a sample group that reflected the range and diversity of feelings about the main survey areas. This form of sampling was the means by which:

Researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of the typicality. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs.

(Cohen and Manion 1994, p.89)

Therefore, the sample group of recently assigned RE teachers to be invited to participate in a round of interviews was indicative of the range of teachers who responded to the survey. The sample consisted of subgroups of teachers, who reflected similar and diverse perceptions in the three categories – use of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying principles. The process for selecting these teachers is described in the next section.

Process for Identifying the Sample Group

The selection of interviewees began by using the Likert scale item responses in the three categories of the survey, namely, use of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying principles. In each item there was a range of possible responses from strongly agree, agree and uncertain to disagree and strongly disagree. Each of these responses was numbered from 1 to 5 respectively so that a mean and a standard deviation was calculated. On many items, the standard deviation was narrow, so it was concluded that the mean score mirrored the perceptions of a significant number of teachers. By adding the mean scores on each item, it was possible to get the total mean score for each category. Once the total mean score was calculated for each category, the total score of each teacher for each category was ranked according to who was closest to the total mean score. As a result, this formed one subgroup of teachers called the mean score or ‘normal’ group for each category.
The same procedure was applied to teachers with the most divergent responses from the total mean scores. These teachers were included to access the diversity of responses and to be sensitive to the minor differences that existed. Some teachers scored items higher than the total mean score, others scored lower. These formed two other subgroups – a high score or ‘critical’ group and a low score or ‘very positive’ group. Figure 4.1 illustrates these groupings of low, mean and high score groups. The ‘high score’ group of teachers had responses which reflected a lesser agreement with the Likert scale item statements. The ‘low score’ group had responses that reflected a greater agreement with the Likert scale item statements. These subgroups are summarised according to item statements within the categories of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying principles in Table 4.2 (p.145). Appendix 6 provides a more detailed summary (pp.365-367).

**Figure 4.1  Sample Selections across Likert Item Scores**
Table 4.2  Initial Criteria for Selection of the Sample Sub-Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Likert Scale Items from Survey</th>
<th>Total Lowest Scores</th>
<th>Total Mean Scores</th>
<th>Total Highest Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Resources (IRES)</td>
<td>1 to 4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Approach (TAPP)</td>
<td>7 to 15</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying Principles (UPRI)</td>
<td>18 to 28</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:

- Scores are given to the nearest first decimal place.
- Total Lowest Score is based on participants’ total score on Likert scale items that have the lowest total score in this category.
- Total Mean Score is based on participants’ total score on Likert scale items that match the mean total score in this category.
- Total Highest Score is based on participants’ total score on Likert scale items that have the highest total score in this category.

The number of participants that could be interviewed was drawn from each of the subgroups. Sowden and Keeves (1988) suggest that a sample size of 15 to 20 people for one researcher to study is recommended. Initially, a balance across the curriculum implementation categories was attempted with 15 to 18 interviewees selected from each of the categories. However, it became apparent that the number of potential interviewees should be focused upon the cluster of scores of the teachers closest to the highest, mean and lowest scores (Figure 4.1, p.144). Small groupings of teachers closest to these scores were more indicative of the subgroups compared to those teachers further from the scores. As a result, cluster groupings were favoured in each subgroup to make up the pool of potential interviewees as shown in Table 4.3 (p.146). By returning to the birthdate code reference in the survey, it was possible to allocate a code reference to each potential interviewee. After checking back to this code, it was realised that some teachers had been selected across the categories with two teachers being selected in the mean score group across the three categories. This checking back on the codes reduced the pool of potential interviewees to 37 actual teachers. The result was a sample cohort...
of recently assigned RE teachers who were representative of the diversity within the target population.

There were some distinct advantages to having a restricted pool of participants. Firstly, the teachers selected were teachers who scored closest to the lower, mean, and higher scores within the categories defined in the survey. These responses of the teachers reflected the responses in the category sub-groups – they were teachers typical of that category sub-group. Secondly, limiting the number of potential interviewees would reduce the amount of time to get the interviews done while the survey was still fresh in the minds of the interviewees. Thirdly, as these teachers were the most typical within the category sub-groups, the selection of additional teachers would mean a wider range of perceptions from the total lower, mean, and higher total scores and not necessarily reflect the predominant perceptions of the target population. Furthermore, this participant sample may be limited by the ‘amount of data that can be processed and by the costs involved’ for this research project (Sowden and Keeves, 1988, p.516). With these advantages in mind, the RE Coordinators (RECs) were contacted again to begin the process of identifying the potential interviewees.

Table 4.3 Potential Pool of Interviewees in each Curriculum Implementation Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Groups</th>
<th>Instructional Resources (IRES)</th>
<th>Teaching Approach (TAPP)</th>
<th>Underlying Principles (UPRI)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Score or Positive Group</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Score or Typical Group</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Score or Critical Group</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
* The mean scores for Instructional Resources were very low (i.e. many teachers responded with agree or strongly agree) and the standard deviation was narrow. As a result, the low score cluster grouping was small in comparison to other groupings.
The RECs were contacted initially by telephone and thanked for their support for the research. An outline of the survey results was discussed and they were then informed that one or more recently assigned RE teachers from their school would be invaluable participants to the interview phase of the research. The RECs were given a limited description of these potential interviewees based on demographic and professional criteria from the survey: birth-date code (day and month interviewee was born), the gender and age range of the teacher, the years of teaching RE and the specialist (main) subject area of the teacher. A letter was sent to the RE Coordinators as a follow up to this telephone conversation (Appendix 7, p.368). At the time of the telephone conversation, they were informed to refrain from disclosing the identity of the teachers to the researcher to maintain anonymity. Instead, the RECs were asked to approach the teachers concerned and pass on a letter from the researcher inviting them to be involved in the interviews (Appendix 8, pp.369-370). The letter to the teachers commended them for their involvement in the survey and for the quality of their responses. The teachers were asked whether they would be involved in the interview phase of the study. If they accepted, they could choose to do a face-to-face interview, a telephone interview or written responses to the interview questions (Appendices 9 and 10, pp.371-379). The last two alternatives were available especially to teachers in remote country schools as it was not possible for the researcher to meet them in person.

From a pool of 37 possible candidates, 28 recently assigned RE teachers accepted the invitation to participate in the first round of interviews. The nine teachers who declined the invitation to be involved stated that they were either too busy or did not wish to be further involved in the research project. The majority of teachers agreed to be involved in face-to-face interviews with two teachers agreeing to extended telephone interviews. Several teachers agreed to give extended written responses and these teachers were followed up with a telephone call to discuss their responses (most of these teachers were located in remote country schools). To preserve their confidentiality (p.151), the participants were given pseudonyms in the study. Appendix 15 (p.385) lists the pseudonyms of the participants and their involvement in the interviews.
4.7.3 The Sample Group Revisited for Second Round of Interviews

For the second round of interviews, contact with the sample group members was renewed by telephone and then by letter. As Appendix 15 (p.385) illustrates, most members had remained at their school but three interviewees – Clare, Jessica, and Ursula – had moved to another school. In addition, two interviewees when contacted again, Jessica and Kate, indicated they had discontinued teaching RE but agreed to be involved in the second round of interviews. They were interviewed to investigate why they had discontinued and whether there were links between this decision and their reflections about their experiences of teaching Religious Education.

There were also changes to the situations of the interviewees. Gayle had left the Catholic school system and did not take part in the second round of interviews. Clare had moved from a country school to a metropolitan one. While she had given a telephone response in the previous round of interviews, she was now able to do a face-to-face interview. Some interviewees, like Steven, agreed to be interviewed personally the second time around after providing written responses in the previous interview round. A further six teachers declined any further involvement in the interview process due to heavy work commitments such as management responsibilities or study. As a result, there were 21 teachers available to be interviewed for the second round of interviews. Again, the distribution of quotations in reporting the findings of the second round of interviews were monitored (Appendix 16, p.386).

During the first round of interviews, the interviewees were drawn from subgroups within the three curriculum implementation categories identified in the initial survey (pp.144-145). There were those teachers who were very positive in their responses (low score group); those teachers who reflected the normal responses of recently assigned RE teachers in the target population (mean score group); and, those teachers who were critical in their responses (high score group). This categorisation meant the sample group could be seen as reflective of the diversity of recently assigned RE teachers within Catholic schools in Western Australia. Since responses from the categories within the sample group tended to be similar in the first round of interviews, it was felt that this distinction no longer needed to be a factor. However, in the initial phases of the second
round of interviews this distinction between groups was monitored to see if there were any appreciable differences. There were no appreciable differences detected and notably they once again held much in common with each other, as will be explored in Chapter 7 (p.244).

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The procedures of this research project have conformed, at all times, to the highest levels of ethics requirements and the research ethics guidelines of the University of Notre Dame Australia were strictly employed. Strategies that ensured adequate provision for confidentiality were an important ethical consideration in conducting the study (Cohen and Manion 1989). It was emphasised to Principals, RE Coordinators and teachers that the study was neither an assessment of the competence of a teacher in teaching RE nor an evaluation of the school or the PAREC Units of Work. A conscious effort was made to highlight that it was the perceptions of the recently assigned RE teachers that were important. This researcher did not wish to offer pre-conceived ideas about the likely findings of the study to these teachers or to Principals and RE Coordinators. As an incentive to participate in the study, the overall findings from the survey were offered to RE Coordinators for perusal and discussion with RE staff.

Furthermore, the participants needed to feel comfortable with answering the questions provided without feeling stressed or embarrassed. Rather, the intention was that the research be valuable to them after they reflected on their experiences of implementing the draft Units and perhaps open up a healthy discussion between themselves and their colleagues. Therefore, it was important to put into place a set of procedures that requested, informed, and reassured each level of the Catholic education system in their involvement in the research project (for example, see pp.125-126).

Of utmost importance was to ensure that the privacy and reputation of schools and teachers was respected. The Catholic education system in Western Australia is comparatively small and it was necessary that neither individuals nor schools were recognised by the responses that were given. To preserve confidentiality, a coding system was applied to schools and participants (p.126). The participants involved in the interviews were given aliases to protect their identities. This alias was especially
necessary, particularly as it relates to the professional competence of RE teachers and the personal nature of responses from individual teachers. Furthermore, an alias allowed the reader to identify more easily with the participant as a person rather than as a code number. One further point concerns RE teachers belonging to a religious congregation. Since a comparatively small number of people from religious congregations are teaching in the Western Australian Catholic education system, such persons are not identified as a brother, priest or sister in this research project to maintain their privacy. Otherwise, the person, religious congregation, or school could possibly be identified.

Another important consideration was the position of the researcher within the Catholic education system and the role to be played in dealing with analysis of the data and possible bias. At the time of the research project, the researcher was involved as a CEOWA RE consultant in the development of the draft PAREC. While working with other consultants on the production of the Units, the researcher also began this research project on a part-time doctoral research basis. Hence, it was necessary to emphasise that the research project was not an evaluation of the draft RE Units, nor was it to be an evaluation of the capacity of recently assigned RE teachers in using these Units. Therefore, letters sent to Principals, RE Coordinators and teachers stressed these points and were signed by the researcher as a doctoral student from the University of Notre Dame Australia (Appendix 2 pp.351-352). Furthermore, to preserve anonymity and encourage goodwill among the teachers, the researcher asked the RE Coordinators to administer the survey so that, at this stage of the research, the researcher was unaware of the identities of the recently assigned RE teachers (p.126). In analysing the responses from the surveys, the priority was to allow the data to speak for itself while recognising that the researcher had many years involvement in RE with which he could reflect upon to discern the significance of the data. However, to reduce interference by bias, the findings were reviewed according to what emerged not only from the survey but also from the subsequent rounds of interviews. Therefore, a triangulation approach was used to support the reliability of the findings (Cohen and Manion 1989; Denzin 1988, p.511).
To encourage involvement by the participants, confidentiality about their personal background was paramount. After contact had been made with the participants, the interviewer organised a suitable time and private venue suitable to the participants. The participants were thanked for their decision to be involved and for their time. They were then informed about the purpose of the interview and how the interview was to be recorded. After the interview, they were thanked again for their involvement and informed that a transcript of the interview would be given to them for their perusal and comment. Importantly, they were reassured that in the reporting of the interview, aliases would be used to protect their privacy and no specific mention would be made of their school.

4.9 Research Design Summary

This chapter provides a detailed description and rationale of the research design that was instigated in this study. The exploration of the difficulties that recently assigned RE teachers faced as they encountered the exigencies of implementing the draft PAREC was addressed by researching the primary research question:

**What perceptions do recently assigned secondary RE teachers possess about the demands of teaching the draft Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course?**

Such a question indicated a mixed method approach to the research problem in similar vein to the research designs of other studies (p.120). Figure 4.2 (p.152) illustrates the steps and procedures that were taken in implementing the research techniques and in collecting and analysing the data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEPS</th>
<th>PROCEDURES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Document Analysis</td>
<td>Content analysis of curriculum documents to identify key resources and curriculum principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Application of Fullan’s (2001) dimensions of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying curriculum principles to pilot survey categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Survey</td>
<td>Pilot survey modified, representations made to Director of CEOWA, Principals and RE Coordinators to be involved in research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey to Target Population</td>
<td>Target population defined. RE Coordinator contacted to distribute surveys and collect completed surveys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surveys returned to researcher. Confidentiality of responses maintained with allocation of school code and birth date code of teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responses collated and analysed. Mean, mode and standard deviation for each Likert item calculated. Open-ended questions analysed and tabulated. Analysis of variance and Schettè tests used to identify significant differences within the survey population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposive Sample</td>
<td>Mean and outlier scores for Likert items used for selection of purposive sample of teachers identified around high, mean and low scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Round of Interviews</td>
<td>Identified teachers approached though RE Coordinator to do an interview. Suitable time and place for interviewed arranged with participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First round of interview questions developed. Questions trialled and modified to focus on survey results and allow opportunity for personal recount of RE teaching experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews recorded and transcribed. Transcription sent to participants for verification. Transcripts collated and analysed using N4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reappraisal of Research Question</td>
<td>Themes emerge that lead to reappraisal of research question and the inclusion of a fourth subsidiary question. Consequently, another round of interviews is conducted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Round of Interviews</td>
<td>Participants approached again a year later to do another interview. Protocols established in first round are repeated. Transcripts analysed by using N4. Changes in themes emerge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The focus of the study was on a particular group of teachers and their perceptions about their experiences of implementing a new curriculum. Such perceptions formed their subjective reality of the concerns and responses to curriculum implementation. In turn, three subsidiary research questions were initially developed:

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?

As there was a lack of contextual data on the target population, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative techniques were incorporated in a survey. The development of the survey included a preliminary analysis of RE curriculum documents and the trialling of a pilot survey. As a result, a modified survey was developed and disseminated to schools. The survey gathered information identifying the target population and their demographic and professional background. Furthermore, a series of Likert scaling and rank ordering items as well as open-ended questions were used, based on the three aspects of curriculum implementation. Next, the trialling of the survey was described, followed by the procedure for conducting the survey in participant schools. The collation and analysis of the responses using the computer software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 7.5 (SPSS Inc. 1997) were then described.

The collation of responses led to the development of a database to be used as a springboard from which a more indepth analysis of the responses of recently assigned RE teachers to the implementation of the draft PAREC were explored. Since the subsidiary research questions were qualitative in nature, an interview approach was used to further explore the perceptions recently assigned RE teachers have about their experiences of dealing with the demands of implementing the draft RE Units. To
maintain the integrity of the interview questions, significant findings from the survey were posed to the interviewees for their reflection and comment. Their responses were recorded on audio-cassette and a transcription of the interview was created. A copy of the transcript was given to the interviewees for their perusal and comment. This process further enhanced the integrity of the research methodology. The transcripts were then analysed for patterns or themes using the QSR NUD•IST version 4.0 (N4) computer software program (QSR International 1996).

As a result, new insights emerged from this first round of interviews that warranted a re-examination of the primary research question and the development of an additional subsidiary question:

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?

This led to a second round of interviews with the sample cohort in the following year and consequently, the research project became a longitudinal study. The protocols for the first round of interviews were followed in the second round as well. The transcripts of the interviews were again analysed using N4 (QSR International 1996). The emerging responses suggested that recently assigned RE teachers make changes to teaching RE as they become more familiar with the content of the Units and discern from their classroom experiences how best to teach RE (Chapter 6, p.216).

The survey also provided the contextual data from which a sample cohort was identified that typified the responses from the target population of recently assigned secondary RE teachers. The sample group chosen represented three groups of teachers that ranged from very supportive (positive), supportive (typical), and less supportive (critical) of the experience of implementing the draft RE curriculum. Furthermore, the chapter included a discussion of the ethical considerations about respecting the privacy and reputation of schools and teachers involved and the possible biases or influences the researcher may have in the survey.
With the research design in place, it was possible to collect initial baseline data; select a sample of recently assigned RE teachers and explore the subjective realities of these teachers during the two rounds of interviews. In the next chapter, the findings of the survey instrument are presented, analysed, and discussed. These findings also became the base from which the first round of interview questions are constructed and discussed.
CHAPTER FIVE

SURVEY FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The role of the survey was to establish a baseline and context for the qualitative aspects of the longitudinal study. This chapter begins by describing the background to the survey in terms of the number of schools and teachers involved as well as their demographic and professional backgrounds. Next, the survey responses of the teachers regarding the use of instructional resources are discussed. The responses of the teachers to the teaching approach and underlying principles sections in the survey are then addressed. An overview of the findings is presented next and possible lines of inquiry are discussed in preparation for the next phase of the research project.

When statistical tests of inference are undertaken, only significant effects are reported. These survey findings establish a database of potential interviewees. From this database, the selection of a purposive sample of interviewees and their professional characteristics as recently assigned RE (RARE) teachers was possible.

5.2 Background to the Teachers in the Survey

Letters were sent to all 38 Principals of Catholic secondary schools from the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton. In response, 34 (89%) Principals agreed to have RE Coordinators and recently assigned RE teachers in their schools involved in the survey. RE Coordinators in these schools were also invited to participate in the study and all agreed to be involved. They were willing to approach recently assigned RE teachers about completing a survey. Table 5.1 (p.157) and Table 5.2 (p.157) summarise the background context of the surveys. Of the 168 surveys sent out to schools to teachers in their second to sixth year of teaching RE, 122 (73%) were sent back which is a high rate of return (as discussed in Chapter 4, p.126). Based on the Accreditation to Teach RE Data (1997a) from the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA), this return of 122 surveys represented about half of the RE teachers in the 0-5 years of teaching experience category (Table 4.1, p.141). Table 5.2 (p.157) shows that most returns came from the
metropolitan area of the Archdiocese of Perth (73%) as this region has the most Catholic secondary schools. There was some variation in the response rate across the three dioceses. The Diocese of Bunbury had the lowest return rate (70%) and the Diocese of Geraldton had the highest (91%).

Table 5.1  Surveys sent to Schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archdioceses and Dioceses</th>
<th>Surveys sent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Archdiocese of Perth</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Area</td>
<td>125 (74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Metropolitan Area</td>
<td>12  (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diocese of Bunbury</strong></td>
<td>20  (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diocese of Geraldton</strong></td>
<td>11  (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Sent</strong></td>
<td>168 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.*

Table 5.2  Surveys returned from Schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archdioceses and Dioceses</th>
<th>Surveys returned</th>
<th>Response Rate¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Archdiocese of Perth</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Area</td>
<td>89   (73%)</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Metropolitan Area</td>
<td>9    (7%)</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diocese of Bunbury</strong></td>
<td>14   (11%)</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diocese of Geraldton</strong></td>
<td>10   (8%)</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Returned</strong></td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:

1. Response Rate calculated on the percentage of surveys returned divided by surveys sent.

Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.*
5.2.1 Demographics of the RE teachers

Of the 122 survey returns, the majority (69%) came from female lay teachers (Figure 5.1). There was only one person from a religious congregation teaching RE involved in the survey. The singular presence of a religious congregation teacher reflects the decline of religious congregation teaching involvement in Catholic schools and the rise in the employment of lay staff (Figure 2.2, p.44). The ratio of male to female teachers in the survey was 1:3 whereas the ratio nationally for secondary school teachers and, coincidently, for Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia was 1:1.2 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003 and Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2003, p.33). The prevalence of female lay teachers was noted but not investigated further as it was considered beyond the scope of this study. While gender perceptions may be a factor in curriculum implementation, the narrow variability in responses from the survey on the three dimensions of curriculum implementation (Table 5.11, p.177; Table 5.19, p.186 and Table 5.31, p.197) seemed to indicate that perceptions were homogeneous (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh 2006, p.136). Nonetheless, one of the recommendations for further research (Chapter 9, p.345) was to explore further this situation regarding gender balance and its impact on the teaching of Religious Education.

Figure 5.1 Distribution of Teachers by Gender and Vocation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender and Vocation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male lay teachers</td>
<td>36 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female lay teachers</td>
<td>85 (69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious congregation teacher</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5.2 indicates that recently assigned RE teachers tended to be drawn from age groups with most respondents (66%), that is, between 21-30 years of age. There was little difference in the male to female teacher ratio across the age groups (Figure 5.3, p.160). Very few (6%) recently assigned RE teachers taught RE as their main subject area (Figure 5.4, p.160). Rather, they were teachers trained within a specific subject area who also taught Religious Education. The largest group of recently assigned RE teachers comprised of teachers who mostly taught English (26%) followed by teachers of Society and Environment (14%), Technology and Enterprise (13%), Science (11%), Health and Physical Education (9%), the Arts (7%), Maths (7%), Religious Education (6%) and Languages Other Than English or LOTE (3%). As a comparison of professional backgrounds, teachers in the learning areas of the Arts, English, LOTE, Religious Education, and, Society and Environment were grouped under a humanities background. Maths, Science, Health and Physical Education, Technology and Enterprise teachers were grouped under a science background. There were more teachers with a humanities background (57%) than teachers with a science background (39%) as indicated in Figure 5.5 (p.161).

**Figure 5.2 Distribution of Teachers across Three Age Groups**

![Bar chart showing distribution of teachers across three age groups: 21–25 years, 26–30 years, > 30 years.](chart)

*Figure 5.2 Distribution of Teachers across Three Age Groups*
Figure 5.3  Percentage Distribution of Teachers by Age Group and Gender

![Graph showing percentage distribution of teachers by age group and gender.](image)

Figure 5.4  Percentage Distribution of Teachers by Major Teaching Area

![Graph showing percentage distribution of teachers by major teaching area.](image)

n = 122 teachers
5.2.2 Tertiary Qualifications

The majority of recently assigned RE teachers (64%) in the survey graduated in their first tertiary qualification between 1991 and 1998 and 32% graduated from 1958 to 1990 (Table 5.3, p.162). Furthermore, 55% of teachers graduated in their second qualification between 1991 and 1998. The data indicate that more than likely teachers had recently graduated and had two qualifications. Very few teachers (9%) had more than two qualifications (Table 5.4, p.163). These teachers (89%) graduated mostly from tertiary institutions in Western Australia (Table 5.4, p.163): 35% from Edith Cowan University, 18% from the University of Western Australia, 18% from Curtin University, 11% from the University of Notre Dame Australia and 8% from Murdoch University. It should be noted that the University of Notre Dame Australia only began its undergraduate program in 1994, so the percentage of teachers graduating would be lower than from the other tertiary institutions.
Many recently assigned RE teachers (73%) had a second degree (Table 5.3), usually a Graduate Diploma of Education to enable a teaching position. Most of these teachers (67%) completed their second degree between 1991 and 1998 (Table 5.3). They had attended predominantly WA tertiary institutions: 25% from Edith Cowan University, 18% from the University of Notre Dame Australia, 13% from the University of Western Australia, 6% from Curtin University and 4% from Murdoch University (Table 5.4, p.163). It should be noted that UNDA was established in 1992 with the College of Education catering for post-graduate students; the focus on pre-service teacher training began in 1994 and so the proportions for first degree graduation are low while the proportion for second degrees are greater.

**Table 5.3** Year of Graduation for First and Second Tertiary Qualifications among recently assigned RE teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>First Degree</th>
<th>Second Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of teachers (%)</td>
<td>Number of teachers (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-1960</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1965</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-1970</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1975</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1980</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1985</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
<td>6 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1990</td>
<td>21 (17%)</td>
<td>8 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1995</td>
<td>65 (52%)</td>
<td>55 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-1998</td>
<td>10 (8%)</td>
<td>12 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No year stated</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>33 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>122 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.*
Table 5.4  Tertiary institutions attended by recently assigned RE teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tertiary Institution</th>
<th>First Degree completed</th>
<th>Second Degree Completed</th>
<th>More than 2 degrees completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curtin University</td>
<td>29 (24%)</td>
<td>7 (6%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith Cowan University</td>
<td>44 (36%)</td>
<td>30 (25%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murdoch University</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Notre Dame Australia</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>22 (18%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Western Australia</td>
<td>24 (20%)</td>
<td>16 (13%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Australian Tertiary Institution</td>
<td>11 (9%)</td>
<td>7 (6%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas Tertiary Institution</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No institution stated</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>33 (27%)</td>
<td>110 (90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.
Table 5.5  Tertiary qualifications of recently assigned RE teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Degree</th>
<th>First Degree completed</th>
<th>Second Degree completed</th>
<th>More than 2 Degrees completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts (Undergraduate)</td>
<td>47 (39%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts (Postgraduate)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Undergraduate)</td>
<td>46 (38%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Postgraduate)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>87 (71%)</td>
<td>6 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science (Undergraduate)</td>
<td>17 (14%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science (Postgraduate)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Undergraduate)</td>
<td>11 (9%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Postgraduate)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No degree or no degree stated</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>32 (26%)</td>
<td>109 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
- Undergraduate refers to Associate Diplomas, Diplomas and Bachelor degrees eg. Bachelor of Education.
- Postgraduate refers to Graduate Diploma, Masters and Doctorate degrees eg. Masters of Education.
- Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

For their first degree completed, 39% of these teachers held an undergraduate qualification in Arts, 38% in Education, 14% in Science and 9% in another discipline. For their second degree, the majority of teachers (71%) held a postgraduate qualification in Education such as a Graduate Diploma in Education (Table 5.5). Only 10% of teachers had completed more than two degrees at a postgraduate level (Table 5.5).
Summary: Professional Qualifications of Recently Assigned RE Teachers

The teachers in the survey tended to be a mixture of recent graduates and experienced teachers – 60% of them graduated in their first degree between 1991 and 1998 and 55% in their second degree between 1991 and 1998 (Table 5.3, p.162). While they may have limited experience in teaching RE, in their own major learning areas their teaching experience varies from some to substantial. These recently assigned teachers have undertaken teacher training with 38% completing an undergraduate education degree as their first degree and 71% completing an undergraduate education degree as their second degree (Table 5.5, p.164). The teacher training they received was mainly from tertiary institutions in Western Australia (89%). This data would imply that recently assigned RE teachers, as they are professionally qualified and trained locally, should be familiar with and confident in catering for the educational and cultural backgrounds of students in WA secondary schools.

5.2.3 Religious Education Qualifications

In the survey, a distinction was made between the teaching qualifications of recently assigned RE teachers and their background to teach Religious Education. Two aspects of RE qualifications were identified: tertiary studies in RE and completion of requirements to fulfil Accreditation to Teach Religious Education.

Tertiary Studies in Religious Education

Recently assigned teachers were asked in the survey about their tertiary studies in Religious Education (Table 5.6, p.166). It should be noted that the item ‘First Degree’ referred to whether it was the first degree in RE achieved by a respondent not their first degree overall. Similarly, the item ‘Second Degree’ means it was the second RE degree they had completed. The majority of teachers (77%) responded that they did not have a tertiary qualification in RE, 19% stated that it was incorporated within their undergraduate (Education) degree and 2% recorded that it was a part of their postgraduate degree in Education. As many teachers indicated they did not have a tertiary qualification in RE, the ‘Not Stated’ items in Table 5.7 (p.166) and Table 5.8 (p.167) also were scored high.
Table 5.6  Tertiary studies in Religious Education for recently assigned RE teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Degree</th>
<th>First Degree completed</th>
<th>Second Degree completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>23 (19%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No degree stated</td>
<td>94 (77%)</td>
<td>121 (99%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. Of the 3 teachers who had completed tertiary studies in RE as part of a postgraduate degree in Education, 2 had completed a Masters of Religious Education.

Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

Table 5.7  Tertiary institutions attended by recently assigned RE teachers to complete studies in Religious Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tertiary Institution</th>
<th>First Degree completed</th>
<th>Second Degree completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edith Cowan University via CIWA¹</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Notre Dame Australia</td>
<td>22 (18%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas Tertiary Institution</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-attendance or not stated</td>
<td>94 (77%)</td>
<td>120 (98%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. CIWA is the Catholic Institute of Western Australia.

Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

Recently assigned teachers (77%) also indicated that they either did not attend a tertiary institution or had not stated that they had attended one to complete studies specifically in Religious Education (Table 5.8, p.167). Those teachers who had graduated with tertiary RE qualifications came from the University of Notre Dame Australia (18%), Edith Cowan University (4%) through the Catholic Institute of Western Australia (CIWA), or from an Overseas Tertiary Institution (1%). Recently assigned teachers were asked also to indicate when they had completed their tertiary studies in Religious Education (Table 5.8, p.167). Teachers with tertiary
qualifications in RE stated they had graduated between 1992 and 1998 with most teachers having graduated between 1994 and 1996.

Table 5.8  Time of First Degree Graduation with tertiary studies in Religious Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>Number of Teachers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>10 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>97 (79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

Mandatory Professional Requirements – Accreditation to Teach Religious Education

The survey asked teachers about their progress towards Accreditation to Teach RE (the mandatory professional requirement to teach RE in Catholic schools in Western Australia). It should be noted that the study component of this Accreditation could be undertaken during and after initial teacher training while the inservice component could only be undertaken with CEOWA-trained facilitators once a teacher was employed to teach RE (CEOWA 1997b). The inservice component was offered to recently assigned RE teachers at their local school after school hours or at the Perth or regional offices of the Catholic Education Office with the proviso of teacher replacement.

Table 5.9 (p.168) indicates that 55% of teachers in the returned surveys stated they had completed the study component of Accreditation to Teach RE, 38% stated they were in the process of completing it and 7% had stated they had not begun the study component. Concerning the inservice component of Accreditation to Teach RE, 76% stated they had completed this component, 9% were in the process of completing it, and 13% stated they had not begun the inservice component. This data would suggest that over half of the recently assigned RE teachers surveyed had fully completed
Accreditation to Teach RE. In comparison, the CEOWA data on Accreditation to Teach RE among a similar grouping of teachers (including teachers in their first year of teaching RE) showed that, in 1997, 37% of teachers had completed Accreditation to Teach RE (Table 4.1, p.141).

Table 5.9 Progress towards Accreditation to Teach RE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Study component (%)</th>
<th>Inservice component (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not begun</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
<td>16 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In progress</td>
<td>46 (38%)</td>
<td>11 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>67 (55%)</td>
<td>93 (76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>122 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.*

One concern raised in the Literature Review (Chapter 3, pp.61-62) was that recently assigned teachers with minimal expertise were sent to remote or disadvantaged schools. Figure 5.6 (p.169) and Figure 5.7 (p.169) present the proportion of teachers who have progressed towards completing their Accreditation to Teach RE as part of the mandatory professional requirements set down by the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA). The graphs indicate that this concern was unfounded and that the Archdiocese of Perth (Metropolitan Area) has a lower proportion of recently assigned RE teachers with Accreditation when compared to outer metropolitan area and other dioceses.
Figure 5.6  Study Component of Accreditation to Teach RE by Region

Cumulative Percentage by Region

Arch. Perth (Metro Area)  Arch. Perth (Outside Metro)  Diocese of Bunbury  Diocese of Geraldton

Regions

- Completed
- In Progress
- Not Begun
- Not Stated

$n = 122$ teachers

Figure 5.7  Inservice Component of Accreditation to Teach RE by Region

Cumulative Percentage by Region

Arch. Perth (Metro Area)  Arch. Perth (Outside Metro)  Diocese of Bunbury  Diocese of Geraldton

Regions

- Completed
- In Progress
- Not Begun
- Not Stated

$n = 122$ teachers
Responses to Open-ended Question on Professional Background

Recently assigned RE teachers were asked what they considered to be of importance in acquiring sufficient professional background to teach RE confidently. The majority (51%) of 178 comments recommended that gaining professional qualifications in RE was important. Of this number, 30% advised that tertiary qualifications, or its equivalent through CEOWA inservice courses, be gained as early as possible. These studies were to be done during either teacher training or the first years of teaching. Furthermore, 14% recommended the need to acquire Accreditation to Teach RE as a means of teaching RE confidently. The responses suggested that just over half of the recently assigned RE teachers recognised the professional status of Religious Education as a learning area. However, overall the respondents saw themselves as professionally trained teachers of another major learning area and that teaching RE was an extra responsibility.

In addition to this majority (51%) who recommended gaining professional qualifications in RE, 9% of comments suggested that, as a minimum, recently assigned RE teachers should be familiar with the background materials in the Units and 8% recommended the need to discuss RE teaching issues with other RE teachers or experienced Religious Educators. The ‘on-the-job’ training attitude of the recently assigned RE teachers implied that the demands of implementing the draft RE Units were adequately catered for as the teachers developed their professional experience by studying, attending courses, talking with other RE teachers and through the teaching experience itself. In contrast, some respondents felt that there were other demands that were not addressed sufficiently by ongoing professional formation. Other issues were reported also by teachers such as: 13% of comments advised that a strong faith witness was important to teaching RE confidently; and, 4% felt that prior tertiary study or Accreditation to Teach RE were of little use.

Summary: Religious Education Qualifications of Recently Assigned RE Teachers

Most recently assigned RE teachers had limited prior training in Religious Education. However, almost a quarter (23%) had graduated with academic studies in RE from a tertiary institution (Table 5.7, p.166). In most cases (76%), this group of teachers consisted of recent graduates from these institutions between 1994 and 1996 (Table 5.8, p. 167). The implication here is that most recently assigned RE teachers
are not professionally prepared to teach Religious Education prior to employment in a Catholic school. Nonetheless, recently assigned RE teachers appeared to be prepared to complete the mandatory professional requirements of Accreditation to Teach RE once they were employed in a Catholic school. Table 5.9 (p.168) indicates that 55% of these surveyed teachers had completed the study component and 38% were in the process of doing so. Furthermore, 76% stated that they had completed the inservice component provided by the CEOWA and 9% were in the process of doing so. This ongoing training would suggest that the majority of recently assigned RE teachers possess the minimal professional competence to teach Religious Education. The teachers themselves highlighted the significance of this ‘on-the-job’ training in the responses to the open-ended question in the survey and are discussed in the next section.

5.2.4 RE Teaching Experience

Teachers were asked about their years of teaching experience specifically in Religious Education. The target population for this survey was teachers in their second to sixth year of RE teaching experience. Of the teachers surveyed, 31% stated they were in the second year of teaching RE, 28% in their third year, 21% in their fourth year, 11% in their fifth year and 10% in their sixth year. These statistics suggested that most (80%) teachers had between one and four years of teaching experience in Religious Education. However, this teaching experience did not come in the form of a full RE teaching load. Of the teachers surveyed, 62% stated that teaching RE represented less than a quarter of their class contact time as a proportion of their teaching load. The remainder indicated their teaching loads as follows: 26% with RE representing between a quarter to a half of their teaching load; 5% with RE representing more than half to three quarters of their teaching load and 6% with RE representing more than three quarters of their teaching load.

Table 5.10 (p.172) shows the distribution of RE classes among recently assigned RE teachers. Respondents were asked to indicate how many classes they taught at each Year level. The distribution of scores indicated that recently assigned RE teachers taught a combination of Year levels. Table 5.10 (p.172) shows that teachers usually taught one class, mostly in lower secondary (34% of teachers in Year 8; 30% in Year 9 and 30% in Year 10) but tended to teach across more than one Year level.
Table 5.10  Distribution of classes among recently assigned RE teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>Year 8</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
<th>Year 10</th>
<th>Year 11</th>
<th>Year 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 class</td>
<td>41 (34%)</td>
<td>37 (30%)</td>
<td>36 (30%)</td>
<td>30 (25%)</td>
<td>16 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 classes</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 classes</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 classes</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No classes stated</td>
<td>78 (64%)</td>
<td>79 (65%)</td>
<td>78 (64%)</td>
<td>85 (70%)</td>
<td>105 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
<td>122 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

A comparison between age categories and the RE teaching experience of recently assigned RE teachers (Figure 5.8) indicates that these teachers come from a range of age categories. The implication is that recently assigned RE teachers in the survey consisted of a mixture of young beginning teachers and older experienced teachers.

Figure 5.8  RE Teaching Experience by Age Categories

n = 122 teachers
When RE teaching experience is considered according to region (Figure 5.9 and Figure 5.10, p.174), the data indicate mixed results. The metropolitan area of the Archdiocese of Perth had proportionally more teachers in their third or fourth year of teaching RE than the other regions (Figure 5.9). On the other hand, the other regions had proportionally more teachers in their second and fifth year of teaching the learning area. However, this was not a consistent trend when the data was subdivided into the separate dioceses (Figure 5.10, p.174). The assertion by some researchers (Ingersoll 1996; Stover 1999; Jerald 2002) that less experienced teachers are located in more remote areas (described in Chapter 3, pp.61-62) did not appear to be the case with recently assigned RE teachers.

**Figure 5.9 RE Teaching Experience by Two Significant Regions**

![Diagram showing RE teaching experience by two significant regions.](image-url)
Summary: RE Teaching Experience

Most (80%) recently assigned RE teachers had between one to four years RE teaching experience. This RE teaching experience was not necessarily related to a specific age group or region. The degree of expertise or experience appeared to be common across age categories and regions. Remoter regions seemed to be as well served by a range of recently assigned RE teachers as the Perth metropolitan area. The data indicated a contrary view about teachers teaching outside of their field of expertise. Recently assigned teachers in Religious Education were not assigned deliberately for administrative purposes to teach RE and these teachers were no more prevalent in remote regions. Whether teachers are younger or older, accredited or not, they seemed to share a similar situation to one another; they were teaching a learning area with which they were unfamiliar. The data indicated that the actual length of RE teaching experience for recently assigned RE teachers was considerably less than what they would experience in their own major learning area. Furthermore, these teachers seemed to teach predominantly lower secondary classes and had a class in more than one Year level. The implication here is that these teachers may be
stretching their preparation time over more than one draft RE Unit at a time. With almost two-thirds of the teachers having a reduced contact time with their RE classes, it was possible that the classroom experience of teaching RE took longer to develop. Furthermore, it was possible that changes to the perceptions of teachers about their experiences occurred over time. Indepth interviews made it possible to explore further the experiences and perceptions of recently assigned RE teachers.

5.2.5 Overview: Demographic and Professional Background of Recently Assigned RE Teachers

The responses, from the survey on the demographic and professional backgrounds of recently assigned RE teachers, suggested that most teachers are lay (99%), female (70%) and aged between 21 and 30 years (66%). They were teachers who specialised in learning areas other than RE; mostly from the disciplines of the Humanities (56%) particularly, from the learning areas of English (26%) and Society and Environment (14%). They were also professionally qualified and trained in WA to become, presumably, competently skilled teachers. However, over three quarters of these teachers did not have tertiary qualifications in RE (78%) although a little over half had progressed towards completing Accreditation to Teach RE, the mandatory professional requirement to teach RE in a Catholic school. Many teachers (76%) had completed only the inservice component of this Accreditation which suggested they were conversant with the underlying pedagogical principles of RE (as indicated in Figure 2.1, p.39). However, only 55% had completed the equivalent of three tertiary units to satisfy the study component of Accreditation. While a little more than half of the recently assigned teachers had completed Accreditation, the evidence suggests this cohort of teachers did not have sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge for teaching this learning area. Interestingly, in contrast to their own progress, many teachers remarked favourably about the value of completing the Accreditation requirements as an important part of their professional formation. Most recently assigned RE teachers had from one to four years of experience in teaching RE (80%) and tended to teach one RE class over more than one Year group. In many respects, these were the teachers that the Catholic Secondary Principals’ Association of Western Australia (CSPAWA) anecdotally referred to as ‘inexperienced teachers or those without a solid training in religious education’ (CSPAWA 1992, par.3). In the next section, the survey responses of this group of teachers regarding their use of RE instructional resources are described.
5.3 Use of Instructional Resources

In the survey, recently assigned RE teachers were asked about the use of instructional resources provided by the PAREC. The tables in this section present a summary of the findings from the 122 responses. The survey explored three issues within this category: the accessibility of the resources, the frequency of use of these resources and the attitudes of recently assigned RE teachers towards the use of these resources. Tests of significance were conducted with regard to items in each category where these were supported by prima facie evidence. Results of such tests are discussed in what follows.

5.3.1 Accessibility of Instructional Resources

Teachers were invited to consider their attitude towards the accessibility of the instructional resources in the draft RE Units. A Likert scale with five levels of agreement was used: Strongly Agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. When the categories ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Agree’ were combined (Table 5.11, p.177), the responses indicated widespread agreement among teachers that the instructional resources were ‘easy to follow’ (86%), ‘useful in my classroom teaching’ (83%), ‘reduce lesson preparation time’ (82%), and provided ‘sufficient background material’ (63%). The skewed distribution towards the modal (most frequent) ‘Agree’ response in the Likert items and the small dispersion of scores from the mean (small standard deviation) indicated that recently assigned RE teachers generally held similar perceptions to one another about the accessibility of the instructional resources.
Despite general similarity of response, it was noted however, that responses to Item 2, ‘RE Units are useful in my classroom teaching’ differed by age groups (Table 5.12, p.178). The mean values indicated that such a difference might be significant. To test this difference, a One Way ANOVA was performed with a probability value set at $p = 0.05$. The ANOVA indicated that the difference was indeed significant, $F(2, 119) = 4.78$, $p = 0.01$. A Post Hoc (Scheffé) test was conducted, again with a probability value set at $p = 0.05$, which indicated differences between RE teachers in the 26-30 year group and >30 year group ($p = 0.021$). This difference may be due to their professional experience and familiarity with these types of resources compared with their younger colleagues. On the other hand, older teachers may see teaching RE as a ‘filler’ and are complacent about using the resources available in the Units (Rymarz, 1999b, p.51).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a recently assigned RE teacher, I tend to find…</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Omit</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean Value¹</th>
<th>Stand. Dev.²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. RE Units are easy to follow.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(64)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. RE Units are useful in my classroom teaching.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(63)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RE Units reduce lesson preparation time.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30)</td>
<td>(52)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RE Units provide sufficient background material.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(47)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The Mean Value represents the average of numerical values scored after each category was given a numerical value. SA = Strongly Agree (1); A = Agree (2); U = uncertain (3); D = Disagree (4) and SD = Strongly Disagree (5). Omit indicates that no response was given.
3. Italicised numbers in parentheses indicate percentages and rounded to the nearest whole numbers.
4. Shaded scores represent the Mode (most frequent response) for that item.
Table 5.12  Item 2: ‘RE Units are useful in my classroom teaching’ considered by Age Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-25 Years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 Years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30 Years</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>122</td>
<td><strong>2.07</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:*

The Mean Values represent the average responses to the Likert item that ranged from ‘Strongly Agree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (5).

5.3.2 Frequency of Use

Teachers were asked to rank five stipulated instructional resources on a scale from (1) to (6), with (6) being least frequently used, in response to the statement: ‘As a [recently assigned] RE teacher, I develop my lessons mostly around….’ The respondents had the flexibility to consider the merits of the five stipulated items and had the option to include another item (Volunteered Item) that they felt was important. A rank score was calculated from the rankings given by each teacher. As some teachers gave two or three items the same rank, the rankings were averaged. For example, if two items were given a rank of (2) by a teacher, they were averaged to score an equal rank value of (2.5) and the next ranked item was given a rank value of (4). The item with the lowest total score was considered to be the most frequently used and so forth for the other items. Volunteered items were counted then given a rank from (6) to (16), with (16) being the least frequent, to distinguish them from the previous five stipulated items. The highest ranked items are shown in Table 5.13 (p.179).
Table 5.13  Ranking of Frequency of Use of Instructional Resources  
(Survey Question 5)

A.  Stipulated Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Mastersheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Student Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Resources created by the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Resources from the Coordinator of RE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Texts cited in the RE Units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B.  Volunteered Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Print materials from magazines and newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Own resources collected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Applying ideas from the Teacher’s Manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Using resources from the school’s RE department</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ranking is from most frequent (1) to least frequent (10).

Recently assigned RE teachers indicated that they used resources such as the Mastersheets from the Teacher’s Manual and the Student Book the most frequently. Yet, these curriculum materials were supplemented by resources created by the teachers themselves or from the RE Coordinator. Teachers augmented these resources with their own or the resources of their school as well as using resources such as videos and print media materials.

A One Way ANOVA was undertaken to test whether there were statistically significant differences between sub-groups of teachers in the survey cohort about the frequency of use of curriculum materials in the RE Units. One difference which surfaced was the use of resources beyond those described in the RE Units between the regions (Table 5.14, p.180). Respondents in the Diocese of Geraldton rated the use of resources provided by the RE Coordinator more highly than respondents in other regions. A One Way ANOVA indicated a statistical difference, $F (3, 118) = 3.26, p = .024$. A Post Hoc (Scheffé) test was conducted which indicated differences
between teachers in the Diocese of Geraldton and teachers in the country areas of the Archdiocese of Perth ($p = .028$). Such a finding does not suggest much overall. Regions away from the Metropolitan Area of the Archdiocese of Perth had diverse responses. One possibility may be the way RE Coordinators played an important resource support role in the schools of the Geraldton region.

### Table 5.14 Stipulated Item: Resources from the Coordinator of RE by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating¹</th>
<th>Overall Rank²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perth Metro</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth Country</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunbury</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldton</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.96</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**

1. *The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.*
2. *The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 5.*

A second finding identified was the use of the Bible according to gender. Male teachers cited use of the Bible as their highest volunteered item whereas female teachers identified it as one of their lowest items (Table 5.15, p.181). However, the frequent use of the Bible was not a high priority overall among recently assigned RE teachers because of the disproportionately large number of female teachers (Figure 5.1, p.158). The contrast in use between male and female teachers indicates that further exploration of this item should include comments from both genders (Chapter 6, pp.228-230).
Table 5.15  Volunteered Item: Use of the Bible by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Rank&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female teacher</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male teacher</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:*
1. The term ‘Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 6 to 16) for volunteered items in Question 5. Volunteered items were counted then given a rank from (6) to (16), with (16) being the least frequent, to distinguish them from the previous five stipulated items in Question 5.

A third finding concerns RARE teachers with more than a 50% teaching load in Religious Education. These teachers ranked using resources they had collected themselves more highly compared to teachers with less than a 50% teaching load (Table 5.16). The implication here is that teachers with more RE classes are more experienced and familiar with the resources available to them because they spend more time in teaching RE. Their professional formation may be hastened and consequently they preferred to use their own resources (Rymarz and Engebretson 2005, p.67), see Chapter 3, p.67.

Table 5.16 Volunteered Item: Own resources collected by RE Teaching Load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE teaching load</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Rank&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%-50%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%-75%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;75%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:*
1. The term ‘Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 6 to 16) for volunteered items in Question 5. Volunteered items were counted then given a rank from (6) to (16), with (16) being the least frequent, to distinguish them from the previous five stipulated items in Question 5.

Juxtaposed with the findings in Table 5.12 (p.178), 26-30 year olds seemed to prefer using ‘Resources created by the teachers’ more than their older counterparts (Table 5.17, p.182). Mean ratings in Table 5.17 (p.182) suggested that the differences might
be significant. A One Way ANOVA was executed and a significant result was found, $F(2, 119) = 3.46, p = 0.034$. A Post Hoc (Scheffé) test indicated a significant difference between the 26-30 year old RARE teachers and >30 year old RARE teachers ($p = 0.036$). The finding suggests that the oldest age group (>31 years), were more content to use the resources provided (as reported in Table 5.12, p.178) and less likely than their younger counterparts to be as energetic in their teaching commitment. Such a conclusion finds support in the research of Rymarz (1999b) relating to some experienced RE teachers (Chapter 3, p.88). Again, the earlier question of whether such a finding is due to professional experience or complacency may be raised (p.177).

Table 5.17 Stipulated Item: Resources created by the teachers by Age Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating(^1)</th>
<th>Overall Rank(^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-25 Years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 Years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30 Years</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.99</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:*
1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 5.

5.3.3 Advice about using the Instructional Resources

Teachers were asked to give a comment about what best reflected their experience as a recently assigned RE teacher in using the Teacher’s Manuals and Student Books. Using a content analysis technique (Cohen and Manion 1994), each comment from a teacher was recorded on a spreadsheet. The comments were grouped on a common theme or phrase that had emerged from the responses. Table 5.18 (p.183) shows what the most important advice RARE teachers would give to other teachers as a result of their experiences of teaching the draft RE Units about using the instructional resources.
Table 5.18  Advice from recently assigned RE teachers about using the Instructional Resources (Survey Question 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment theme or phrases</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Plan for and review the curriculum materials as it provides good, useful background</td>
<td>58 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be creative, explore alternatives, provide variety, don’t just use the Mastersheets or Student Books</td>
<td>45 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use curriculum materials as a guide; be selective</td>
<td>39 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Match or modify curriculum materials to student needs, encourage student involvement</td>
<td>31 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supervise the use of the Mastersheets and the Student Book because the language is not readily accessible to students</td>
<td>20 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Follow teaching and learning program – well resourced and researched</td>
<td>17 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consult with RE Coordinator or other RE teachers about the curriculum materials</td>
<td>11 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access to resources is important</td>
<td>6 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Move through the teaching and learning program quickly as there is too much</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do more background reading</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use the Mastersheets and the Student Book – good</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Begin lesson with prayer or journal writing</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resources do not counter negative influences</td>
<td>1 (&lt;1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t teach Year 11 – too much theological background is necessary</td>
<td>1 (&lt;1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No comment given</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>246 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

The advice from recently assigned RE teachers about using the instructional resources provided by the draft Units was consistent across the cohort and seemed to focus on using the resources as a mainstay for teaching. This advice about using the resources was indicated by comments relating to ‘planning for and reviewing the resources’ (23%) and ‘using the resources as a guide’ (16%) and ‘follow the teaching and learning program’ (7%). These comments were juxtaposed with statements by recently assigned teachers about drawing on other resources that were suited to the needs of their students. The teachers made comments such as: ‘be creative, explore alternatives, provide variety’ (18%), ‘match or modify curriculum materials to student needs’ (13%) and ‘supervise the use of Mastersheets and the Student Book because language is not readily accessible to the students’ (8%).
5.3.4 **Overview: Use of Instructional Resources by Teachers**

The responses from recently assigned RE teachers were very positive and consistent towards the use of instructional resources in the draft RE Units. This positive response suggested that the Units satisfied one of the major concerns raised by Religious Educators about the implementation of RE curricula, the ease of access to resources for recently assigned RE teachers. The ease of accessibility of the instructional resources in the Units was indicated further by the high frequency of use of the Mastersheets and the Students Books by the teachers. The notion of ‘activities that work’ (Chapter 3, p.61) seemed to be very much the focus here. However, the lower response for ‘sufficient background material’ may warrant further investigation into links between these content materials and the extent of professional formation these teachers possessed. The differences between groups of teachers seemed to depend upon the familiarity and confidence of teachers in using materials other than the Mastersheets and Student Book. The responses in Table 5.12 (p.178) indicated that recently assigned RE teachers used the draft PAREC materials as a foundation or as a ‘springboard’ for other activities to be used in their classroom teaching. These responses were noted as also being worthy of further exploration.

5.4 **Teaching Approach**

In the survey, recently assigned RE teachers were asked about their experiences in using the teaching approach as recommended by the draft RE Units. Tables in this section present a summary of the findings. Three issues within this category were explored: teaching process, preferred learning strategies and the attitudes of recently assigned RE teachers towards the prescribed teaching approach. Tests of significance were conducted with regard to items in each category where these were supported by prima facie evidence. As was the case with the accessibility of resources (p.174), the data reflected a positively skewed distribution and narrow standard deviations suggesting widespread agreement on items about teaching approach. The exception to this trend was the Likert item dealing with organising liturgies in the classroom.
5.4.1 Teaching Process

In Table 5.19 (p.186) with the categories ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Agree’ combined, a majority of recently assigned RE teachers (87%) agreed that it was useful to begin with student experiences about a topic. In addition to this notion, 80% of teachers surveyed indicated it was useful to use a process of sincere and patient dialogue with their students. The majority of teachers (71%) also indicated that journal work was easy to include as a part of their teaching.

In the survey, 71% indicated it was useful to follow the sequence of objectives in the RE Units (Item 8). Some differences between sub-groups of teachers became apparent after further analysis. Table 5.20 (p.187) indicates that the oldest teachers (>30 years) were possibly more positive about using the sequence of objectives than their younger colleagues (26-30 years). The mean values indicated there may be a significant difference. To test for difference between categories, a One Way ANOVA was performed which confirmed this difference, $F (2, 117) = 3.75, p = 0.027$. The Post Hoc (Scheffé) test indicated that the differences in the mean values between >30 year old teachers and 26-30 year old teachers was significant ($p = 0.027$). Such findings may reflect earlier suggestions about this age group regarding their proclivity for compliance (p.177 and p.182).

In addition, the results for a further One Way ANOVA test indicate that RARE teachers who taught 50-75% of their teaching load in RE were less in favour of following the sequence of objectives than teachers who taught 25-50% of their teaching load, $F (3, 115) = 4.10, p = 0.008$ (Table 5.21, p.187). The Post Hoc (Scheffé) test result reported significant differences in the means between these two categories, ($p = 0.009$). Such a finding suggests that these teachers were more discerning about what and how they teach their RE classes because of their experience and familiarity with the Units.
### Table 5.19 Experience of the RE Teaching Approach as perceived by recently assigned RE teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a [recently assigned] RE teacher, I tend to find…</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Omit</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Stand. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Presenting content as outcomes of learning useful.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(44)</td>
<td>(43)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Following the sequence of objectives in the RE Units useful.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(59)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Beginning with students’ experiences about a topic useful.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(48)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A process of sincere and patient dialogue with students useful.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(40)</td>
<td>(40)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Linking students’ experiences with the Gospels difficult.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(41)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Including learning strategies suited to the faith stances of all students difficult.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(43)</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Organising class liturgies difficult.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(30)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(35)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Journal work is easy to include as part of my teaching.</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(34)</td>
<td>(37)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Formal assessments are easy to include as part of my teaching.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>(52)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
1. The Mean Value represents the average of numerical values scored after each category was given a numerical value. SA = Strongly Agree (1); A = Agree (2); U = uncertain (3); D = Disagree (4) and SD = Strongly Disagree (5). Omit indicates that no response was given.
3. Italicised numbers in parentheses indicate percentages and rounded to the nearest whole numbers.
4. Shaded scores represent the Mode (most frequent response) for that item.
Table 5.20  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE Teaching Load</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-25 Years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 Years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30 Years</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  
The Mean Scores represent the average responses to the Likert item that ranged from ‘Strongly Agree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (5).

Table 5.21  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE Teaching Load</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%-50%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%-75%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;75%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  
The Mean Scores represent the average responses to the Likert item that ranged from ‘Strongly Agree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (5).

Interestingly, 79% of respondents felt that it was easy to include assessments as part of their teaching (Item 15). Although there was general agreement, a series of One Way ANOVAs was conducted to test whether there were any differences between sub-groups of teachers. One difference was related to the completion of the study component of Accreditation. Teachers who had completed the study component of their Accreditation seemed more positive about item 15: ‘Formal assessments are easy to include as part of my teaching’ than teachers who were still ‘In Progress’ (Table 5.22, p.188). To test the significance of the difference between categories, a One Way ANOVA was performed. The results returned showed an $F$ ratio of $F (2, 116) = 4.12, p = 0.019$. A Post Hoc (Scheffé) test was conducted and the result ($p = 0.041$) indicated there was a significant difference in the means between teachers who had completed the study component of Accreditation and those teachers who
were progressing towards completion. Perhaps ‘In Progress’ teachers see the inclusion of such assessments as increasing their professional workloads during a time when they are studying after hours to complete the study component to their Accreditation.

Table 5.22 Item 15: ‘Formal assessments are easy to include as part of my teaching’ by Accreditation to Teach RE: Study component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accreditation to Teach RE: Study component</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Begun</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Progress</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The Mean Scores represent the average responses to the Likert item that ranged from ‘Strongly Agree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (5).

Respondents agreed less strongly with each other on the difficulties they experienced with the teaching approach employed in the draft Units. Most teachers (59%) felt they had difficulty in including learning strategies suited to the faith stances of their students and 52% had difficulty with linking student experiences with the Gospels. Respondents also seemed divided about organising class liturgies with 38% agreeing they had difficulty doing so, 42% disagreeing they had difficulty and 16% indicating they were uncertain.

One item in particular returned responses that suggested a range of perceptions about the educational focus of Religious Education. While 47% of teachers agreed that presenting content as outcomes of learning was useful (Item 7), 43% were uncertain about this. Two sub-groups of teachers appeared to have differences in their perceptions about this item, one group according to RE qualifications and another group according to age. Teachers with tertiary qualifications in RE seemed to be less positive towards this item in comparison to teachers without qualifications (Table 5.23, p.189). The One Way ANOVA confirmed there was a significant difference between the mean values, $F (1, 118) = 5.37, p = 0.022$. In the case of another sub-group, the oldest teachers (>31 years) seemed to be more inclined to present content as outcomes of learning than the youngest group (21-25 years) of teachers.
The One Way ANOVA confirmed there was a significant difference between the mean values, $F(2, 117) = 3.95, p = 0.022$. The Post Hoc (Scheffé) test result ($p = 0.044$) reported there was a significant difference in the means between these sub-groups. These findings may imply that these two sub-group of teachers lean towards a stronger catechetical rather than an educational orientation to their RE teaching than their colleagues (Chapter 2, pp.37-40). These differences between sub-groups of teachers were noted for further investigation.

Table 5.23  Item 7: ‘Presenting content as outcomes of learning useful’ by RE Tertiary Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE Tertiary Qualification</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The Mean Scores represent the average responses to the Likert item that ranged from ‘Strongly Agree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (5).

Table 5.24  Item 7: ‘Presenting content as outcomes of learning useful’ by Age Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-25 Years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 Years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30 Years</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The Mean Scores represent the average responses to the Likert item that ranged from ‘Strongly Agree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (5).

5.4.2 *Preferred learning strategies*

Teachers were asked to rank stipulated learning strategies from (1) to (6) with (6) being least preferred in response to the statement: ‘As a [recently assigned] RE teacher, I prefer learning strategies that help ….’ Teachers also were given the opportunity to include a sixth item to rank. As with the frequency of use item (p.178), the respondents then had the flexibility to consider the merits of the five
stipulated items and had the option to include another item, volunteered by them that they felt was important to consider. A score was calculated from the rankings given by each teacher. As some teachers gave two or three items the same rank, the rankings were equally weighted. For example, where two items were given a rank of (2) by a teacher, each item was given an equal rank value of (2.5) and the next ranked item was given a rank value of (4). The item with the lowest total score was considered to be the most preferred strategy and so forth with the other items. Volunteered items were counted then ranked from (6) to (16), with (16) being the least frequent, to distinguish them from the previous five stipulated items. The top ranked items are shown in Table 5.25.

Table 5.25  Ranking of Preferred Learning Strategies (Survey Question 16)

A.  Stipulated Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Stimulate active participation and creativity within students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Interpret significant human experiences in the light of the Gospels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Describe and explain information about Catholic beliefs and practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Reinforce student understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Reveal the deeper religious meanings behind Catholic beliefs and practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B.  Volunteered Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Provide students with experiences of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Promote personal development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Identify moral arguments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Promote interconnectedness and group discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Ranking is from most frequent (1) to least frequent (10).*
The most preferred learning strategies were those that teachers felt ‘stimulate active participation and creativity within students’. This preference suggested that recently assigned RE teachers were focused on student-centred learning. Female teachers seemed to rate learning strategies that stimulated active participation and creativity higher than did male teachers (Table 5.26), although there was no overall difference in rank between the groups. A One Way Analysis of Variance of the mean ratings indicated there was a significant difference between the genders, $F(1, 118) = 8.68, p = 0.004$. However, female teachers seemed to prefer learning strategies that ‘reinforced student understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices’ more than did male teachers (Table 5.27, p.192). Another One Way ANOVA of the mean ratings indicated there was a significant difference between the genders, $F(1, 118) = 7.75, p = 0.006$. Such contrasts between the genders indicate that further exploration of these items via comments from both male and female teachers would be of value (Chapter 6, pp.232-234). Teachers also seemed to prefer strategies that assisted in interpreting significant human experiences in the light of the Gospels. Interestingly, in Table 5.19 (p.186) ‘making links between experiences of the students and the Gospels’ was a strategy teachers had difficulty in using. This finding was noted as a point for further investigation.

Table 5.26  Stipulated Item: Reinforce student understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating $^1$</th>
<th>Overall Rank $^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female teacher</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male teacher</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:

1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 16.
Table 5.27  Stipulated Item: Stimulate active participation and creativity within students by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating$^1$</th>
<th>Overall Rank$^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female teacher</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male teacher</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 16.

Overall, the responses from the survey indicated that teachers were very much in tune with the catechetical teaching approach advocated by the draft PAREC (Figure 2.1, p.39). The volunteered items in Table 5.25 (p.190) appear to highlight this emphasis on catechetical formation. The highest ranked volunteered item was ‘providing students with experiences of God’. Teachers who taught 51-75% of their teaching load in RE were the most inclined towards this item (Table 5.28).

Furthermore, teachers with a >75% teaching load in RE ranked promoting prayer experiences more highly than did teachers with a lower teaching load (Table 5.29, p.193). The suggestion here reinforces the notion that teachers with more RE classes are more experienced and familiar with teaching approaches in tune with a catechetical rather than an educational orientation towards Religious Education (p.189).

Table 5.28  volunteered Item: Provide students with experiences of God by RE Teaching Load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE teaching load</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Rank$^1$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%-50%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%-75%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;75%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The term ‘Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 6 to 16) for volunteered items in Question 16. Volunteered items were counted then given a rank from (6) to (16), with (16) being the least frequent, to distinguish them from the previous five stipulated items in Question 16.
Table 5.29  Volunteered Item: Promote prayer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE teaching load</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Rank¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%-50%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%-75%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;75%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The term 'Rank' refers to the order of priority (from 6 to 16) for volunteered items in Question 16. Volunteered items were counted then given a rank from (6) to (16), with (16) being the least frequent, to distinguish them from the previous five stipulated items in Question 16.

5.4.3 Advice about Applying the Teaching Approach of PAREC

Table 5.30 (p.194) indicates the most important advice recently assigned RE teachers would give others about applying the teaching approach of PAREC as a result of their experience of teaching Religious Education. The responses were not limited to any one particular sub-group of recently assigned RE teachers.
Table 5.30  Advice from recently assigned RE teachers about applying the Teaching Approach of the PAREC (Survey Question 17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment themes or phrases</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Be student-centred; to suit students; work from student experiences and background, provide experiences and substance for students</td>
<td>59 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use Unit as a guide; be selective of objectives, simplify or vary</td>
<td>29 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dynamic and flexible; encourage creativity and active participation</td>
<td>27 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discuss views and content with students; have open dialogue with them, create atmosphere of mutual trust and respect</td>
<td>20 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Know and understand the Units, the background information and sequence of objectives</td>
<td>14 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Link student experiences with teachings of Christ in the Gospels and/or Catholic beliefs and practices</td>
<td>12 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Become comfortable with the teaching approach, balance strategies between ‘head’ (cognitive) and ‘heart’ (affective)</td>
<td>11 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Talk to the RE Coordinator or experienced RE teachers about the teaching approach</td>
<td>5 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Apply the teaching of the Catholic Church, its beliefs and practices first</td>
<td>5 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bring teacher’s experience in (witness to the Faith)</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Journal work needs to be established</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop students’ appreciation that God loves them unconditionally through prayer, reflection, meditation and journal work</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not assume prior knowledge or experience of Catholic beliefs and practices</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did not understand the question</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Beware of the Mastersheets!</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mastersheets – use them!</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pray yourself</td>
<td>1 (&lt;1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No comment given</td>
<td>17 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>221 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.*
The responses from Table 5.30 (p.194) reinforced that teachers wanted to use a student-centred approach to their RE teaching. The highest response (27%) highlighted the need for teachers to be ‘student-centred, to suit the students, to work from student experiences and background’ or to ‘provide experiences or substance for students’. In addition, teachers believed they needed to ‘be dynamic and flexible, to encourage creativity and active participation’ (12%) and to ‘discuss views and content with students, have open dialogue with them, create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect’ (9%). Perhaps recently assigned RE teachers were keen to engage their students in learning by providing meaningful and relevant lessons. Further investigation of this aspect of RE teaching was needed to discover whether this keenness was translated into action, especially when teachers also suggested that they frequently used instructional resources such as the Mastersheets and Student Books.

The role of facilitating learning was suggested further by comments about the need to ‘link students’ experiences with the teachings of Christ in the Gospels or to Catholic beliefs and practices’ (5%). The facilitating learning approach was supported by a perceived confidence in using the Units as a foundation or springboard as evidenced by comments such as: ‘use the Unit as a guide; be selective of objectives, simplify or vary’ (13%) and, ‘become comfortable with the teaching approach, balance strategies between the “head” (cognitive) and the “heart” (affective)’ (5%). An important aspect to using the Units as a foundation seemed to be for teachers to ‘know and understand the Units, the background information and sequence of objectives’ (7%). The responses from the teachers suggested there was a tension between addressing the personal developmental needs of students and addressing their own professional needs. Recently assigned teachers wanted their students to be engaged in learning about RE but the teachers needed the reassurance of knowing how to manage the content presented in the draft RE Units. This need for reassurance is supported by research regarding teacher efficacy (Chapter 3, p.87) and was explored further in the interview phase of the research.

5.4.4 Overview: Application of Teaching Approach by Teachers

Recently assigned RE teachers seemed to interpret the teaching approach advocated in the draft RE Units (Figure 2.1, p.39) from the perspective of their expertise as specialist subject teachers and their pre-conceived notions of Religious Education.
Objectives and content in the Units were to be covered in ways they thought were interesting and relevant to their students. Their confidence in applying the teaching approach seemed to be linked to their perceived competence in using student-centred approaches in their classroom teaching. However, while their confidence appeared to be tied closely to following the Unit Objectives, when they had to make links between the life experiences of students and the Gospels or other related themes, then there was some uncertainty and apprehension. The impression was that these teachers were responding to how they think they should use the teaching approach according to training in their own learning areas rather than readily indicate a deeper critical understanding of the pedagogy used in Religious Education. As a result, the religious dimensions of RE teaching seemed to be widely advocated but inadequately understood by these teachers. Such a perception is in line with the findings of Engebretson (1997) who concluded that RARE teachers had a poor understanding of the curriculum principles underlying the RE curriculum (Chapter 3, pp.95-96). Furthermore, there seemed to be a tension between focusing on the personal developmental needs of students and their own needs to become familiar with the content and strategies presented in the draft RE Units.

The confidence of recently assigned RE teachers also appeared to be related to what they are doing in the classroom rather than why they are teaching in a particular way. As was found in the research by Malone (1997) recently assigned RE teachers pride themselves upon being practitioners rather than manipulators or innovators in implementing the RE curriculum (Chapter 3, p.65). Whether recently assigned RE teachers developed towards a more critical understanding of an RE pedagogy was worthwhile to pursue in the interview phase of this study.

5.5 Underlying Curriculum Principles

Recently assigned RE teachers were asked about their understanding of the underlying principles in teaching RE, that is, their knowledge and understanding of the role of the RE teacher and the aims of Religious Education.

5.5.1 Religious Dimension

One of the roles of the Religious Educator is to promote the religious dimension of the school. RE teachers are role models and witnesses to an active Catholic faith life (CCE 1988, par.96). For each statement in Table 5.31 (p.197), teachers were asked to
indicate their perceptions, as recently assigned RE teachers, about being involved in the religious dimension of a Catholic school. Four key areas were available for comment: awareness raising activities of the Church’s missionary work, formal liturgies, formal prayers and school retreats or RE seminar days. The mean values, modes, and low standard deviations across the Likert items suggested a high degree of agreement among the teachers.

Table 5.31  Participation in the Religious Dimension of a Catholic school as perceived by recently assigned RE teachers (Survey Questions 18-23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a [recently assigned] RE teacher, I want to assist in organising…</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Omit</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean Value$^1$</th>
<th>Stand. Dev.$^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18. School or class Masses.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(57)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation at school.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(49)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. School retreats or RE seminar days.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(25)</td>
<td>(56)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Celebrations for key feast days or liturgical seasons at school.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(43)</td>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The inclusion of prayers at school assemblies or events.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(60)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Activities that raise awareness of the Church’s missionary work.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(28)</td>
<td>(55)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The Mean Value represents the average of numerical values scored after each category was given a numerical value. SA = Strongly Agree (1); A = Agree (2); U = uncertain (3); D = Disagree (4) and SD = Strongly Disagree (5). Omit indicates that no response was given.
3. Italicised numbers in parentheses indicate percentages and rounded to the nearest whole numbers.
4. Shaded scores represent the Mode (most frequent response) for that item.

A large number of teachers (83%) responded that they would agree with assisting in the organisation of activities that ‘raise awareness of the Church’s missionary work’. Recently assigned RE teachers also seemed eager to assist in organising the inclusion
of prayers at school assemblies or events (80%) and to take part in assisting in the organisation of school retreats or seminar days (78%). It was in the area of assisting in organising formal liturgies that some reservations were expressed.

Teachers agreed with: wanting to assist in organising school or class Masses (76%); celebrations for key feast days or liturgical seasons (62%); and, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation at school (60%). However, some teachers expressed uncertainty or disagreement with involvement in the organisation of formal liturgies. For school or class Masses, 12% were uncertain about being involved and 12% disagreed with being involved. For celebrations for key feast days or liturgical seasons, 21% were uncertain about being involved and 16% disagreed with being involved. With the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation at school, 20% were uncertain about being involved and 20% disagreed with being involved. One wonders whether such responses might reflect the general Catholic lack of ease with Reconciliation and loss of connection with the liturgical year, especially feast days of saints.

Such nervousness among RARE teachers to be involved in organising liturgies may be related to a lack of professional confidence due to limited training and experience rather than a lack of faith formation. Responses on an earlier item in Table 5.19 (p.186) regarding the difficulty of organising class liturgies indicated that 38% agreed it was difficult and 16% were uncertain about this. In contrast, Table 5.25 (p.190) highlighted that teachers ranked the stipulated item, ‘provide students with experiences of God’ as their highest preferred learning strategy. This aspect of the survey was noted for further investigation.

5.5.2 Attitude towards teaching RE

For each statement in Table 5.32 (p.199), teachers were asked to indicate the category that best reflected their attitudes, as a recently assigned RE teacher, towards teaching RE. Again, there was a high degree of agreement (‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Agree’ combined) among the respondents and notably, the dispersion of responses was narrow as indicated by the low standard deviations.
Table 5.32  
Attitude towards teaching RE as perceived by recently assigned RE teachers (Survey Questions 24-28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Omit</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Stand. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24. Managing the demands made on my own faith stance.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Presenting Catholic beliefs and practices.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Relating students’ experiences to Catholic beliefs and practices.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Fostering an atmosphere of Christian love and respect.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Fostering positive relationships with my students.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The Mean Value represents the average of numerical values scored after each category was given a numerical value. SA = Strongly Agree (1); A = Agree (2); U = uncertain (3); D = Disagree (4) and SD = Strongly Disagree (5). Omit indicates that no response was given.
3. Italicised numbers in parentheses indicate percentages and rounded to the nearest whole numbers.
4. Shaded scores represent the Mode (most frequent response) for that item.

The overwhelming positive response by teachers (Table 5.32) was to Item 27, ‘foster an atmosphere of Christian love and respect’ (90%). and Item 28, ‘foster positive relationships with my students’ (95%). This response seemed to re-emphasise earlier responses regarding the importance of being student-centred and the creation of a learning culture that exhibits and promotes the values of the draft PAREC. Other items in Table 5.32 indicate how in-tune recently assigned teachers were with the teaching process of the Units (Figure 2.1, p.39). In ‘presenting Catholic beliefs and practices’, 77% felt confident in doing so and 73% believed they were confident in being able to relate ‘students’ experiences to Catholic beliefs and practices’. As to issues relating to adequate faith formation, 74% of teachers in the survey agreed they felt confident enough in ‘managing the demands made on their own faith stance’.

This response seemed to reinforce again the trend that recently assigned RE teachers mostly lacked sufficient professional training in organising liturgies and other religious opportunities for students.
5.5.3 Teacher beliefs about the aims of RE

Teachers were asked to rank stipulated aims of RE from (1) to (6), with (6) being least important in response to the statement: ‘As a [recently assigned] RE teacher, I believe the aims of RE should encourage students to ….’ Teachers were also given the opportunity to include a sixth item to rank. As with the frequency of use item (p.178), the respondents then had the flexibility to consider the merits of the five stipulated items and had the option of including another volunteered item that they felt was important to consider. A score was calculated from the rankings given by each teacher. As some teachers gave two or three items the same rank, the previously described practice (p.178) was used. The item with the lowest total score was considered the most preferred aim of RE and so forth on the other items. Volunteered items were counted then given a rank from (6) to (16), with (16) being the least frequent, to distinguish them from the previous five stipulated items. The top ranked items are shown in Table 5.33 (p.201).
Table 5.33  
Ranking of Aims of Religious Education by recently assigned RE teachers (Survey Question 29)

A.  Stipulated Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Develop social justice and tolerance for others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Develop a closer relationship with God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Relate the Gospel example of Jesus to their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Participate fully in formal prayers and liturgy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Understand God’s intervention in human history.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B.  Volunteered Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Integrate faith and life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>To be able to share their (students’) faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Learn about the history of the Church, its policies and Sacraments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>See self-worth in themselves (students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Understand and listen to their (students’) consciences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ranking is from most frequent (1) to least frequent (9).

The highest priority for recently assigned RE teachers in Table 5.33 was to develop social justice and tolerance for others in the students. However, ‘Understand God’s intervention in human history’ was ranked last on the stipulated items list. However, the highest volunteered item response was to ‘integrate faith and life’. The rankings seemed to complement what the General Directory for Catechesis called an approach with a ‘missionary or humanitarian nature’ (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, par.185). How well this approach was understood warranted further investigation.

Some caution was needed about the method chosen to report these rankings from the survey. There was an expectation that the item with the highest ranking was the item that scored the highest rank most frequently. In this case, ‘Develop social justice and tolerance for others’ did rank higher than other items but upon closer inspection this response was not necessarily the item that scored the highest most frequently. Rather, other items were ranked higher but their frequency of highest ranking was more
diverse among the respondents. For example, if there were three items to be ranked: A, B and C then possible arrangements of rankings could be ABC, BAC, and CAB. It appeared that A had the most frequent highest ranking but B and C also were ranked highest at least once. Such a ranking outcome does not reflect the divided views of the respondents. One Way ANOVAs were conducted to test whether there were significant differences between sub-groups of teachers as follows.

Teachers with a high RE teaching load appeared to prefer encouraging students to relate the Gospel example of Jesus to their lives as the aim of Religious Education compared to teachers with a low RE teaching load (Table 5.34, p.203). The One Way ANOVA indicated there was a significant difference between the mean ratings of these sub-groups, $F(3, 117) = 4.80, p = 0.003$. The Post Hoc (Scheffé) test, $p = 0.045$, reported there was a significant mean difference between teachers with <25% teaching load in RE and teachers with >75% RE teaching load.

RARE teachers with a high RE teaching load also seemed to least prefer the item, ‘Develop social justice and tolerance for others’ in comparison to teachers with a low RE teaching load (Table 5.35, p.203). Again, the One Way ANOVA indicated significant difference, $F(3, 117) = 10.3, p <0.001$. The Post Hoc (Scheffé) test confirmed there was a mean difference between: teachers with <25% RE teaching load and teachers with a 51-75% RE teaching load, $p <0.001$; teachers with <25% RE teaching load and teachers with >75% RE teaching load, $p = 0.005$; and, teachers with 25-50% RE teaching load and teachers with 51-75% RE teaching load, $p = 0.010$.

The item ‘Understand God’s intervention in human history appeared to be rated higher by teachers with a teaching load between 25% and 75% in comparison to other teachers (Table 5.36, p.204). The mean ratings indicated there was a difference between these sub-groups and a One Way ANOVA was performed to confirm the difference to be significant, $F(3, 117) = 3.49, p = 0.018$. The Post Hoc (Scheffé) test indicated that there were differences between teachers with 21-50% RE teaching load and teachers with >75% RE teaching load, $p = 0.021$.

Overall, the findings from Table 5.34 (p.203), Table 5.35 (p.203) and Table 5.36 (p.204) suggest that teachers who are more experienced and familiar with the content of the RE Units tended to focus less on secular humanist aspects (such as, ‘Develop
social justice and tolerance for others’) and more on the catechetical aspects of the Units. However, the evidence from Table 5.34 and Table 5.36 (p.204) also indicates that this catechetical focus may be more formational rather than instructional. These discrepancies warranted further investigation in the interviews to see how well recently assigned RE teachers understood the aims of Religious Education.

Table 5.34  Stipulated Item: Relate the Gospel example of Jesus to their lives by RE Teaching Load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE teaching load</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating¹</th>
<th>Overall Rank²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%-50%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%-75%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;75%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1³</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  
1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.  
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 29.  
3. Not stated (n=1) was not included in ANOVA and Scheffé test.

Table 5.35  Stipulated Item: Develop social justice and tolerance for others by RE Teaching Load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE teaching load</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating¹</th>
<th>Overall Rank²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%-50%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%-75%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;75%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1³</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  
1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.  
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 29.  
3. Not stated (n=1) was not included in ANOVA and Scheffé test.
Table 5.36  Stipulated Item: Understand God’s intervention in human history by RE Teaching Load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE teaching load</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating(^1)</th>
<th>Overall Rank(^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%-50%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%-75%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;75%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1(^3)</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.11</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 29.
3. Not stated (n=1) was not included in ANOVA and Scheffé test.

5.5.4 Teacher emphasis placed on the content of RE

Teachers were asked to rank stipulated emphases on the content of RE from (1) to (6), with (6) being least emphasis in response to the statement: ‘As a [recently assigned] RE teacher, I believe the content of RE should emphasise…’ Teachers also were given the opportunity to include a sixth item to rank. As with the frequency of use item (p.178), the respondents then had the flexibility to consider the merits of the five stipulated items and had the option to include another volunteered item that they felt was important to consider. A rank score was calculated from the rankings given by each teacher. Once again, as some teachers gave two or three items the same rank, the previous practice described (p.178) was used. The item with the lowest total score was considered to be the most preferred emphasis and so forth on the other items (Table 5.37, p.205). Volunteered items were counted then given a rank from (6) to (16), with (16) being the least frequent, to distinguish them from the previous five stipulated items.
Table 5.37  Ranking of emphasis on the Content of Religious Education by recently assigned RE teachers (Survey Question 30)

A.  Stipulated Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What helps a person to reach full human potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Actions for transforming society for the common good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Consequences of social issues and trends on human nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>How the Gospels relate to significant life experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Knowledge about Catholic beliefs and practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B.  Volunteered Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Relationship with Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Focus on Church teachings, solid apologetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Relationship with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Practical ways to live like Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Student relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ranking is from most frequent (1) to least frequent (10).

Interestingly, the rankings on emphasis reflected closely the teaching process of the draft PAREC (Figure 2.1, p.39) and reinforced the ‘humanitarian nature’ of faith development (Congregation of the Clergy 1997, par.185). Content that emphasised reaching ‘full human potential’, ‘actions for transforming society’ and ‘consequences on human nature’ seemed to be more desirable than emphasising how ‘Gospels relate to significant life experiences’ and ‘knowledge about Catholic beliefs and practices’. Female teachers seemed to prefer emphasising full human potential more than did male teachers (Table 5.38, p.206). A One Way ANOVA confirmed that the difference in mean ratings was significant, $F (1, 119) = 4.10, p = 0.045$. Personal human formation seemed to be a higher priority for female teachers than for male teachers. Such a contrast indicates that further exploration of this item should include comments from both male and female teachers (Chapter 6, pp.233, 234 and 236).
Table 5.38  Stipulated Item: What helps a person to reach full human potential by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating$^1$</th>
<th>Overall Rank$^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female teacher</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male teacher</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.55</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 30.

Teachers with a tertiary qualification in RE appeared to rank emphasising the ‘consequences of social issues and trends on human nature’ lower than did teachers without tertiary qualifications (Table 5.39, p.207). A One Way ANOVA was performed and confirmed that the differences between the mean ratings was significant, $F(1, 119) = 4.30, p = 0.040$. Teachers with qualifications in RE, also seemed to prefer emphasising relating the Gospels to significant life experiences more than did teachers without qualifications (Table 5.40, p.207). The result from the One Way ANOVA, $F(1, 119) = 4.56, p = 0.035$, confirmed the significance in the differences between the mean ratings. Teachers who had not begun the study component of Accreditation seemed to rank ‘consequences’ more highly than other teachers did (Table 5.41, p.207). Again, to test for significance, a One Way ANOVA was performed and confirmed the differences between mean ratings was significant, $F(2, 118) = 4.88, p = 0.009$. The Post Hoc (Scheffé) test, $p = 0.035$, indicated that there were differences between teachers who had completed the study component and teachers who had not begun the study component.
### Table 5.39  Stipulated Item: Consequences of social issues and trends on human nature by RE Tertiary Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE Tertiary Qualification</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Overall Rank&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 30.

### Table 5.40  Stipulated Item: How the Gospels relate to significant life experiences by RE Tertiary Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE Tertiary Qualification</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Overall Rank&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 30.

### Table 5.41  Stipulated Item: Consequences of social issues and trends on human nature by RE Tertiary Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accreditation to Teach RE: Study component</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Mean Rating&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Overall Rank&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Begun</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Progress</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
1. The term ‘Mean Rating’ refers to the average rating response (from 1 to 5) teachers gave to that stipulated item.
2. The term ‘Overall Rank’ refers to the order of priority (from 1 to 5) for that mean rating compared to the mean ratings of other stipulated items in Question 30.
Recently assigned RE teachers did want to emphasise the faith aspects in their teaching. In the Volunteered Items of Table 5.37 (p.205) teachers felt an emphasis on content dealing with the faith formation of their students such as ‘the relationship with Jesus’, ‘apologetics’, ‘relationship with God’ and ‘practical ways to live like Christ’ were important. Overall, the findings from Table 5.39 (p.207), Table 5.40 (p.207) and Table 5.41 (p.207) suggest that teachers with a professional background in RE are more likely to emphasise the catechetical aspects of the Units rather than remain focused on secular humanist aspects (Benson and Guerra 1985).

5.5.5 Important advice about what students need to learn

Based on their experiences of teaching RE, recently assigned RE teachers were asked to comment upon the most important advice they would give others about what was crucial for students to learn (Table 5.42, p.209). A sizeable proportion of teachers (16%) offered no advice. Among other alternatives, perhaps they did not wish to or, as the question was towards the end of the survey, perhaps they were becoming fatigued. Some teachers answered the question by giving advice to others about what they should do to help students learn (‘become very familiar with each Unit taught’, 11%). There were also two instances (1%) of teachers commenting that they ‘did not understand the question or what to answer’. Nonetheless, a number of teachers (14%) believed it was crucial to ‘offer a vision of a positive self-image, self love and personal development’, to deepen the ‘understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices’ of students (12%) and to ‘link Catholic beliefs and practices to the daily challenges faced by students’ (9%). This deepening appreciation for integration of life and faith was complemented by comments that recommended promoting the love of God as part of their faith development (10%), the transformation of society (9%), the relationships between Gospels and real life, society and lives of the students (9%) and an understanding of Jesus as a perfect role model (7%).
Table 5.42  Advice from recently assigned RE teachers about what was crucial for students to learn in Religious Education (Survey Question 31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment themes or phrases</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer a vision of a positive self-image/ self love/ personal development</td>
<td>24 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepening understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices</td>
<td>20 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become very familiar with each Unit you teach</td>
<td>18 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote love of God, the Salvation offered, faith development, prayer/liturgy experiences as distinct from Catholic beliefs and practices</td>
<td>17 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link between Catholic beliefs and practice and the daily challenges faced by students</td>
<td>16 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote the understanding and relationships between the Gospels and real life, society and their own lives</td>
<td>16 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote transformation of society, seek social justice, love and tolerance, respect for all</td>
<td>15 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Jesus as the perfect role model</td>
<td>13 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying human weaknesses, that actions have consequences, sin</td>
<td>5 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to reflect on ideas presented</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not understand the question or what to answer</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No advice stated</td>
<td>29 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>179 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.*

5.5.6  Overview: Understandings of the Underlying Curriculum Principles by RARE Teachers

The depth of understanding about the principles and purposes of RE among recently assigned teachers was ambiguous but this is not surprising. At this stage, they seemed to recognise what they should understand but lacked the professional formation or experience to assimilate their understanding as a part of their teaching practice. Therefore, they wanted to portray a commitment towards involvement in the religious dimensions of the school but were uncertain about how they should implement these dimensions themselves (such as, organising Masses and the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation). They expressed an agreeable attitude.
towards teaching RE but seemed divided as to what were the aims of Religious Education. Formation and experience seemed to be two important ingredients of how well RARE teachers understood the aims of RE and what content to emphasise to students. The disparity between teachers appeared to be reinforced by the lack of comment and the variety of advice given (Table 5.42, p.209) as to what was crucial for students to learn in Religious Education. Finding out more of what recently assigned RE teachers understood about their role and the aims of RE became important to pursue later in the interviews.

5.6 Selection of the Interview Participants
After developing baseline data, it was possible to select a purposive sample of interview participants based upon the responses to Likert items in the three sections of the survey, instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying principles (Chapter 4, p.143). Table 5.43 (p.211) lists alphabetically the 28 participants (using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and retain a level of humaneness, Chapter 4, p.150) and their backgrounds in terms of age range, main teaching area, Accreditation, teaching experience in Religious Education and the category from which they were selected (Chapter 4, p.146). The table was also a useful contextual backdrop to the verbatim comments provided by the participants in Chapters 6 and 7 dealing with the First and Second Round of Interview Findings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age Range (Years)</th>
<th>Main Teaching Area</th>
<th>Accreditation</th>
<th>Selection Category*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>TAPP-Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>51-55</td>
<td>T &amp; E</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UPRI-Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>TAPP-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UPRI-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>IRES-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>T &amp; E</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>TAPP-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darla</td>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UPIN-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>IRES-Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>TAPP-Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>SOSE</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>UPRI-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>IRES-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>IRES-Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>IRES-Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayle</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>T &amp; E</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>IRES-Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>TAPP-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hailey</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UPRI-Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>UPRI-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>IRES-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>SOSE</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>UPRI-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>IRES-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UPRI-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>T &amp; E</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>IRES-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pippa</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>UPRI-Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>TAPP-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>T &amp; E</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>IRES-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>TAPP-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ursula</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>TAPP-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>H &amp; PE</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>IRES-High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.43</th>
<th>Background to the Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Pseudonyms</td>
<td>Age Range (Years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>21-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>51-55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>21-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>26-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>36-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>21-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darla</td>
<td>46-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>26-30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Involvement:
- Did not participate in Second Round of Interviews

Learning Areas (abbreviations):
- H & PE = Health & Physical Education
- LOTE = Language other than English
- SOSE = Studies of Society & Environment
- RE = Religious Education
- T & E = Technology & Enterprise

Accreditation status:
- ✓ = completed
- IP = in progress
- = not begun

Selection Categories:
- * see Table 4.3, p.146
- IRES = Instructional resources
- TAPP = Teaching approach
- UPRI = Underlying principles

211
Overall, the interview participants in Table 5.43 (p.211) were characterised by certain demographic and professional backgrounds. The majority of the participants were lay female teachers (64%) from the Archdiocese of Perth (75%) who taught mainly in learning areas of the Humanities (60%). The age categories of these teachers ranged from 21-25 years (36%), 26-30 years (25%) to >30 years (39%). A high proportion of the interview participants were accredited to teach RE with 61% of teachers having completed the study component and 75% having completed the inservice component. Most teachers (61%) were in their second or third year of teaching Religious Education. The distribution of the number of teachers in the Selection Categories (Table 5.44) was based on Table 4.3 (p.146) after teachers consented to be involved in the interview stages of the research. The result was a sample cohort that reflected as closely as possible the target population of RARE teachers based not only on their survey responses but also on their backgrounds.

**Table 5.44  Distribution of Interviewees across the Curriculum Implementation Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Groups</th>
<th>Instructional Resources (IRES)</th>
<th>Teaching Approach (TAPP)</th>
<th>Underlying Principles (UPRI)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Score (Positive)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Interview</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Interview</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean Score (Typical)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Interview</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Interview</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Score (Critical)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Interview</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Interview</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:

* The mean scores for Instructional Resources were very low (i.e. many teachers responded with agree or strongly agree) and the standard deviation was narrow. As a result, the low score cluster grouping was small in comparison to other groupings.
5.7 Conclusion: Recently Assigned RE Teachers implementing the draft RE Units

This study explored the perceptions of RARE teachers across the three dimensions of curriculum implementation. The concerns expressed previously by religious educators about recently assigned RE teachers (Chapter 2, p.46) were premised on these teachers being a coherent and large group of RE teachers (Table 4.1, p.141). The survey has highlighted that these teachers do share much in common with each other. However, there is a need to recognise that there are some significant differences between sub-groups of teachers. These differences seem to revolve around demographic and professional variables such as gender, age, RE teaching load and tertiary study. These variables were kept in mind when selecting participants for the interviews (Table 5.43, p.211) and for reporting from the two rounds of interviews. The survey results suggest that further research also needs to be undertaken to explore the influence of these variables not only on this cohort but also across all categories of RE teachers (Chapter 9, p.345). However, a number of issues about implementing the draft RE Units emerged from the survey responses that warranted further exploration. Each aspect of implementation is discussed next.

Questions were proposed as a focus for the interview phase of the study.

Use of Instructional Resources

Recently assigned RE teachers initially used the materials provided by the draft RE Units, especially the frequent use of the Mastersheets and Student Books. These resources became the cornerstone of their teaching. Why these teachers had a seemingly over-reliance on these resources was investigated in the interviews. Teachers also commented that they used other resources available to them. They were convinced that the resources provided reduced their lesson preparation time because of the accessibility. This perception raised a number of questions for further exploration:

- Why were recently assigned RE teachers concerned about the priority RE received in their preparation time?
- Why did these teachers rely so much on the Mastersheets and Student Book?
- Why did teachers change their use of resources, preferring resources they or others created?

**Application of Teaching Approach**

Respondents indicated that they were comfortable with the teaching approach as translated in the Teaching and Learning Programs of the draft RE Units. As competent teachers, they felt they had the skills to create lessons from these programs using the ‘Steps of the Teaching Process’ outlined in the Teacher’s Manual (Figure 2.1, p.39). However, while familiar with student-centred approaches to learning, they seemed less able to make links between life experiences of students and the faith concepts or understandings presented in the draft Units. The use of Scripture and organisation of liturgies were particularly worrisome to recently assigned RE teachers. Perhaps these RE teachers had the generic teaching and management skills but lacked the specialist skills to assist students in integrating faith understandings into their lives. This situation raised a number of further questions to be explored in later chapters:

- Why did recently assigned RE teachers closely adhere to the ‘Steps of the Teaching Process’ promoted in the draft RE Units?
- Why did recently assigned RE teachers who seem to feel confident about student-centred strategies also seem uncomfortable making links between life experiences of students and faith understandings?
- How did these teachers manage the difficulties of using Scripture and organising liturgies as part of their RE teaching?
- What changes in teaching approach occurred as recently assigned RE teachers became more experienced in teaching the draft RE Units?

**Teacher Understanding of Underlying Curriculum Principles**

Recently assigned RE teachers seemed to be very enthusiastic about how they portrayed themselves. Many were eager to participate in the religious life of the school (although there was a difference between helping out and managing the organisation of religious activities such as liturgies). Part of their teacher persona was to appear positive about promoting a faith witness and a Christian environment
conducive to learning. However, their understanding of the purposes of RE remained mixed and couched in catechetical or personal faith commitment terms rather than as educational outcomes. This mixed understanding also raised a number of questions:

- Why did recently assigned RE teachers appear eager to be involved in some aspects of the religious dimensions of the school and not others?
- Why did these teachers have diverse perceptions about the purposes of Religious Education?
- Why did an emphasis on humanitarian issues come to the fore in the perceptions of some of these teachers?

Chapter 6 draws upon these above questions as a basis for the interview questions. The questions were designed to assist in addressing the primary research question:  

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

The intention was to delve more deeply into how these teachers coped with the demands of curriculum implementation placed on them. The survey responses from recently assigned RE teachers have suggested their situation was characterised by a lack of familiarity with specific aspects of teaching Religious Education due to inexperience and limited personal and professional formation.

### 5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the development of a database from the survey responses of recently assigned RE teachers about their experience of implementing the draft PAREC. The database included data on the demographic and professional backgrounds of teachers as well as responses to items concerning the use of instructional resources, teaching approach and understanding of the underlying RE curriculum principles. The database provided a clearer picture of the target population and assisted the process in selecting a sample group of recently assigned RE teachers. A number of issues also emerged from the survey, which warranted further exploration, and became the basis for the interview questions in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX

THE FIRST INTERVIEWS

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter Six, the findings of the first round of interviews about the experiences of recently assigned RE teachers implementing the draft RE Units are described and analysed. The chapter begins by reviewing the interview experience with a sample of recently assigned RE (RARE) teachers. Next, the chapter describes the results of the analysis of the interview transcripts using the QSR NUD•IST version 4.0 (N4) computer software program (QSR International 1996). The findings from the initial coding are then presented. From this analysis, the chapter turns its attention to the themes of concern that emerged from this round of interviews. Lastly, there is a discussion of the issues that arose during these interviews and the need to further explore the perceptions of RARE teachers about the increasing demands on them in implementing the draft RE Units.

6.2 Review of the Interview Experience

Some interviewees were nervous initially about the interview but were comfortable talking about what they did in preparing and organising their lessons in Religious Education. Some teachers spoke at length about what they did; consequently, the first question (Chapter 4, p.129) drew an extended response from them.

The interview questions in the first round of interviews included statements or propositions based on key findings from the survey responses (Chapter 4, pp.129-131). The technique of using a statement or proposition from the survey results provided a concrete context from which the interviewees could make a response. However, most interviewees were surprised by the statement: ‘Develop social justice and tolerance for others in the students’ as the highest priority aim of RE by respondents. This statement seemed to create a dilemma for some interviewees – should they accede to the proposition or should they dispute it? Most respondents disagreed with the statement and proceeded to describe their aims of RE usually in
catechetical terms (see Table 6.1, ‘Teaching Approach’, p.218). While they seemed willing to describe their views about the aims of RE, they did seem to have difficulty with Question 7 in articulating their personal vision of Religious Education. Nonetheless, interviewees were able to recover their composure with Question 8 and speak at some length regarding their mentors and influences in their life; not so much with regard to helping them teach RE but about supporting the personal faith formation of the interviewees in their commitment to teaching this learning area.

Interviewees spoke confidently about their personal faith commitment and the need for further professional development as important to teaching RE. They felt that implementing the draft RE Units needed to be done in an enthusiastic and committed way. Interviewees judged their colleagues (and possibly themselves) from this perspective when it came to teaching RE. Table 6.1 (p.218) outlines the pattern of responses that emerged from the initial coding based on the dimensions of curriculum implementation.

The selection of interviewees was drawn to reflect the diversity and commonality of perceptions among the recently assigned RE teacher population. With the selection of very positive, normal and critical sub-groups within the sample cohort (Chapter 4, pp.143-144), there was an expectation that different perceptions would emerge from the groups. However, this was not reflected in the interview conversations. Each sub-group appeared to be focusing on similar perceptions and a pattern of responses began to form in the interviews. The sample cohort tended to be characterised by what they held in common rather than by their differences. This tendency towards commonality in the sample group reflected the survey findings on the Likert items with narrow standard deviations. As a result, a number of key themes emerged from the first round of interviews. These key themes are described in further detail in the next section ‘Findings of the First Interview: Key Themes’ (p.219).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension and Aspect</th>
<th>Number of Participants referring to the Aspect (n = 28)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Instructional Resources (Questions 1-3)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Availability of resources</td>
<td>27 (96%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Choice of resources</td>
<td>27 (96%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Suitability of resources to student learning</td>
<td>24 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Catalyst for further learning</td>
<td>14 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Approach (Questions 4-6)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set a positive tone in the classroom</td>
<td>28 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Develop active learning strategies</td>
<td>28 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Relate to student life experience</td>
<td>27 (96%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Modelling to students*</td>
<td>3 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formation of students</td>
<td>28 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Integration of faith into lives of students</td>
<td>25 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Formation of personal human qualities</td>
<td>13 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Direct instruction to students</td>
<td>27 (96%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Underlying Principles (Questions 7-9)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Become well-informed in the content</td>
<td>28 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop professionalism</td>
<td>28 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Self-assurance from experience</td>
<td>25 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Need for teacher commitment</td>
<td>24 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need for further formation of teacher</td>
<td>27 (96%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Professional Development Opportunities</td>
<td>26 (93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Advantage of an upbringing in faith</td>
<td>24 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Faith Development Opportunities</td>
<td>14 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be a faith witness to students</td>
<td>20 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support and example of other staff*</td>
<td>6 (21%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:
* = These aspects are mentioned as they become important in the Second Round of Interviews (Table 7.1, p.231). Percentages are given in whole numbers.
6.3 Findings of the First Interviews: Key themes

The themes were focused upon what the interviewees reported they did and what they hoped to do in the future. The generic themes focused upon the qualities of the RE teachers that needed to be developed to cope with the demands of implementing the RE Units as indicated in Table 6.2. The themes were the result of a coding and recoding process that aggregated the data into clusters or patterns that eventually led to the emergence of these themes (Chapter 4, p.132). The strength of the aggregation was demonstrated by the number of participants that directly referred to an aspect of that theme (Table 6.2). However, aggregations of less than 100% reflected a tendency towards participants not directly reporting an aspect rather than a reflection of discrepant data (Chapter 4, p.132).

Table 6.2 Indicator of Support for Themes emerging from First Round of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Generic Themes</th>
<th>Number of Participants referring to the Theme (n=28)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Need to Survive</strong></td>
<td>27 (96%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers felt that having a variety of ready-made curriculum materials available to them was important to how they survived the demands of implementing the draft RE Units.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Desire for Self-Assurance</strong></td>
<td>28 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers felt their confidence to teach RE came from the availability of curriculum materials, familiarity with the content of the Units, support from other teachers and from experience of teaching RE (including their expectation to be highly professional).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Quest to Flourish</strong></td>
<td>28 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently assigned teachers wanted to be seen as RE teachers of quality. They believed this could be achieved by making the draft RE Units as relevant to the learning needs of their students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Desire for Authenticity</strong></td>
<td>24 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees believed RE teachers were credible to their students because of their serious commitment to teaching RE as a ‘person of faith’. This led them to see the need for further faith formation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages are given in whole numbers.
In reading the analysis of each of the themes, it is important to be mindful of the format style of the quotations. Where participants pause, perhaps to reflect on what they said, this was shown by: (pause); where there were incidental phrases or words omitted, then ‘…” was shown; and where additional or clarifying editorial remarks (that is, not the words of the interviewee) need to be indicated then ‘[ ]’ brackets were used. Minimal punctuation was used in order to best represent the voice of the interviewee. The minimal punctuation has been included to clarify and remove possible ambiguities that were not present in the spoken dialogue.

The individual quotations were fair representations of the views of the participant quoted. Each quotation was selected to indicate the perception of the individual or group to which it was attributed and was quoted in such a way to present the perception without distortion or addition. As quotations were selected to be indicative, it is inevitable that some interviewees phrased their thoughts in ways that better communicated an idea. As a result, the communication of the same idea expressed by other interviewees was seldom quoted (Appendix 16, p.386). The codings, searching and reporting features of the QSR NUD•IST version 4.0 (N4) computer software program (QSR International 1996) helped ensure that all text was available for analysis and readily accessed as each theme was developed (Chapter 4, p.132).

6.3.1 The Need to Survive

The interviewees affirmed the earlier survey report about the accessibility of instructional resources (Chapter 5, p.176) in the draft Perth Archdiocesan RE Course (PAREC). The recently assigned RE teachers clearly enjoyed the curriculum materials being readily available for them to use in implementing the draft PAREC (Table 6.1, p.218). The teachers tended to use the Mastersheets and the Student Book frequently because they were readily accessible resources, reduced preparation time and acted as a back up for relief classes:

I think teachers use the Mastersheets and the Student Book because they often save time that I know I do not get to do lesson research and preparation.

(Darla)
The accessibility factor was based also on reducing the workload rather than availability alone. Some interviewees pointed out that, as RARE teachers, having the materials available meant they concentrated time and energy on their major learning area because RE was not their first priority (this point is discussed further in the next theme ‘Desire for Self-assurance’ on p.226). Hailey, a Science teacher with RE teaching as a minor part of her teaching load, expressed this attitude towards the curriculum materials:

Sometimes they’re really convenient. Sometimes, like I’ve got Year 11 Chem. and sometimes that tends to have more focus than my RE classes. So, you rush to get something that you can work with the kids, you know what’s going on but you just haven’t got time to prepare that little bit extra.

(Hailey)

At this stage of implementing the draft RE Units, RARE teachers felt very positive towards the curriculum materials because they wanted to keep their students busy while they focused on learning the content themselves:

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

(Clare)

This need to survive was crucial according to the interviewees. As Tim explained, ‘The advantage of using these materials is that you do not have to prepare in great detail and they provide security especially for recently assigned RE teachers’. By using Mastersheets and the Student Book, interviewees felt secure that the content of the draft Unit was communicated accurately and therefore they were less anxious about being subjected to scrutiny from the school community:

From my own personal experience I used the Student Book because I was confident the material covered was in accordance with Catholic teaching. … I liked using the Student Book because often it would explain things in a way I couldn’t.

(Amber)

After this initial reliance on the curriculum materials, interviewees began to identify shortcomings with them. Many interviewees were especially concerned about the language and presentation of the Mastersheets and Student Book. In his written
response, Frank summed up the usefulness of the materials as: ‘Easy to use and follow, although some material is of a very high complexity.’ It seemed that trust in the curriculum materials provided by the draft RE Units was quickly supplanted by increasing pressure on the RARE teacher to find alternative resources.

After a term of using the curriculum materials, recently assigned RE teachers found that their students were not responding in ways they would have wished. The interviewees described how the style of language in the materials was beyond the literacy level of students in their classes, particularly students with low academic ability. Brian, for example, felt that ‘… the materials are pitched too high, especially for our community.’ The country students he taught did not possess a strong literacy background. While he did not think all the materials should be made easier, he was concerned that the Student Book was too difficult for many of his students to read by themselves. As a result, teachers found that they had to spend more time and energy on explaining the meanings of words and phrases in the materials to a diverse class of academic backgrounds:

And it takes a lot of work on behalf of the teacher to the point where you have to sit down with the individual kids and say, “Right, what do you think?” and really tease it out with them.

(Nancy)

These explanations slowed down the pace of the lesson and put further pressure on the teacher to manage the class as brighter students became bored or less able students became disruptive because the content matter was too difficult to understand. Recently assigned RE teachers also became further disillusioned with the repetitiveness of the topics presented within the Units and the difficulties they encountered in catering for a diverse range of functional and visual literacy:

And I think a lot of our students today are limited in their reading and therefore, they find the Bible very dry. Because there is no other input. They are so used to a lot of other visual or audio stimulation to go with it. It’s not an easy thing for them to do–whether it be a Bible or a normal book. Books aren’t part of their culture.

(Fran)
Teachers realised that their initial enthusiasm about access to curriculum materials, as reported in the survey (Chapter 5, p.176), was dampened by the experience of using the materials. As a result, as alluded to also in the survey, they had to adapt the materials available or find more suitable activities or resources for their students:

Well I just think, “How can I do this in the class a little better?” (pauses with pensive look) “Can I?” So that’s usually what it is. It’s usually, “What can I?” (pauses with pensive look) How can I do this in class to make it more interesting, more presentable to them, or in a way that they are going to be able to see a reason for wanting, for needing to learn this? Needing to have some understanding of it.

(Gayle)

The teachers seemed to become increasingly concerned about the receptivity of their students and perhaps even pandered towards them. They began to focus their energies on finding or creating resources that were more interesting and relevant to the class:

I prefer to use the Student Book now as an additional teacher reference or opportunities for students to broaden and deepen their individual needs. Mastersheets can be useful but mostly I prefer to develop more ‘hands on’ activities – roleplays, posters, debates and so forth. I often modify Mastersheets to suit individual class need and capabilities.

(Clare)

While most teachers were happy to develop their own resources and strategies, some teachers felt a dilemma in using their initiative when other colleagues were using the draft RE Units as text materials because that was the expectation from the curriculum writers:

The feeling I’ve got from different teachers is that they have to stick to that because they think it’s a text. And they can’t change from there because that’s what’s come out of Catholic Ed. [Office]. That’s what Catholic Ed. [Office] wants and that’s what we have to give. So they use it as a real textbook, read this section, answer these questions, you’ll be tested on this.
Because they’re used to the main stream of teaching where they’ve got a textbook and you do that. I suppose I ‘ad lib’ more in the classroom and obviously the reason I do that is because I try to make it more comfortable for the kids. Where they can appreciate what’s happening. I also do some textual reading because I think it’s important they see those aspects of it but that’s not the be all and end all of it for me.

(Mark)

The interviewees had learnt from their experiences that they needed to be more flexible in how and what they taught their students. However, the teachers often developed alternatives that reflected strongly their traditional didactic teaching style (Table 6.1, p.218). As Gwen (Table 5.43, p.211) reported, to address the language problem of the Student Books in a Year 8 class, her response was to, ‘… make up my own worksheets or … do a lot of talking and using the board.’ The flexibility they perceived related to preferring their own teaching approach to implementing the draft RE Units or in choosing strategies they felt most comfortable in using:

So I think that flexibility suits me because I’m not a Social Studies teacher, I’m not an English teacher, I’m not a Science teacher so I don’t necessarily have a full on logical development of ideas. I try and look at an idea or a concept first and build something around a concept. … Because I’m an Art teacher I want the kids to attack it in their own way, just give them guidance on their presentation as well. So … I’d flick back and look at the Mastersheet here, then go back to the suggested strategies, look for where this Mastersheet appears in the suggested resources to see what objective that I’m attacking, to make sure I’m covering the objectives as I go through. I suppose I use this book backwards. Then again I might just be flicking through here and I might just see an idea that comes straight from the suggested strategies–the highlighted section–and get an idea from there. I might go to the Mastersheets and not like it and then develop my own or just do it totally on the board or just do it totally as a discussion.

(Ian)

On the other hand, this flexibility related to providing more practical or ‘hands on’ activities for the students:
I use a lot of stories. I use different approaches with different
groups of students. Teachers need to be flexible. Try to have
a practical component, some sort of ‘faith in action’ or
awareness-raising of those less fortunate.

(Charles)

Teachers recognised that though they were RE teachers they did not necessarily have
the same kind of skill repertoire as other teachers from other learning areas. For
example, while most of the teachers interviewed were trained as Humanities teachers
(Table 5.43, p.211) and were familiar with organising discussions in their classes,
other recently assigned teachers from different learning areas were not as confident
in this regard. Nonetheless, specialist teachers such as drama or art teachers felt that
their specific skills held them in good stead when creative activities like role-play or
artwork were called for in the teaching and learning program.

As the teachers became more familiar with the draft RE Units, they also became
more discerning with how they used the curriculum materials. Increasingly they
began to use their own resources and strategies and used the materials presented in
the Units of Work as a starting point or catalyst (Table 6.1, p.218) for students to
engage the content or to apply the content to a real-life or relevant context:

Mastersheets are very good. They have good presentation
and clarity. Tend to make selective use of them because they
are good focus sheets. I tend to modify the Mastersheets. Use
them so that kids can do something concrete or use them for
personal reflection. Good for students to do work alone
rather than only do group work. Use the Student Book as a
reference guide or basis for the Unit. Do not use every time.
Use the book as an initiator to discussion in class. The
Mastersheets and Student Book are crucial in the beginning.

(Ursula)

The teachers interviewed affirmed the survey finding (Chapter 5, p.198) that they
found organising a liturgy was a concern. The issue of accessibility to suitable
resources and professional background material was highlighted. They reported that
access to resources on liturgy was a problem—particularly as they are not provided in
the draft RE Units. Even when interviewees mentioned sincerely they went to Mass
regularly, they still had few ideas about organising one:
Personally I baulk at the idea because I’ve had no training in it at all. I go to Mass every day but I have no memory for what comes before what unless I’ve had to do it myself or I’ve been taught to do it. I’ve been taught that nowhere. So there’s a booklet we’ve received from the CEO which I’m intending to use and follow step by step. So I’ll tuck that away as a safety belt but I can understand that teachers feel very uncomfortable with it.

(Diana)

On the other hand, the teachers who had access to resources or attended professional development courses on liturgy found these resources and courses to be beneficial. Provided they had assistance from other more experienced teachers, interviewees believed they were able to cope fairly well. They also accessed resources available in their school or on the Internet and sought to attend professional development courses in this area. The difficulties in organising liturgies reported previously in the survey seemed to be due to the lack of prior training and inexperience compounded with a lack of access to resources according to the interviewees. It appeared that recently assigned RE teachers compensated by taking a collaborative role with other more experienced teachers.

6.3.2 Desire for Self-assurance

The theme ‘Desire for Self-assurance’ refers to the teaching approach recently assigned RE teachers took to ensure they felt comfortable with the students and confident in how they presented the curriculum materials. RARE teachers are anxious teachers and are motivated to be well prepared for their students because, as Diana relates, ‘… inevitably there are curly questions’. Such anxiety about knowing the content meant that recently assigned RE teachers devoted a large part of their preparation time to becoming acquainted with initially, the Teaching and Learning Program and later, the Teacher Reference Section provided by the draft RE Units.

The issue of time for professional preparation was a common one among the interviewees. For example, Anne was an experienced Technology and Enterprise teacher (Table 5.43, p.211). She sympathized with her RARE colleagues about the amount of preparation time that was required to develop new RE lessons. However, Anne felt that the frequent use of the Mastersheets and Student Books (see pp.220-221) was unhealthy for the professional development of teachers. She believed that such a practice made recently assigned RE teachers too dependent – ‘they are lazy’
and a ‘cop out’ for teachers – and made them less inclined to do their research and develop their own resources. Nonetheless, while Anne was critical of such recently assigned RE teachers, she believed there was a need to have more time for preparation to do the job properly:

Beginning RE teachers need time out for preparation. It takes the longest to prepare even if you have one class of RE. It takes more time than other subjects.

(Anne)

Recently assigned RE teachers were faced with competing priorities. Some of the competing priorities were: to focus on their major learning area where they had prior training; to experience and develop good lessons; or, to spend additional time on reading and studying the Teaching Reference Section before preparing good RE lessons. Inevitably, some RARE teachers tried to do both but with Religious Education placed increasingly on the backburner:

[If] they’re teaching mainly Social Studies and one or two RE [classes], their main goal is that, Social Studies. So … they don’t get handed Mastersheets and Student Book like you do in RE. So, it’s like, “Well thank God that’s planned. I’ll just work on my Social Studies, and I’ll just concentrate on the RE kids in class.” Certainly, and they’re certainly sincere about it but it’s like, “Why would I go and write another Mastersheet when I’ve got” (pauses and points to one of the Mastersheets in the Teacher’s Manual). You know what’s going on there and it’s a time thing.

(Rose)

As teachers became more familiar with the content of the draft RE Units and had successfully taught their prepared lessons, their confidence grew.

Another factor that assisted the confidence of the teachers was prior training in the RE learning area. Unlike the majority of recently assigned RE teachers, a few of the teachers interviewed already possessed training beyond the Accreditation requirements. One teacher, Rose, was a specialist RE teacher (Table 5.43, p.211) and had majored in Theology and Religious Education in her degree. While she still had a lot to learn about teaching in the classroom, Rose saw her background knowledge as a distinct advantage:
Having a degree in Theology and a major in Religious Education method has been a God-send for me. Because I tend to have a lot of background knowledge in my head and I’m only 22 [years old]. I’ve recently done these things myself, so, that’s good. Because often I can just know the text that I use and I can brush up quickly. It’s not like I have to go and find the facts for the first time. And I think, I’m just so lucky because some of my colleagues don’t have that luxury, I guess. So they’re starting – I don’t know – with a lot more work in front of them.

(Rose)

However, for the majority of teachers, two areas of difficulty emerged from the survey (Chapter 5, p.188): using the Bible in their lessons and organising liturgies. In the first round of interviews, the teachers were questioned about why they thought these difficulties were the case. In the use of the Bible, Victor reported frankly:

it’s hard for me as a teacher to try and translate something [in the Gospels] sometimes when you don’t even know yourself. You’re finding it difficult yourself to be able to get students to understand that.

(Victor)

Victor had a lack of prior training because he had not finished his study component of Accreditation. However, where interviewees had completed their studies, they were reluctant also to include Scripture references in their own resources because they feared misconstruing its interpretation:

Personally I find it hard using the Scriptures, not because I don’t think it is relevant, but because of my own inadequacies and lack of knowledge.

(Amber)

As a result, many avoided organising liturgies and using the Bible. They were afraid or worried about how they coped with the reactions of students or the scrutiny of the school community. When it came to liturgies, the problem was further exacerbated by concerns over how the presiding priest might react:

I’m just always worried about doing something wrong. Organising something wrong, having a priest come in from outside who may have some assumptions about what the school should be doing, or RE is not being taught, or something like that.

(Edward)

Recently assigned RE teachers were concerned about the reaction of the priest to how they organised the liturgy and the manner in which the students conducted
themselves. Some interviewees felt the priest was there to judge them in their role. The teachers thought the priest assumed that, in their role as a religious educator, they were responsible totally for the quality of participation shown by their RE class. They did not see the priest as someone who was supportive and sympathetic to their situation, especially if the priest was not a regular visitor to the school. Such concerns reflected the research work of Tinsey (1999) about the misunderstood relationships between priests and teachers in Catholic secondary schools. The teachers were also concerned about the attitudes of the students to organising and participating in the Mass or other liturgies:

teachers may be afraid that the students will not appreciate the need for liturgy to have silence and reflection because of their entertainment culture. Teachers may be afraid that students will play up. Teachers’ perceptions about getting kids involved in organising a Mass may be influenced by them fearing that students couldn’t care less.

(Tim)

It was very much a ‘fear of the unknown’ for experienced and inexperienced teachers alike. Both these areas demonstrated that where the curriculum materials did not provide direct support, then recently assigned RE teachers were uncomfortable about doing it because they lacked the knowledge and confidence to do so in front of their classes:

If you were really familiar with them and you know what you were talking about, fine. But if you’re not, then there’s a danger because you’re going to basically be showing the kids that you don’t know what you’re going on about. And I think that’s a danger because that will turn kids away more than anything else. So if you’re confident and done lots of study in it, then yes, fine, use it. (pause) Make sure it relates to them. But if you’re not then be very, very picky and not necessarily use it all the time.

(Kate)

Interestingly, one interviewee took the point further about the selective use of Scripture in class to compensate for the lack of knowledge and sufficient training. Barbara, who had completed her Accreditation (Table 5.43, p.211), suggested that the recently assigned teacher was not obliged to do so, they could leave it out altogether! If the teacher did not have sufficient background knowledge, then it was difficult to be confident about using the Bible:
However, not all are [confident], and this may be the reason as to why not a lot of teachers refer to the Scriptures in their teaching (pause) and they shouldn’t feel obliged to especially if they feel uncomfortable with the content.

(Barbara)

Contrary to this view, one interviewee saw this matter in a different light. This interviewee was a member of a teaching religious order with a number of years of training in theology and scripture before beginning to teach the draft RE Units. Pat observed that the lack of confidence was a matter also of the personal faith background of the teacher:

So I think the more confident a person is with their faith, whether they agree with everything in the Catholic faith is irrelevant but the more confident they are with their faith, the better they are to adapt the message.

(Pat)

Such an observation was reflected in the thinking of Stead (1994) and Hartley (1999) regarding personal and professional development opportunities in using Scripture (Chapter 3, p.98).

Further professional formation seemed to be undertaken by the recently assigned RE teachers through reading the Teacher Resource Section within the draft RE Units, attending the ‘Content of RE’ Inservices provided by the CEOWA and by listening to the experiences of other teachers:

Reading through the background notes … in the [Teacher’s]
Book …. [Also] I’ve been to some of these [Content of] RE
inservices. In fact, I have really found them useful. … And
just some staff meetings we’ve had, people get up and speak
about stuff and it’s very good stuff that I’ve picked up.

(Pippa)

One recently assigned RE teacher spoke directly of the wish to discuss and share with colleagues useful ideas, strategies and helpful hints on managing the RE classroom (Table 6.1, p.218). Such a wish seemed to be a newly emerging factor and became a significant response in the second round of interviews (Chapter 7, p.263). Gwen recognised that this collegiality was difficult because RE teachers were not in the one department together. She felt that it would be beneficial to RARE teachers if they had direct support from experienced personnel whether it be the RE Coordinator, experienced RE teachers or consultant from the CEOWA. Recently assigned RE teachers wanted to see practical classroom strategies in action. Gwen
suggested that it would be a good idea if they could access a ‘mentor’ – a qualified and experienced Religious Educator who was renowned as an expert at their craft:

I think they probably need a mentor, a good role model. Someone who will offer them support and encouragement. But still allow them to try to do their own things, to do their own mistakes. They’re there to really model that loving and openness, that great belief in the value of what they’re doing.

(Gwen)

Gwen commented further upon the value of having someone like this: maybe the Principal, Deputy Principal, RE Coordinator, Priests and others. She felt that by watching what they did and learning their styles of teaching, RARE teachers could enhance their teaching as well. Other RARE teachers wanted to see an ‘expert’ in action translating the content into meaningful and engaging activities for a wide range of students This form of ongoing professional development was what recently assigned RE teachers appeared to yearn for the most:

every teacher who is going to be taking RE for the first time, second or third time – they’re new teachers, they should be inserviced on the same content across the state. You make sure you have top class facilitators that are not going to just lecture to your participants but make them do activities as if they were the students in the classroom. Show them the different strategies that are available to teach RE. I mean you can get a sheet and have 56 different strategies. Show them how to use those strategies.

(Olivia)

Olivia, along with other RARE teachers (pp.223-225), believed that it was this ‘hands on’, practical approach to teaching RE that they needed rather than be left in a vacuum of uncertainty as to what to do. Having a choice of strategies in the teaching and learning program was useful but for recently assigned RE teachers there needed to be ways to learn how to use these strategies so they could flourish as competent and confident RE teachers. This quest to flourish as RE teachers is the focus of the next theme.
6.3.3 The Quest to Flourish

It seemed that once the immediate professional demands of the draft RE Units were met, recently assigned RE teachers turned their attention to the specific learning needs of their students. In the first round of interviews, teachers commented that the change in use of curriculum materials and teaching approach came about because of a greater awareness of (and concern for) relevance to the students. Hailey believed that, in her experience, a variety of activities suited to the abilities of her students was important:

> This is my fourth term of teaching the same Unit and I haven’t taught it the same twice because of the kids. And also what the kids are experiencing at the time. … you’ve got to be aware of the skills that the kids have got. If the kids can’t have an open discussion without someone being threatened, then you can’t do that. You’ve got to find some other way of getting the message across. If the kids aren’t good at artwork and they hate it, then you find some way different to be creative. You go and make collages rather than drawings, and things like that. You just adapt to the skills that the kids have got.

(Hailey)

It was not just a case of adapting their teaching approach for a diverse range of academic backgrounds, but also a greater sensitivity in the approach of RARE teachers for the personal development of their students:

> If you can’t relate what you’re teaching to their lives, to their own questions now, [then] it’s just like the rest of knowledge you leave behind after school. It doesn’t make any impact, it doesn’t meet them where they’re at.

(Diana)

Though recently assigned RE teachers had prior training in the phases of development of secondary students, the responses of the interviewees tended to indicate that only after the experience of teaching the draft RE Units, did they appreciate how important their strategies became in making the content more accessible to the understanding of the students. For example, in using the Bible, interviewees explained how they needed to provide a more experiential approach to assist the understanding of their students:
The use of Scripture is important given the clientele of the students. However, more [direct] use of Scriptures would switch the students off. Better to make constant reference [to Scripture] by ‘e g’ [interviewee’s term] the use of roleplay, adapting it to everyday life. Need to make links to modern day life and make the Scriptures relevant to the students. Students like to use drama to Scripture readings in liturgies ‘e g’ as part of Mass. 

(Ursula)

It was apparent that difficulties occurred where recently assigned RE teachers did not have prior training in using effective strategies that were in tune with the religious understandings of students. It appeared the difficulties for RARE teachers was not just confined to a lack of knowledge about areas such as Scripture but also a lack of skilling or method in making the ‘link’ between the meaning of the content and the lived experience of the students. Recently assigned RE teachers who had both knowledge and skills were able to appreciate the importance of such a link and made the connections between faith and life for the students. Rose, a specialist RE teacher (p.228), felt very competent in her ability to get the students interested (or what she referred to in her interview as ‘hooked’) in the material she was presenting. She attributed her competence in making the content relevant to the students because she was given ‘a more practical aspect’ in her training. Rose believed that this practical training was what RARE teachers needed to develop the confidence in this important aspect of their teaching:

I think they all should go through a course like what I went through … [at UNDA] which was the Accreditation [to teach RE] to a certain extent, but over more time and probably with a more practical aspect to it. So I think that they should do something like that. I think they should be involved with like Liturgies and learning about Scripture and that sort of thing. Again, in a practical way. 

(Rose)

This change in teaching approach and greater initiative in using a wider range of classroom resources and strategies also seemed to coincide with the teachers wishing to encourage a ‘comfortable’ learning environment as a precursor for concentrating on the spiritual and faith formation of students:

To make a comfortable environment for students to share together their ideas and to enhance their faith involvement and understanding. 

(Steven)
Mark suggested such an environment was to be positive and intimate, to create a sanctuary for the students to discuss spirituality, faith and other matters of importance to their lives:

So I try to level it in such a way that they felt comfortable and happy to come into the classroom. They found it as a sanctuary where you could talk about spiritual things, talk about the RE side of it, also talk about real life situations. And using the Catholic perspective how to best to deal with those sorts of things.

(Mark)

In contrast, many interviewees remained focused on teaching the content (Table 6.1, p.218) in spite of the reactions of their students and be pressured to adapt their management to the needs of students. They seemed to view the attitudes of their students and responses as opposing the efforts of the teacher to educate them about Catholic beliefs. The interviewees commented also about the lack of interest by the students in Religious Education or the lack of appreciation for the effort the teacher placed in trying to make strategies work. Worst of all, one teacher believed students were actively sabotaging her attempts to teach:

And certainly when I started in Term 1 with these life issues, when I came up against a fairly large male brick wall in my classes who were very anti-anything I wanted to present to them and they would simply not listen to me. They would ask questions, they were very inquisitive but I think they were trying to set me up.

(Nancy)

In all cases, it seemed that the interviewees were expressing a desire to flourish as RE teachers. They wanted to be competent classroom managers, to provide lessons that were relevant and enjoyable to their students and to be able to create a learning environment that would enable positive opportunities for the students to explore their spirituality and faith. As Hailey, an experienced Science teacher and in her fourth year of teaching RE (Table 5.43, p.211), explained:
Making them [the students] do work without them realising it. If they don’t think they’ve done any work then that’s great RE. But that doesn’t necessarily mean they haven’t … And giving them the incentive to work so that they get something out of it … Plus it does cut down on your discipline problems. If kids are doing something they want to do, they can do, then they’re so much easier to handle. They enjoy themselves more.

(Hailey)

While the approach of Hailey appeared like pandering to the sense of hedonism advocated by the students, she did feel positive about the affirmation coming from the students. As the students enjoyed completing the tasks, discipline no longer was a problem for Hailey and she felt she was becoming a competent classroom manager in Religious Education. For RARE teachers, this teaching approach meant affirmation for their own sense of identity: as a person and as an RE teacher:

Look, at the end of the day, I mean I teach the same kids for the whole year. I want to have built up a positive relationship with them and I do that through RE because I believe it gives me the scope to get to know them, it gives me the scope to tell them why I choose to be Catholic, why I choose to do certain things.

(Olivia)

The comment by Olivia about ‘why I choose to be Catholic’ was a common thread that linked in with the need to be familiar with the content of the draft RE Units and be able to relate this content to the students in meaningful ways. The interviewees saw that their confidence and competence was linked to how they saw themselves and particularly their strength of character in presenting a faith witness. A person who believed in the truth of what they were teaching was going to be far more adept at communicating the message across to the students as Pat indicated earlier (p.230).

Recently assigned RE teachers wanted to flourish, to have confidence in their professional competency to teach the content and to be familiar with the curriculum materials. Interviewees believed that they needed to be able to relate the materials in interesting and relevant ways and to be committed to what they doing in both professional and religious terms. Teachers who felt they were confident in these three areas as they implemented the draft RE Units emphasised their belief that their aim in RE was to facilitate the human, spiritual and faith formation of their students. It seemed that the experience of teaching the draft Units, and the support of further
professional development, led to changes in the perceptions RARE teachers had of the aims of Religious Education. Their perceptions were changing from a ‘crusade of delivery’ imposed on the students to a ‘pilgrimage of formation’ with the students. The crusade of delivery seemed to be characterised by prolific use of Mastersheets and Student Book with close coverage of all learning objectives. Alternatively, a pilgrimage of formation focused on the selective use of curriculum materials and strategies that were related to the academic and personal spiritual and religious aptitudes of the students:

The most important aim … [of RE is] finding out the centre of who they are … to make contact with who they are spiritually, to have grown personally, to have learnt what the Church teaches and to respect others’ opinions and views.

(Anne)

In relating their teaching to the specific needs of students, the interviewees expressed a belief that their teaching of RE was directed towards firstly (and, in some cases, primarily), the personal and spiritual formation of the students (Table 6.1, p.218). Interviewees, who focused on the spiritual aspects of the formation of their students, tended themselves to be so inclined:

Probably developing the spiritual side of the students and all that goes with it. I’d be the last person to talk about dogma and that’s because I’m not into that sort of thing! So I would hope at the end that they would have their spiritual side of them start to develop.

(Jessica)

The admission by Jessica that she ‘be the last person to talk about dogma … [because she was] … not into that sort of thing’ raised the suspicion that the degree of integration in the students desired by the teachers seemed to be related to the degree of integration in the personal spiritual and religious formation of the teacher. Many interviewees spoke about how they wanted their students to grow in their understanding and appreciation of their own (assumed to be Catholic) personal faith as an integral part of their development as a maturing person:
My vision of RE is that the students learn to have a relationship with God. That they learn about our Church. That they learn to love God and to love the Church. And that they know how to apply that to their lives, so that when they’re dealing with their friends or they’re dealing with their families they can do that in a Christian Catholic sense and try and really live. I want them to live what we are talking about.

(Rose)

Rose assumed that students could and wanted to be like her, to be a committed person of faith. While this assumption may work in catechetical situations, such a viewpoint may prove intimidating to students who are unable or unwilling to follow suit. While not doubting the sincerity expressed by Rose, how she portrayed herself to the students and how well they accepted her was an issue for Rose. Questions of authenticity and relevance were raised and are the focus of the next theme.

6.3.4 Desire for Authenticity

The interviewees spoke about the importance of how RE teachers presented themselves to their students. They believed that teachers should ‘practice what they preached’ and be a faith witness to their students (Table 6.1, p.218). The teachers wanted to show the students that they empathised with them and understood what the students experienced. One of the interviewees, Brian, commented, ‘… to show students you were like them and that you are a human being too.’ This desire to empathise with students entailed a certain amount of vulnerability because teachers needed to share something of their inner selves with the students. Most of all, according to Jessica, the teacher had to ‘ring true’ with the students, to be an RE teacher who was genuine as a person with a commitment to a faith stance:

I still think it’s really important that you have (pause) you know where you stand, so that you’re not reciting something from a book. Because if it doesn’t ring true, I think, to the kids for a start because they’re pretty (pause) they can usually see through teachers like that pretty easily.

(Jessica)

Jessica went on to say how the authenticity dilemma began from the moment the recently assigned teacher was employed to teach RE. She pointed out that recently assigned teachers feel they had to be compliant because of job opportunity or timetabling issues. Edith, like Jessica, expressed a similar concern and wondered whether RARE teachers should feel compelled to teach RE:
Teachers should never be forced [Edith’s emphasis] to teach RE because of timetabling or financial constraints. If the world of Catholic education is genuine in its commitment to quality RE instruction in its schools that should come before convenience of timetables.

(Edith)

Both Jessica and Edith also felt that the integrity of the recently assigned RE teacher became compromised when the personal faith stance of the teacher was not completely in tune with the demands of the draft RE Units. They felt uneasy about the perceived gap between their stance and the stance presented in the draft RE Units. In turn, they felt they were not living up to expectations and failed to be authentic to the students, to the curriculum and to themselves. Coupled with the difficulties of inadequate professional formation, teachers became less than enthusiastic about teaching the subject and other teachers became dismayed by the apathy of their colleagues. For instance, Diana, teaching in her second year of Religious Education (Table 5.43, p.211) who claimed she was a devoutly practising Catholic, demonstrated this point well. She wanted to share her passion for her Church. However, Diana felt frustrated with her fellow colleagues who were assigned to teach RE when they were still coming to terms with their own faith commitment. Her comments suggested that there were few recently assigned teachers with the personal faith formation to teach RE and, in turn, had an impact on the faith formation of the students:

I think if you’ve got a teacher who’s been thrown into teaching religion when really they haven’t thought deeply about how do you integrate it into your own life then for them it’s still textbook material and it’s still a series of questions and answers in a penny catechism. And to try and integrate Church teaching into somebody else’s life is impossible if you aren’t actively seeking that in your own. I think one of the problems we have … is teachers that are brought into the schools and are asked in the interview, ‘Are you prepared to teach religion?’ If they are, regardless of where they’re at in their own faith journey, they’re thrown into one class or two classes per week to fill the timetable gaps.
And they’re there dealing with their own questions, trying to convincingly portray the Church’s views and try to show it works in real life scenarios when they’re still at the point of trying to assimilate that into their lives. So I think in some cases that’s why it’s difficult. … I think that to have teachers who aren’t in love with or seeking to become more in love with their faith themselves, to have teachers who are only teaching not living religion does more harm than good.

(Diana)

Interestingly, other interviewees also frowned upon this lack of enthusiasm where teachers might not be taking RE seriously. There seemed to be a sense that if the RARE teacher were in such a situation, then the teacher should be allowed to opt out of teaching RE. Such teachers did not have the energy nor the personal commitment to sustain themselves in face of the curriculum demands of the draft RE Units. A professional and personal faith commitment to teaching RE seemed to be the determinant in sustaining the recently assigned RE teacher in meeting the curriculum demands of the draft RE Units. As Edward (Table 5.43, p.211), who had not completed the study component of Accreditation, commented:

If there’s a particular teacher that doesn’t hold the Church teaching particularly close to their heart, they’re not going to relate it to the kids because they don’t care about it that much themselves. The teachers that do are going to find ways, they’re going to seek to connect with the kids, they’re going to seek to connect with the Church’s teachings. You got to talk from personal experience, and that’s why RE is sharing of yourself. You got to talk about where the Church is teaching or the place it has had in your life and how it has made your life better. And in situations where you haven’t used the Church’s teachings, it has made your life worse. You just got to relate it back to the personal situation. … At the same time, the worse thing in the world would be someone who has all the professional development, who may have Accreditation [to teach RE] … and yet, doesn’t really care that much about the faith. That’s the worse situation.

(Edward)

Many of the interviewees related the confidence to share their faith with their students because of their own religious upbringing or personal faith experience (Table 6.1, p.218). Some relied on how they were taught about religion and emulated that experience with their own classes. For other interviewees like Diana (p.238), what was more significant was their personal decision to be an actively practising Catholic. They felt that being able to share something of their personal commitment
was important. Interviewees related how their commitment developed while growing up at home, being a part of their parish, joining youth movements or being influenced by significant family members, priests, RE teachers and others:

I suppose having faith being central to my life. My faith is important to who I am and I grew up in a Catholic family. But I never took the faith on myself until I made the decision to. And the things that have flowed from that decision to become consciously Christian have been brilliant. My life has gotten better a million fold. I was involved in youth movements – Catholic youth movements, so Antioch groups, being a part of ‘Team’ and things like that has been really significant for me. Well, there have been people at [this school] whose RE teaching have been fantastic. Who have been at it with a real passion. I’ve learnt a lot from them, just ‘on the job’ learning. It stems from having a personal commitment to being a Christian.

(Edward)

Interviewees believed personal faith formation held them in good stead in meeting the curriculum demands and personal faith witness to the students. In the case of Ursula, who was a young, accredited RE teacher in her fifth year of teaching RE (Table 5.43, p.211), this integration of teacher and witness was something that she felt very comfortable portraying to her students:

Students can see me as a person not just an RE teacher – that’s who I am, a person living out Gospel values. So students respect – I think that’s crucial – me and I am someone to model from. I hope they go out and do the same from what they learn or have built or reinforced from home such as morals and values.

(Ursula)

She saw it as part of her self-identity – ‘that’s who I am’ – and this persona was authentic to the students. Even teachers who did not come from such a background found that their decision to become an ‘active’ rather than a ‘nominal’ Catholic was a significant support for them in teaching the draft RE Units:
My own conversion experience from being a nominal Catholic to an active one. Having seen the results of removing the ‘mystical, supernatural things’ from RE. Students can get that sort of RE from their family and friends. Doing several tertiary units in Theology and Religious Education. From my own prayer life. My own reading and theologising of the Catechism. From my parish experience. From having support from my RE Coordinator.

(Tim)

This did not mean, as far as the interviewees were concerned, that recently assigned RE teachers without this ‘ideal’ background could not teach Religious Education. What was recognised was that there was a gap between their personal commitment and the commitment they perceived was presented in the draft RE Units. To bridge this gap, RARE teachers felt they had to become more deeply committed as a person of faith. The issue of identity and integrity emerged as an important area for recently assigned RE teachers in how they coped with the demands of the draft RE Units. The issue is discussed further in the next section, ‘Issues for Further Exploration’ (p.242).

To help them in coping with the demands of faith witness, a few recently assigned RE teachers commented they looked towards the example of more experienced Religious Educators and most participating teachers commended the professional development opportunities they attended on Religious Education and spirituality (Table 6.1, p.218):

I have to go back to the REC we had at our school. I think he was a very gifted man and he always inspired me. Whenever I had the chance to watch him work with a group of students you could see he had them in the palm of his hand all the way through. And he was very instrumental in making me feel that this was a good subject to teach, this was important. … The only inservicing I’ve really done as far as RE strictly goes is through the CEO. I can honestly say that I never felt it was a waste of time to come to one. Whether I use it in the classroom or not may vary but for my own personal growth and understanding I always come away feeling that I learnt a bit more.

(Fran)

Recently assigned RE teachers in this first round of interviews were adamant that, regardless of their prior personal and professional formation, there was a lot more they needed to learn and understand about themselves and about teaching the draft RE Units. They were looking for greater depth to their knowledge of the content of
the Units, greater skill in managing and teaching the students and greater wisdom about themselves and their job. Such a thirst for becoming an accomplished RE teacher went beyond that provided by the Accreditation program to teach RE:

Accreditation [to teach RE] … is good but teachers need more of it on an ongoing basis. After learning how to teach RE the first time, they need to be able to go back to it again. Their classroom experiences will help them understand how they can teach RE better. Teachers in the country also need access to ‘experts’ like lecturers on moral issues. Teachers also need to have a retreat for themselves which should be available on an ongoing basis because people grow and change over time. Teachers need to know themselves before they impart anything in RE. They need to have developed their own spirituality and developed a knowledge and appreciation for Scripture.

(Anne)

It was apparent that the recently assigned RE teachers perceived that their role was more than be a teacher and that role was very much linked to a grander vision of why they taught Religious Education. As one interviewee, Gwen, who had not completed her Accreditation but was in her sixth year of teaching RE (Table 5.43, p.211) described, teaching RE was a something she felt was a purpose in her life, it was a ‘mission’:

And I see my job as a real mission, otherwise I wouldn’t be here. If I just wanted to teach, to be a good English teacher, I’d be in a State school. You can be a good teacher in a State school. But I have chosen to be here because I do see it as a mission.

(Gwen)

Teaching RE for Gwen went beyond becoming a ‘good teacher’; there was something more then professional competence that was related to how strongly she felt about her faith stance.

6.4 Issues for Further Exploration

Matters of competence had emerged in the first round of interviews. Teachers wanted to be able to implement the draft RE Units confidently. This confidence came from familiarity with the Units and from experience of teaching RE classes. However, there seemed to be something more going on. There was another side to
this confidence that teachers were describing that had more to do with themselves as people. Over time, with familiarity with the Units, teachers became more concerned by the way they portrayed themselves to their students. They seemed to be dealing with a new array of expectations. Did they feel their teaching, as Jessica suggested, ‘ring true’ with the students (p.237)? Was the commitment of the teacher to the faith sincere and authentic to the students? These matters seemed to play on the minds of the teachers. They were anxious about their own identity and integrity as an RE teacher. It seemed possible that as the recently assigned RE teachers implemented the draft RE Units, they in turn were affected personally and professionally by the curriculum and faith witness demands placed on them.

Data had emerged that suggested there was another paradigm to be explored about how recently assigned RE teachers implemented the draft RE Units. This paradigm was the interplay between the journey of personal and professional formation of RARE teachers with the process of curriculum implementation. The study had uncovered a unique perspective on how recently assigned RE teachers coped with the demands of curriculum implementation. Further exploration of this paradigm had the potential to add to the field of knowledge in RE curriculum innovation. This paradigm was investigated further in the second round of interviews with the sample group of RARE teachers. This second round of interviews is the focus of the next chapter.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension and Aspect</th>
<th>Number of Participants referring to the Aspect (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do you stand now in relation to your RE teaching? Is it the same, different, worse, or better?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better due to experience of teaching the Units</td>
<td>13 (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Familiarity with Program &amp; Resources</td>
<td>6 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better due to collegial support</td>
<td>13 (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Change in Teaching Approach</td>
<td>12 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o For the better</td>
<td>8 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Change of attitude by teacher</td>
<td>8 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Cater for attitude of students</td>
<td>7 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficult due to circumstances of teaching RE</td>
<td>12 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better due to professional formation</td>
<td>9 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stronger commitment to RE</td>
<td>8 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No change, no better, no worse</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Subject matter to be taught</td>
<td>17 (81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Familiar strategies</td>
<td>14 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Managed like other subjects</td>
<td>7 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focused on content and tasks</td>
<td>4 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unique nature of the learning area</td>
<td>21 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Special subject matter</td>
<td>18 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Unique relational environment</td>
<td>12 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Focus on faith</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting diverse expectations</td>
<td>17 (81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o To be adaptable</td>
<td>10 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Faith dimension</td>
<td>6 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o To be a witness</td>
<td>6 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o To be a mentor</td>
<td>6 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is best and most special about teaching RE for you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Close rapport with students</td>
<td>17 (81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentoring as a teacher &amp; person of faith</td>
<td>16 (76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal and religious formation of students</td>
<td>14 (67%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Generic Themes</th>
<th>Number of Participants referring to the Theme (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RE is like other subjects and a lot more</td>
<td>21 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Rapport</td>
<td>17 (81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Authenticity</td>
<td>16 (76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>13 (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question of Teacher Generativity</td>
<td>15 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An uncertainty about sustaining their enthusiasm for teaching the draft RE Units in the face of teaching disinterested students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 authenticate 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:

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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?”
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(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:

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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.
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(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.
CHAPTER EIGHT

REFLECTIONS

8.1 Introduction
This chapter considers the key themes that have emerged from this study and discusses their significance within the context of current educational literature pertaining to the formation and experience of recently assigned teachers. The chapter is called ‘Reflections’ because it presents a synthesis of the thoughts, feelings and research from a range of sources. It reflects, firstly, the thoughts and feelings of the recently assigned RE teachers from the survey and interviews. Secondly, the chapter presents the reflections of the researcher about the significance of the qualitative data that emerged. Thirdly, the chapter describes how the findings mirror other research and Church documents about the experience of recently assigned teachers and especially recently assigned RE (RARE) teachers. Lastly, a model is proposed about the process of change that recently assigned RE teachers experienced, both personally and professionally, as they aspired to become excellent RE teachers.

8.2 Key Concerns
Looking at the various themes to emerge from the survey and two rounds of interviews, a number of key concerns became significant to recently assigned RE teachers. These key concerns were common to the majority of teachers teaching a learning area with which they were unfamiliar (Chapter 3, p.55). The responses to these key concerns were the mechanisms by which RARE teachers learnt to cope with the curriculum exigencies as they implemented the draft RE Units in their RE classroom teaching. The key concerns are described under these headings:

- **Competence in Instruction and Classroom Management**: Recently assigned RE teachers were concerned initially about developing effective knowledgeable instruction and classroom management;
- **Connectivity**: To enhance their competence, RARE teachers wanted to develop a network of positive and professional relationships with students and with other staff members;
• **Authenticity and Spiritual Integrity**: The experience of teaching the draft RE Units led to RARE teachers wanting to present authentic human qualities to their students, to affirm these qualities within themselves and to develop and maintain a balanced, healthy spirituality to cope with the personal and professional demands of teaching the draft RE Units;

• **Vocation of the recently assigned Religious Educator**: RARE teachers began to see their RE teaching in a broader context to their own faith commitment and wanted to discover their vocation in becoming a passionate and committed Religious Educator; and,

• **Holistic and Ongoing Formation**: Recently assigned RE teachers sought to improve themselves personally and professionally and recognised the need for further personal, professional, and religious formation on an ongoing basis.

Each concern is discussed, in turn, and a model is proposed to draw together these concerns and their influences on recently assigned secondary RE teachers.

### 8.2.1 Competence in Instruction and Classroom Management

One of the concerns to emerge from this research was the importance of gaining experience and familiarity with the RE Units of Work. As recently assigned RE teachers addressed this competence in instruction, the confidence of the teacher developed as a result. In the survey responses, RARE teachers indicated that accessibility to instructional resources was important (Chapter 5, p.176) and frequently, they preferred using the Mastersheets and Student Book as a mainstay to their teaching (Chapter 5, p.178). It seemed to be the case of having ‘activities that worked’ (Appleton and Kindt 1999, p.4) to cope with the immediate task of implementing the draft RE Units into their classroom teaching (Chapter 3, p.61).

The perceptions of the teachers interviewed in the first round were focused on the importance of competence in their classroom teaching of the draft RE Units (Chapter 6, p.234). As Clare mentioned in the first round of interviews (Chapter 6, p.221), she believed that recently assigned RE teachers were very ‘reliant on the Mastersheets and Student Books’ because they wanted to ensure their instruction was effective. Teachers seemed to be more concerned about the pragmatics of implementing the draft Units. At the initial interview, what mattered to the interviewees was a
thorough knowledge of the content of the Unit, having the resources and strategies to keep the students on task and developing a warm rapport with the students. RARE teachers shared with colleagues in other learning areas the challenge of ensuring effective instruction and classroom management. How well they managed this fundamental demand formed their confidence to teach RE in the future. It was a cornerstone trait towards becoming ‘highly effective teachers’ (McEwan 2002, p.51). Rymarz and Engebretson (2005) have also affirmed similar concerns (Chapter 3, p.67).

Recently assigned RE teachers felt frustrated by their inability to teach students in the ways they perceived they should teach them. Such frustration was typical of teachers faced with teaching a new learning area (Chapter 3, pp.56-57). To cope with this situation, RARE teachers increasingly felt they had to adapt their teaching approach to the needs of their students. In the survey, teachers commented about the need to adapt the curriculum materials provided by the draft RE Units (Chapter 5, p.183) and were using other instructional resources they were able to access themselves (Table 5.18, p.183). The perception was that these materials were more suitable to the needs of students (Chapter 5, p.183).

In turn, the positive response the teachers received from the students helped to restore the sense of self-worth and confidence of the teachers to teach in the future. After a year of teaching the draft RE Units, most teachers saw adapting their use of curriculum materials and teaching approach to be more in tune with the learning needs of their students as crucial to their competence and confidence as an RE teacher (Table 7.1, p.246). Even though Kate (Table 5.43, p.211) had quit teaching RE for other reasons (Chapter 7, p.261), she also recognised that she needed to change how she used the materials and teaching approach if she taught the subject again:

I think if I taught RE again now I’d go about it a totally different way to what I did last year and the year before. Like I stuck to the [Teacher’s] Manuals and the [Student] Books and the [Master] sheets because I sort of didn’t know where to start with RE. I think in my last interview I mentioned that you have to make it relevant that’s what I would be doing.
Like I’d probably look at the [Student] Books and have a look at some of the ideas they’d got but I’d be coming up with my own activities, just really going on my own a lot more, using current newspapers a lot more and TV programs and whatever, stuff like that.

(Kate, second round of interviews)

For most RARE teachers a strict adherence to the use of the materials in the draft RE Units was viewed as a provisional strategy until they became more familiar and comfortable with the content. This sense of ease with the Units was very much oriented towards the capacity of the teachers to understand and accept the presentation of the beliefs and values contained within the content (Chapter 3, pp.81-83).

A sense of ease did not necessarily translate into practice for all recently assigned RE teachers. Recently assigned teachers do not always succeed in achieving the changes mentioned above (Chapter 3, p.58). Such was the case in this study: some recently assigned RE teachers learnt from their experiences and succeeded; some did not and remained frustrated by their failures. Inexperience in teaching did seem to complicate the capacity of beginning teachers to cope with the intensity of the demands placed on them in RE teaching. If recently assigned teachers had difficulties in instruction and classroom management in their main teaching areas (Chapter 3, p.58), then teaching the draft RE Units seemed to make these difficulties worse. Mark, a teacher with many years of teaching experience but a novice to teaching RE (Table 5.43, p.211), made this observation about RARE teachers who in their early career years were called upon to teach this learning area:

I think first and second year out teachers shouldn’t be thrust into a RE classroom. Basically, for classroom management more than anything else, I think. The big key to teaching RE is the teacher’s ability to manage the classroom in such a way to get responses from them. If you take a too hard a line with kids, especially in RE, you get negativity. If you give them too much scope, too much elasticity you lose them totally. First and second year out teachers don’t have these skills. It takes a little time to acquire these skills to be able to read the kids properly.

(Mark, first round of interviews)
Mark believed that teachers new to teaching should ‘cut their teeth’ on their specialist learning area before teaching Religious Education. He felt that novice teachers needed to develop their classroom management skills before engaging appropriate student responses. Such an opinion reflected the point that most novice teachers did not possess sufficient knowledge background or skills even in their specialist areas (Chapter 3, p.58). If this was the case, then recently assigned RE teachers with one or two years of teaching experience had more than enough to cope with in their own specialist learning area before tackling the draft RE Units.

Some interviewees did not readily change their teaching approach and continued to be frustrated in the way they wanted to teach RE because they felt personally challenged by the students. One case in point occurred in the first round of interviews where Nancy related her problems in dealing with her Year 11 ‘naughty boys’ in Religious Education. Nancy felt she had to know her content very closely because of the sorts of students she had in her class:

I guess when I went into start teaching life issues with my Year 11 RE class which has a very high proportion of ‘naughty’ boys, who are not particularly on-side, then it was definitely a consideration. Because I knew that I had to be very, very clear about what I was teaching. There was no way you could bluff your way through in a class like that….

(Nancy, first round of interviews)

As Nancy was earlier quoted (Chapter 6, p.234), she felt the students in her class were ‘wanting to set her up’ because she was enthusiastically teaching them about the position of the Church on certain life issues. She found this conflict difficult to handle and eventually she conceded to modifying her approach, perhaps out of tiredness in trying to cope:

So I do tend to take each day as it comes, and try and respond accordingly. I found that better because going in there with set things I just (pause) kids are so changeable, you know, and these kids have actually changed over the four terms I’ve had them, thank God!
I don’t have my program set out for 10 weeks, I know I’m going to do this and use this resource. I try to be very realistic and say, “Okay, Friday last period, I’m not going to be able to do what I want to do. So we’ll do something else.” I try to be realistic in that way. I don’t have set strategies and resources.

(Nancy, first round of interviews)

The enthusiasm Nancy had for her ideal of teaching RE classes (Chapter 6, p.262) had waned because her confidence in relating with students had been tested (Chapter 3, p.57).

Although the recently assigned RE teachers were able to identify the teaching approach (Figure 2.1, p.39), they tended to understate a critical understanding of the principles underlying such an approach. Such an approach paralleled the view of Engebretson (1997) that recently assigned RE teachers lacked a sufficiently developed understanding of the theoretical framework of Religious Education (Chapter 3, pp.95-96). Like Nancy, the research participants studied by Engebretson (1997, p.19) were confused by the interplay between the theory and practice of RE teaching (Chapter 3, p.96). The lack of understanding among RARE teachers about the principles underlying the draft PAREC was also a concern and understanding these principles became a significant part of their professional formation.

Furthermore, the RE teachers seemed to behave as Malone (1997, p.14) predicted, they were practitioners and tended to use resources uncritically (Chapter 3, p.65). However, after teaching a Unit, teachers became more confident and began to diversify their use of curriculum materials.

Teachers such as Kate (pp.276-277), commented how they initially had relied heavily on the Mastersheets and Student Book as identified in the survey (Chapter 5, p.178). After teaching the draft Units, the teachers saw that they needed to diversify their resource and strategy repertoire as they became more cognisant of the learning needs of their students. In the first round of interviews, Ursula wrote of her experiences in using the curriculum materials in a country secondary school. She found the Mastersheets and Student Book were crucial in the beginning to get her students working. Later, Ursula used the Mastersheets as a focus towards doing ‘something concrete’ or using them for ‘personal reflection’ and the Student Book, she used as a ‘reference guide’ or ‘as an initiator to discussion in class’ (Chapter 6, p.225). Such responses appeared to be the proper course of action as teachers.
became better acquainted with the curriculum materials. Indeed, it was considered an appropriate professional development for recently assigned teachers to make (Chapter 3, p.67).

Teachers saw the curriculum materials and teaching approach in the draft RE Units as useful tools comparable to those available in their major learning area. They expected that, like in their own learning areas, teachers were to have the flexibility to choose from a wider range of resources and to go beyond the teaching strategies advised in the draft RE Units, to suit the needs of their students. Teachers perceived that such a practice was an integral part of their professional formation as RE teachers (Chapter 3, p.67). It was apparent that most recently assigned RE teachers felt they were competent in their instruction and classroom management. However, the challenges and frustrations they experienced had more to do with their personal and professional adequacy in addressing the spiritual and religious formation of students.

Unlike their major learning area where the experience of teaching students led to a sense of accomplishment for the teacher, in teaching RE some teachers did not feel this same sense. What seemed to be different about these experiences was the depth and tone of dissatisfaction and self-doubt recently assigned RE teachers felt in teaching Religious Education. Some students were unresponsive and negative in their attitudes towards Religious Education, a familiar situation for many RE teachers teaching upper secondary students (de Souza 2000, pp.41-42). As Pippa (Table 5.43, p.211) reflected about her experience of negative students, she concluded, ‘Why am I doing this?’ (Chapter 7, p.268). For teachers like Pippa, the demands of teaching the draft RE Units to disobliging students led them to question the value of what they were doing and, may experience ‘a loss of energy when students do not respond [favourably]’ (Noddings 1992, p.17). This loss of energy or generativity (Treston 1997, p.69) is a matter of concern for recently assigned RE teachers (Chapter 7, p.266). Such questioning in response to the intense demands of teaching RE was common among RARE teachers with a narrow range of competency (Chapter 3, pp.86-87) and stymied professional formation (Chapter 3, pp.95-96).

Whereas recently assigned RE teachers recognised the need to inform students in relevant ways, they preferred to focus on the personal and spiritual formation of their
students (Chapter 3, p.87). As admirable as this view may be, it was still perhaps a limited view of the potential formation that arose from providing strategies that allowed students to learn how to integrate Catholic culture and spirituality into their lives (Chapter 3, pp.102-103). It seemed that RARE teachers needed to develop a more highly developed expertise in content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to cope with the demands of implementing the draft PAREC. The professional formation of recently assigned RE teachers required training in both content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to teach Religious Education. Such a formation was related to the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) advice that:

> With appropriate degrees, and with an adequate preparation in religious pedagogy, they will have the basic training needed for the teaching of religion.

(CCE 1982, par.66).

Survey respondents did indeed comment about the value of prior training and completing *Accreditation to Teach Religious Education* (Chapter 5, p.170). However, the experience of the research participants suggested that the case may be one of depth of training rather than ‘basic training’. Many of the participants had completed the study and inservice components of *Accreditation to Teach RE* (Table 5.43, p.211). Perhaps, like other learning areas, there was an increasing professional expectation about teaching the draft RE Units (Chapter 3, p.66). Religious Education had become a learning area with a highly specialised content and sophisticated pedagogy that, unlike other learning areas, recently assigned RE teachers were expected to implement with insufficient or limited prior training. The findings from research in this study indicated that teaching RE required a breadth and depth of knowledge and skills far exceeding those normally acquired by the teacher. To this extent, RARE teachers mirrored the experience of ‘out-of-field’ teachers (Chapter 3, p.58 and p.60). Such breadth and depth had to cater for a diverse range of spiritual and religious backgrounds in students as noted by Ryan (1997, p.95) and discussed in Chapter 3 (p.66).

This diversity made it very difficult and frustrating for teachers to pitch lessons on common ground. As Ian (Table 5.43, p.211) commented in his second interview, the students in his classroom have different ideas about God, Church and religious practice while some may come from other religions:
I think it’s too difficult to expect new teachers to RE, whether they’re experienced teachers in other subjects or not, to really understand the diversity of the kids when it comes down to RE. Because you’ll have students in there who have such a negative attitude towards RE and you’ll have the extreme, you’ll have those students who have strong faith. And you’ll have everything in between, and you’ll have those in the middle somewhere who are totally indifferent.

(Ian, second round of interviews)

Furthermore, not only did recently assigned RE teachers require a broader knowledge background and skills in developing positive rapport with students but they also felt RE teachers required a sincere faith commitment. As Gwen reflected about her teaching of Year 8 students (Chapter 7, p.256), she felt her RE teaching required far more from her than other learning areas. This requirement went beyond delivering content and presenting a faith witness; a focus on affirming and forming the spirituality of the students was also required. All of which needed to be done in an integrated manner by the teacher.

Teaching RE, unlike other learning areas, had additional demands because teachers felt the necessity to be faith witnesses to their students regardless of whether students were receptive to the stance of the teacher. It was possible that the persona of the teacher as a Religious Education teacher was related to being a genuine faith witness. The teacher may be sincere in what they believe but what seemed to count was the ability of the teacher to give a personal account of how they came to believe in their faith tradition. Edward, for example, spoke about wanting to share with students his personal experiences of Church teaching making an impact on his life (Chapter 6, p.239). Engebretson (1992, p.19) also found similar motivations initially among her study group of novice RE teachers. Authenticity was linked here with the willingness of the teacher to share their own personal story with the students about faith. The Congregation for Catholic Education emphasised that:

A teacher who has a clear vision of the Christian milieu and lives in accord with it will be able to help [students] develop a similar vision, and give them the inspiration they need to put it into practice.

(CCE 1988, par.96)
This important aspect of RE teaching is discussed further under the theme of ‘Authenticity and Spiritual Integrity’ later in this chapter (p.288).

The perceptions of the interviewees about their instruction and classroom management style changed from the survey through to first round to the second round of interviews. The teachers believed initially they needed to understand the content and then later the background of their students more deeply. Consequently, the RARE teachers implemented classroom activities that held the interest of their students rather than solely cover the objectives of the RE Units. In tandem with this approach, teachers believed they needed to cultivate a closer relationship with their students that went beyond developing a harmonious learning environment. At the same time, recently assigned RE teachers were seeking assistance and support from their more experienced colleagues. The initial concern of recently assigned RE teachers, when faced with the prospect of implementing a curriculum with which they were unfamiliar, was to develop a level of competence in instruction and maintain confidence in their classroom management. A significant response was the need to connect with their students and with their colleagues to form a network of support relationships. This concern for connectivity is the focus of the next section.

8.2.2 Connectivity
Teachers expressed a strong desire for a positive learning environment in RE by developing closer pastoral relationships and dialogue with their students (Chapter 5, p.186 and p.199). Such a ‘genuine dialogue’ (Congregation for Catholic Education 1988, par.96) was considered by Rymarz (1998, p.11) as a hallmark of good RE teachers (Chapter 3, p.97). As a result, teachers were able to provide pertinent answers for the students. This emphasis on the need for dialogue between themselves and their students was akin to the perceptions about the purpose of Religious Education in a consultation document by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW). Dialogue provided the means for students to connect doctrine with lived experience:
While a systematic presentation of doctrine is considered essential, it is not deemed by itself sufficient. Students need to be able to evaluate their lives, to grow in their sense of their and others’ worth and become open to prayer.

(CBCEW 1999, p.3)

Through this genuine dialogue between themselves and their students, recently assigned RE teachers believed they were trying to help their students become better Christian people.

Teachers believed this human and Christian formation occurred by developing social justice and tolerance in their students (as indicated in the survey, Chapter 5, p.201) or through formative activities that focused on character development or personal spirituality (as indicated in the interviews):

By the end of a Unit students need to make contact with who they are spiritually, to have grown personally, to have learnt what the Church teaches and to respect others’ opinions and views.

(Anne, first round of interviews)

They believed that students required this spiritual and religious formation within the context of the Catholic faith tradition. They wanted to pass on the Catholic faith heritage both in terms of knowledge and commitment. Their perceptions tended to be aligned with the catechetical emphasis of the teaching approach in the draft RE Units (Figure 2.1, p.39). Contrary to the view of de Souza (2005) outlined previously in Chapter 3 (p.62), RARE teachers in Western Australia focused more on strategies with a personal character or faith commitment aspect to them rather than cognitive strategies dealing with doctrinal subject matter. Interviewees like Rose wanted students to form a Christian spirituality, to ‘learn to love God and to love the Church’ (Chapter 6, p.237). In so doing, she believed that her students could then apply these loving relationships to their relationships with friends and family.

In this study, recently assigned RE teachers preferred to focus on the personal development of students rather than enabling students to achieve a mastery of the content (Chapter 3, pp.104-105). Such a focus was similar also to the observations made by English (1999) of RE teachers in Newfoundland, Canada (Chapter 3, p.95). In the second round of interviews, Diana (Table 5.43, p.211) realised that this choice between formation and mastery took ‘time and energy and forethought and planning to do both’ but, were she given a choice, she would ‘rather meet the students …
where they are at’ (Chapter 7, p.252). Like Diana, RARE teachers became more immersed in the personal and spiritual lives of their students. So much so, that some teachers saw themselves as significant role models and carers for their students. Ursula recounted the story of her encounter with a Year 8 student feeling depressed after his parents had recently divorced. The student had asked her a question in the middle of a busy lesson and Ursula was worried that she had not answered his personal question fully enough before the lesson finished:

With Religion [teaching], … you’re hit with a problem [from a student to address] because for that one student, even for one student in that class, that could mean (pause) well something could happen to that kid over the weekend and personally I’d feel responsible.

(Ursula, second round of interviews)

Such was the seemingly strong conviction of recently assigned RE teachers about this aspect of classroom teaching that one wonders whether they were over-zealous in feeling responsible for the personal formation of their students. The ability of teachers to develop a relational approach to teaching RE, termed ‘pastoral rapport’ in this study, was crucial to whether they wanted to continue to teach the subject in the future. The quality of this rapport is reflective of many teachers who feel passionate about teaching (Chapter 3, p.80).

In teaching the draft RE Units, the interviewed teachers believed they had to focus on the personal development of the students rather than provide ‘empty vessels’ with information about the Catholic faith tradition. Such a key belief was affirmed by research into how secondary students view Religious Education (Chapter 3, pp.104-105). It was not surprising to find that recently assigned RE teachers preferred a teaching approach that emphasised a pastoral response to the personal and spiritual development of students. However, such an emphasis was possibly more about the needs of the teachers rather than about the students. Survey responses indicated that teachers had difficulties dealing with enriching the faith needs of their students (Table 5.19, p.186). The anomaly appeared to be that recently assigned RE teachers themselves lacked personal and spiritual formation to cope with the demands of teaching RE when they claimed this formation is what the students needed to receive (Table 5.25, p.190). Religious Education is a learning area, not the sole pastoral care or personal development vehicle of the school. While a pastoral approach was
valuable, the proper direction of RE was towards another more important purpose, evangelisation (Holohan 1999). It appeared that recently assigned RE teachers needed guidance and support during this phase of their professional formation to understand their role and the purposes of Religious Education in the classroom. It was quite possible that, for some recently assigned RE teachers, an emphasis on the students’ personal and spiritual development distracted them from having to implement the content of the draft RE Units fully – a form of implementation avoidance (Chapter 3, p.61). Without further professional formation, RARE teachers were culpable of repeating the mistake of inculcating a ‘secular, humanist philosophy’ in Religious Education (Chapter 3, p.102).

The teachers interviewed often spoke of their concerns about how the students in their class received their teaching and how RARE teachers wanted their teaching colleagues to share their ideas and thoughts with them. Such concerns about student expectations and collegiality were not uncommon and vital to the professional formation of young recently assigned teachers (Chapter 3, p.107). It was not surprising then to hear that recently assigned RE teachers wanted to belong, to fit in with the school community. Perhaps it had more to do with wanting to be accepted as a person and as a professional, competent RE teacher by peers and students alike (p.282). One example recounted by several recently assigned RE teachers was the desire to have a close affiliation with an RE department where ideas and information were communicated between colleagues (Chapter 7, pp.264-265). Such a desire, if left unfulfilled, frustrated teachers in their professional formation (Chapter 3, p.107).

In Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia, most teachers in the RE department taught Religious Education as a minor part of their teaching load. The teachers were affiliated with their specialist learning area, leaving the RE Coordinator to keep in touch with the fragments of personnel scattered around the school. The fragmentary structure of an RE department exacerbated the feelings of isolation experienced by recently assigned secondary RE teachers and heightened their need to be supported by peers associated with the teaching of Religious Education. This fragmentation created problems not only in teaching the draft RE Units but also in other areas that recently assigned RE teachers found difficulties in managing, such as liturgies:
RE teachers do not belong in one department i.e. in the one room, makes it difficult to coordinate and plan liturgies with other teachers. These teachers have other demands or priorities in their own subject areas....

The RE Coordinator needs to work closely with recently assigned RE teachers and be there for them. Need to have an actual [interviewee’s emphasis] RE department and be given the same if not more priority in the school.... Time to reflect and share ideas with other RE teachers.... Have time in our own RE department, to plan out ideas together.

(Ursula, first round of interviews)

Like Ursula, many recently assigned RE teachers interviewed related their wish to have closer interaction with and support from the RE Coordinator. This wish was as much a need for affirmation for the amount of work RARE teachers do (along with the demands from their own subject areas) as it was for advice from an experienced RE teacher. Recently assigned RE teachers wanted to have regular RE staff meetings to exchange ideas and resources about teaching the draft RE Units, to assist their professional formation. Jessica, for example, appreciated the opportunities to exchange ideas with her colleagues in Religious Education because, as it was not her major teaching area, she was uncertain about what she was doing (Chapter 7, p.264).

Interviewees valued the collegial exchange in this way and the opportunities to share their feelings and experiences of teaching RE with their peers (Chapter 3, pp.107-108).

Crucial amongst this group of peers was the positive support they received from the RE Coordinator, the Principal and other experienced and talented RE teachers. This finding paralleled that of the study by Healy (2003) of the professional development of religious educators. The teachers interviewed in this study felt they needed that mentor, an experienced colleague they could talk to about teaching Religious Education. The notion of a mentoring program for recently assigned teachers is well documented (Chapter 3, pp.108-109). Mentoring is very much in keeping with the philosophy of Catholic education. The Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) has encouraged teachers to have close collegial relationships and to ‘work together as a team’ (CCE 1982, par.34). In the first round of interviews, Ian remarked how such a mentor – a knowledgeable and experienced RE teacher – could be available for recently assigned RE teachers to ‘sit’ with them:
Whereas maybe it could be that once a term they could go off to another school to sit with an experienced RE teacher and some sort of a mentor program. That might be another way of approaching it or even just within your own school you could organise that.

… I would have liked to been sitting in a classroom watching other RE teachers because it certainly wasn’t part of my teacher training at all to be involved in RE teaching. I know basically what other people teach but I don’t actually ever, I never actually seen how they go about doing that….

(Ian, first round of interviews)

Ian felt that recently assigned teachers wanted affirmation and guidance about what they were doing as well as clarification about why they did what they were doing. He went on to say, however, that recently assigned RE teachers should not be forced into a mentoring program. The program was to be a dialogue or sharing process rather than some form of formal teacher appraisal for these teachers.

To sum up, recently assigned RE teachers actively sought to develop a network of positive relationships with students and colleagues alike. They believed that by developing a pastoral rapport with their students, they were able to relate the draft RE Units to the personal and spiritual needs of their students. This ability to connect subject matter with the needs of students became the uppermost concern for RARE teachers as they related more closely with their students. Teachers also needed to be affirmed by their students, to know that their teaching was relevant and meaningful to the lives of their students. To further assist them in this endeavour, teachers sought support from their more experienced colleagues, especially the RE Coordinator and other significant personnel. Such collegial support provided RARE teachers with further knowledge and skills that enhanced their professional prowess and confidence. They were able to observe and model from experienced Religious Educators who taught with authenticity and spiritual integrity.

8.2.3 Authenticity and Spiritual Integrity

Recently assigned RE teachers were drawn towards a close pastoral rapport with their students. Teachers saw themselves as becoming significant role models for the personal spiritual formation of their students. As a result, RARE teachers felt an increasing expectation that they should be authentic models of a mature adult person to their students. In the first round of interviews, Mark highlighted the situation where there had been a recent tragedy at the school and he and the students in his
class were upset. He wanted the class to understand that it was okay to express their feelings, and he thanked the students for appreciating that he was upset as well, by what had happened. He believed that, during the class discussion, the students wanted some guidance on how to behave in the circumstances and he felt his responses were examples of good modelling:

when you model what you expect from them they understand. I’ve had kids come up to me and say, ‘Mr [Teacher’s Name], we’ve never met a person like you who’s thanked us for everything’. And one of the Year 10s, ‘Mr [Teacher’s Name], you’re a very caring person’. And they’re the sorts of things I want them to see. Then they start to be caring as well. They realise it’s not that bad, ‘Mr [Teacher’s Name] is an ‘okay bloke’. He’s coping with it well. I think we can too.’

(Mark, first round of interviews)

Mark used the colloquial phrase ‘okay bloke’ to describe this type of ‘model’ person. The Congregation for Catholic Education has recognised this personal integration of authentically human and spiritual qualities (Chapter 3, pp.100-101) and the capacity to share aspects of their personal humanity and its impact on students should not be underestimated (Rymarz 2001, p.24). Such authenticity went beyond personal identity to include personal faith witness. Interviewees discussed this faith witness as crucial to how they presented themselves authentically to their students. Like Mark, Ursula wanted the students to respect her as a person of faith. She felt that this perception by the students was significant. Ursula believed she was a model of a ‘person living out Gospel values’ (Chapter 6, p.240) who encouraged the students to do likewise. To give of themselves in this way meant the teachers also needed to become something more themselves.

Recently assigned RE teachers felt that they had to present a Christ-like presence to their students. In the survey, teachers were very positive towards their support of key religious dimensions in the school such as missions, prayers and retreats (Table 5.31, p.197). However, there were some misgivings about liturgical celebrations that may have involved their leadership or direct participation as a person of faith (Chapter 5, p.198). The findings in this study reflected the thinking of Crawford and Rossiter (1985) that such a response was fraught with feelings of confusion and self-doubt (Chapter 3, p.101) as RARE teachers tried to work out the authenticity of being such devout witnesses for the faith (Chapter 5, p.209).
Perhaps there was a much deeper significance to this faith witness. The faith commitment of the teacher was an important factor for RARE teachers. Recently assigned RE teachers, like Ursula, believed that the authenticity of their faith influenced their students, even if the students did not agree with what the teachers believed. The impression left on the students was not only the actions of ‘living out Gospel values’ (p.289) but also how Ursula recounted her own personal experiences of faith. Authenticity here was linked to personal experience. Ursula had experienced the love and mercy of God and she wanted to share this personal faith experience with others too. Similarly, teachers who had experienced injustice or unhealthy lifestyles understood the power of redemption in their lives and wanted to share their personal experiences of such events. Witness here meant that teachers had an understanding and appreciation for a particular lived experience or what may be termed as ‘experiential content knowledge’ (p.314). They had a knowledge and empathy of what it really felt like to become a believer and accept the grace of God. After all, ‘it is difficult, if not impossible, to meaningfully teach what one does not know’ (Fisher 1999, p.35) in matters dealing with spirituality and faith. It was this form of personal authenticity or genuineness espoused by Holohan (1996b), that impressed the students because the teachers had the religious integrity – to integrate faith and life – as part of their RE teaching (Chapter 3, p.99).

Recently assigned RE teachers not only felt the dilemma of whether they were good enough as professional educators but also the dilemma of whether they were good enough as mature, adult persons of faith; especially, as many of them were still in their young adult years (Chapter 5, p.159). This latter dilemma was not easily resolved and proved to be highly draining for some recently assigned RE teachers. Such a dilemma had the possibility of leading to a heightened sense of guilt (Curtis 2000). Most teachers felt at some stage that they were inadequate both personally and professionally in teaching Religious Education. Perhaps RARE teachers expected too much of themselves or they felt the Perth Archdiocesan RE Course (PAREC) expected too much of them (Chapter 3, pp.99-101). Di Giacomo (1989) observed that there were benefits and costs when it came to teaching RE and teachers would be wise to consider these factors in their situation:
Anyone brave or idealistic enough to attempt religious instruction in high school soon learns that while the rewards and satisfactions can be high, so can the costs from time to time. These go beyond the hard work, dedication, and drudgery that accompany almost any kind of teaching at this level. They may involve tension, frustration, and guilt that sap energy, drain enthusiasm, and sometimes lead to burnout. (Di Giacomo 1989, p.58)

From the second round of interviews it appeared that recently assigned RE teachers did reach a point of decision that helped them to clarify their commitment to teaching Religious Education. For some teachers, like Kate and Jessica (Chapter 7, p.261 and p.270), the personal cost was too high and they decided to discontinue teaching RE classes. For most recently assigned RE teachers, the experience of implementing the draft RE Units had led towards a deeper appreciation of their vocation as RE teachers. This deepening appreciation seemed to be an important aspect to the formation of RARE teachers. For some recently assigned RE teachers, although they did not realise it, it was possible they were influenced personally, professionally and spiritually by the demands of implementing the RE Units.

From the two rounds of interviews, the interviewees commented about the value of reflecting upon their RE teaching. Such a reflection was an important aspect to the personal and professional formation of teachers (Chapter 3, p.63, p.95, and p.105). For some interviewees, the actual interviews were the first time anyone had asked what they thought or even felt about their teaching. For a few interviewees, it was a highly emotive experience. Perhaps opportunities for reflection on their professional practice are an important dimension to their professional formation. Certainly the interviewees were passionate about what they were doing (or wanted to do). They sensed a feeling of vulnerability in teaching RE because it put them on the line about their faith commitment. For example, Nancy spoke about the challenge of male students in her Year 11 RE class and their apparent behaviour in trying to prove her wrong. She found it difficult to cope with the challenges from the largely recalcitrant male class (Chapter 6, p.234), especially because Nancy had recently made an adult commitment to the Church and was offended by the disrespect and ignorance these students displayed.

This ‘hyper-sensitivity’ felt by some recently assigned RE teachers may have led them to losing a balanced perspective about the needs of secondary students and
what students were realistically able to achieve in Religious Education. Some interviewees, like Nancy and Pippa (Chapter 7, pp.267-270), were not coping well with these challenges and most interviewees felt that teaching RE well was difficult to do (Table 7.1, p.246). The resolution to the inner turmoil these challenges presented was a part of the personal formation of RARE teachers:

Most religion teachers are idealistic people who care about their students and want very much to enrich their lives. That’s a beautiful combination of qualities, but it is also the prescription for a potentially vulnerable person. The prevention or the cure for tension, frustration, and guilt lies not in diminishing idealism or denying vulnerability, but in keeping a sense of balance and perspective. There are no guarantees that one will never be hurt, but they will help one heal faster, last longer, and do a lot more good. (Di Giacomo 1989, p.62)

Keeping a ‘sense of balance and perspective’ was not easy to achieve. In this study, interviewees were still searching for this perspective. Some teachers decided that it was better to give RE teaching away because the personal changes involved were too great. Those recently assigned RE teachers who did decide to continue to teach RE came to find a degree of spiritual integrity in their lives. This integrity provided the foundation for placing their personal and professional commitment into practice. As Anne recounted, she felt she had to integrate her personal and professional roles, to be ‘versatile, flexible, aware and available’ to her students. For Anne, her spiritual integrity – ‘a responsibility to be real to the students at a deeper, spiritual level’ – was what really counted in teaching Religious Education (Chapter 7, p.258). It seemed that recently assigned RE teachers needed a spiritual formation, one of journeying towards personal integrity.

Personal integrity is at the heart of becoming a good teacher (Chapter 3, p.80). It refers to how teachers relate to how they see themselves as a teacher and their relationship with others in their immediate learning community as well as to the subject matter. This personal sense of self or spirituality of the teacher is ‘the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos’ (Palmer 2004). Personal integrity provides the energy or drive for teachers to continue to teach at three levels: intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually (Chapter 3, p.81). How this integrity influences these three aspects of teaching are described subsequently.
Intellectually: Recently assigned RE teachers wanted to be familiar with the background material in the draft Units and to be able to pass on their own understanding of this material to their students. They needed to feel secure and confident in their own content knowledge. The focus for the teachers was upon their intellectual integrity as a teacher with a sound knowledge background. RARE teachers selected resources and activities which they thought were relevant and of interest to students. In so doing, they were ‘filling in’ the knowledge of the students or correcting misunderstandings about a particular topic or issue.

Emotionally: Recently assigned RE teachers wanted to develop a close pastoral rapport with their students. They were eager to discover the background and issues of young people in their RE class. They wanted the emotional integrity to be a respected person by their students about matters concerning faith and life in a modern world. The teachers were particularly concerned about how their students reacted to the lessons they provided.

Spiritually: Recently assigned RE teachers were concerned about how they came across as a ‘model’ RE teacher. They felt that when students disagreed or were insolent, the students were challenging them as an RE teacher on a personal level. Teachers also felt their personal integrity was challenged when they made their own decisions about what they thought was best for their students when other more experienced teachers closely followed the Unit program. Some teachers were worried that because they did not agree with all the content of the draft RE Units, it meant that they were not good enough to be the type of RE teacher they believed was demanded.

Without a positive outlook to these three aspects of integrity, teachers questioned themselves about their efficacy as a teacher. Like other teachers in similar situations (Chapter 3, p.81), they became fatigued. The interviewees in this study felt strongly about their commitment to RE teaching both personally and professionally as well as about preserving their sense of authenticity and integrity as part of the decision to continue or discontinue RE teaching. For some teachers there was an evident need for them to attend to their personal religious and spiritual formation or else further distress and perhaps harm might accrue (Chapter 3, p.81).
On the other hand, there were recently assigned RE teachers interviewed in this study who appeared to rise above the challenges by developing a positive outlook. Edward, in the first round of interviews, felt very strongly about how he shared his personal experiences of faith with students (p.282). He believed that this type of approach in implementing the draft RE Units was important for the faith formation of the students. Consequently, Edward was very critical of teachers who did not have a similar evangelical approach as he did (Chapter 6, p.239) even though he lacked the professional background to teach Religious Education (Table 5.43, p.211). In his view, along with many of the other teachers interviewed, RE was not so much a learning area but rather an opportunity to evangelise, to go beyond human and spiritual formation to formation in the Christian faith. Perhaps for RARE teachers to cope with the demands of implementing the draft RE Units a balanced and ongoing formation for teachers was required. This formation needed to include not only personal and professional development but also a deepening understanding of the role of the RE teacher as a faith witness and Religious Education as a Ministry of the Word within Evangelisation (Holohan 1999).

**Summary: Authenticity and Spiritual Integrity**

In summary, recently assigned RE teachers realised that they needed to present an authentic persona, one that reflected them as a decent human being and a person of integrity and faith. Such a persona was demanding both personally and professionally but was a necessary part of implementing the draft RE Units. Teachers who felt comfortable with such a persona drew their strength from their personal faith commitment. Recently assigned RE teachers felt it was this personal faith commitment and a balanced, healthy spirituality that impressed their students and became a hallmark of their vocation as a Religious Educator.

### 8.2.4 Vocation of the recently assigned Religious Educator

A repeated theme throughout the study was the conviction of recently assigned RE teachers that to teach the draft RE Units, one had to be an authentic person of faith and a mentor to their students. Initially, RARE teachers were keen to teach RE and optimistically viewed the personal and professional challenges placed upon them by the draft RE Units. However, others experienced a loss of enthusiasm for the learning area that stemmed from a lack of prior personal or professional formation.
Some recently assigned RE teachers had undertaken studies in Theology and Religious Education units to fulfil Accreditation to Teach RE during their pre-service training as evidenced in the survey (Chapter 5, p.167). However, it would be misleading to assume that Accreditation, a mandatory professional requirement to teach RE in Catholic schools in Western Australia, was a guarantee of a deeper commitment to this learning area. While it may be the case that some recently assigned RE teachers were prepared to teach RE as a ‘filler’ (Chapter 3, p.88), the personal and professional demands of the curriculum seemed to have had an impact on whether they should continue to teach RE in the future.

Apart from their personal reasons for teaching RE, inexperienced recently assigned RE teachers were faced with a question of professional priorities in order to survive their first years of teaching. Victor taught in a remote Catholic secondary school. A recent graduate, he was employed as a Physical Education teacher with one RE class to make up his teaching load. Victor was candid about where his priorities lie:

"It’s not your priority, my main teaching area is Phys. Ed. and that’s where everyone sees you, see yourself and that’s where you dedicate most of your energies too. But it’s nice to have that one RE class, I think it’s important to have a variety of teaching areas for your own motivation yourself. And it’s good to teach RE just for your own faith."

(Victor, first round of interviews)

Like many RARE teachers, Victor was faced with developing his professional competence in his specialist learning area. Teaching RE was a part of his minor teaching load. Why would he want to demonstrate a deeper commitment to teaching RE when he had more than enough to handle with his specialist learning area? While Victor placed his energies into ‘Phys. Ed.’, he acknowledged RE as good to teach ‘just for your faith’. He also made the point of how valuable he found the professional development inservices in RE that the school provided (mostly over the weekend):
I think ongoing professional development is important. … doing Accreditation [to teach RE] and doing [inservices on] a new [draft RE] Unit every couple of months over the last two years has really kept me on track. And then I’ve developed from there.

(Victor, first round of interviews)

It was possible that, if recently assigned RE teachers were naïve enough to think they could teach RE and not be affected by its expectations, they were mistaken (Chapter 3, pp.58-59). Like Victor, they seemed to be affected both personally and professionally as they taught the draft Units and wanted to receive further training. Some of the RARE teachers interviewed seemed to experience a significant juncture in teaching RE after a few years. They began to realise that in order to continue to teach RE, they needed to form a deeper personal commitment towards its teaching. Such a realisation or ‘passion’ for the subject was a crucial part of their personal and professional formation. Such a passion was often framed in terms of calling or vocation (Chapter 3, p.80). However, some of the interviewees felt so strongly about the division in their integrity between their fundamental aspirations as a teacher and their own assimilation of Catholic beliefs and practices that they stopped teaching RE altogether.

It was apparent from the interviews that the recently assigned RE teachers were on the cusp of deciding to continue to teach RE or not to teach the subject any longer. Interviewees like Jessica and Edith felt that RE teachers required a choice as to whether they continued to teach the subject, especially if they felt they did not agree with the content (Chapter 6, p.237). The feelings of these interviewees towards the subject were largely the result of their experiences of teaching RE and its impact on their personal authenticity and spiritual integrity. In a sense, some teachers believed that they were called to live their faith by teaching RE whereas others felt that the personal dissonance was too much for them. Perhaps, today, young adult Catholics value integrity over acquiescence. To expect these young adult, inexperienced RE teachers to continue a career in teaching RE was too difficult without further access to personal and professional faith formation opportunities.

It was surprising to hear from the interviewees how they had never spoken, if ever, to anyone about their motivation or reasons for why they would continue to teach Religious Education. While reflections about materials and strategies were
communicated with others, the more important discussion of self-knowledge and integrity was ignored or suppressed. This lack of discourse seemed to be typical of the teaching profession. Teachers talked about what they do but rarely discussed how they saw themselves and the qualities that made them a good teacher (Banner and Cannon 1997, p.4).

For recently assigned RE teachers such a discussion was crucial to whether they continued to teach RE classes. Where they felt they truly put themselves ‘on the line’ with their students, to be teachers of strong character (Chapter 3, p.99), they needed to have the affirmation and support from their colleagues, the administration and the students themselves. Considering the emotive reactions expressed when asked about what they believed was ‘best about RE’, the teachers remained a ‘bubbling pot’ of feelings that, left unattended, desiccated their emotional and psychological energy. While Banner and Cannon (1997) referred to the pressures of teaching in general, the responsibilities recently assigned RE teachers felt with regard to the personal and spiritual formation of their students escalated the intensity of the pressure experienced.

The vocation of the recently assigned RE teacher is not a smooth or easy path. It is a journey of formation and entails personal and professional challenges. As much as the draft RE Units assisted RARE teachers in teaching RE confidently, the Units also challenged teachers in regard to their own personal and religious character as well as their conviction in RE teaching. Recently assigned RE teachers felt pressures to conform to an image of a Religious Educator that had yet to be attained by experience or training. There was a danger that these teachers became burnt out before acquiring the kind of formation that was vital in teaching RE well. Recently assigned RE teachers needed time to develop and they needed opportunities to explore their personality and passions for RE teaching. In short, they required a holistic and ongoing formation as an RE teacher which is the focus of the next section.

8.2.5 Holistic and Ongoing Formation

Recently assigned RE teachers rely not only on their professional expertise but also, and more importantly, upon their vocation as a person of faith (Chapter 3, pp.87-88). The personal upbringing and life experiences of RARE teachers like Edward,
coupled with his ‘pilgrimage’ of personal faith formation, led him to feel very deeply about the importance of the faith witness of the recently assigned teacher:

Most special thing for me is that it’s a way that I can... well I’m trying to follow the Lord in my life. And then there’s one way I can do that and that’s teaching RE. Because I’m not off helping the poor in Africa...

(Edward, second round of interviews)

The ‘follow the Lord in my life’ by Edward heralded the sentiments of the advice of Congregation of Catholic Education (1982) about the importance of developing Religious Educators with appropriate religious and professional formation (Chapter 3, pp.100-101). It became apparent over the duration of this study that assumptions about RARE teachers being at the same point in their professional, spiritual and religious formation were inaccurate; nor was it possible to assume that their formation was in alignment with faith stances presented in the draft RE Units. Recently assigned RE teachers required an extended period of time to develop a deeper level of personal, professional and religious commitment. The first five years of teaching Religious Education were significant to RARE teachers. Over this period of time, they made fundamental decisions about their RE teaching. The less training and personal spiritual and faith formation they received before teaching RE, the more they needed training and personal spiritual and faith formation after they began teaching the learning area. It is significant that the demands of teaching the draft RE Units have had an important part to play upon challenging and forming the teacher’s own sense of identity and spirituality. As recently assigned RE teachers taught, they were also learners. Ursula made this same point as she remembered how she came to teach RE:

I remember [the Principal at the last school] asked me, not so much asked but told me that I was teaching RE and I was scared, I was really, really scared. Where do I start? I don’t have anything, I don’t even (pause) I mean, I know that I’ve got faith myself, I knew that I had faith and I knew that I’d been brought up you know in a certain way.
I was petrified and I think looking back now, now I can walk into it – an RE classroom – and actually be very, very confident. And confident not so much because I know a little bit more about what I’m teaching but confident because I feel enriched myself, like it’s helped me personally.

(Ursula, second round of interviews)

However, teaching the draft RE units had a detrimental impact upon some teachers which ‘incidental formation’ of the teaching experience cannot overcome (Chapter 3, p.93).

Recently assigned RE teachers possibly felt they were alone and unworthy to teach RE because of their apparent lack of formation. These teachers felt they needed ‘time out’ and space to reflect on what they were doing and wanted to do. They wanted to be affirmed and supported in their efforts by students and colleagues. The danger was that they could have felt emotionally and spiritually drained after a few years of teaching Religious Education. To continue to teach RE, RARE teachers yearned for a professional and religious formation that was an integral and ongoing part of their development as an authentic and competent RE teacher. Anne made this point quite succinctly:

I think recently assigned RE teachers need more knowledge background of the Catholic faith in terms of doctrine. Accreditation [to teach RE] is good but teachers need more of it on an ongoing basis. After learning how to teach RE the first time, they need to be able to go back to it again. Their classroom experiences will help them understand how they can teach RE better. Teachers … also need access to ‘experts’ like lecturers on moral issues. Teachers also need to have a retreat for themselves which should be available on an ongoing basis because people grow and change over time. Teachers need to know themselves before they impart anything in RE. They need to have developed their own spirituality and developed a knowledge and appreciation for Scripture.

(Anne, first round of interviews)

It seemed that both the content and the responses from the students forced RARE teachers to reflect upon not only ‘what’ they were teaching but also ‘why’ they were teaching the subject. The demands of teaching the draft RE Units were a catalyst themselves to initiate the formation of the recently assigned RE teacher. Teaching the draft RE Units also contributed to the spiritual and religious formation of the
teacher in becoming an excellent RE teacher. Such formation occurred with teaching experience over an extended period (Chapter 3, pp.92-93).

It is possible that some RARE teachers experienced a depth of formation tantamount to a personal conversion (Chapter 3, p.99 and pp.103-104). Recently assigned RE teachers soon realised that the content of the draft RE Units needed to be made relevant to the learning needs of the students in the class. Furthermore, the relationships to be developed between the teachers and the students was perceived by the RARE teachers as demanding a closeness and quality far superior to the relationships that were established in other learning areas. As recently assigned RE teachers developed a closer pastoral rapport with their class, the teachers, in turn, began to examine their personal qualities and authenticity as mentors. The more experience and familiarity the recently assigned teachers had with the draft RE Units, the more they felt the personal, professional and religious demands upon themselves. As the demands increased, so too was the response from some teachers to either avoid teaching RE (or not teach its content fully) or for others to seek further professional and religious formation.

The teachers in the interviews recognised the value of further formation in content knowledge as an adjunct to teaching the draft RE Units. Some commented on the value of attending ‘Content of RE’ inservices run by Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) or completing tertiary units in Theology and Religious Education. Such recognition of the value of formation in content knowledge was reflective of trends elsewhere (Chapter 3, p.103). Yet, as the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (1999) highlighted in its Consultation on the teaching of RE, there was also formation needed in spirituality, ministry and pedagogy. Teachers in the first round of interviews also commented on the value of formation in pedagogical content knowledge by having opportunities to attend inservices on specific year groups or draft Units and exchange ideas, strategies and resources with other like-minded teachers. Teachers, like Anne, further expressed the value of attending retreats for teachers for their own personal spiritual and faith formation (Chapter 6, pp.241-242).

While most recently assigned RE teachers were able to respond positively to the curriculum and personal faith demands placed on them, others felt they were unable to continue to aspire to such high expectations. Kate, for example, found the
personal faith demands expected of her were too much (Chapter 7, p.261). Kate’s decision not to continue to teach RE was based on preserving her own personal spiritual and religious integrity. She was not able to commit herself to the degree of expectation she felt was presented in the draft PAREC. Like Kate, some recently assigned RE teachers found themselves seemingly at odds with the direction of the Bishops. The emphasis on ‘life witness’ and ‘intensely lived spirituality’ (Chapter 3, p.100) went far beyond the basic training of these RARE teachers and, in teaching the draft RE Units, possibly became an overwhelming challenge. Furthermore, the advice of the WA Director of Religious Education (Chapter 3, p.99) had the potential to be interpreted as RE teachers needing to seek a personal conversion of a nature that some recently assigned RE teachers felt was beyond them to achieve. Recently assigned RE teachers, like Kate, believed they had some formation towards ‘personal identification with Christ’ (Chapter 3, p.101); however, they felt the expectation of the draft PAREC was an unequivocal accomplished commitment rather than a pilgrimage over a teaching career.

Teachers interviewed in the second round of interviews (Chapter 7, pp.264-265) reflected the encouragement teachers received when they saw their formation as an ongoing pilgrimage over their teaching career (Treston 1991). They expressed the difficulties of teaching RE and the struggles they undertook to meet the professional and spiritual demands of the draft RE Units. Recently assigned RE teachers perhaps needed to be affirmed in their difficulties and struggles and to be made aware that their trials are a part of a ‘religious journey’ (Chapter 3, p.95) that becomes a pilgrimage of formation rather than a crusade of delivery. Furthermore, the sharing of a personal faith witness became an increasingly significant cornerstone to these teachers in teaching Religious Education. RARE teachers who were able to offer themselves in this way felt more comfortable in teaching Religious Education. Pat, a member of a religious congregation for many years who had only recently taken up RE teaching, also spoke about teaching RE in similar terms:
I think it’s passing on the Catholic faith. My personal belief of why we have Catholic schools is to pass on that faith and my basic belief is that at the end of the time, whatever period of time a child has spent, that if they are going to reject the message of Jesus that they know what they are saying ‘no’ to.

(Pat, first round of interviews)

Benson and Guerra (1985) had reported that teachers with a lay vocation did not have the same capacity as religious congregation teachers to teach RE in this way because of a lack of religious formation. As a result, they believed lay teachers skewed their teaching towards a humanistic approach (Chapter 3, p.102). This skewness in their RE teaching is also evident in this study. In the initial survey, recently assigned teachers consistently placed tolerance and compassion as a high priority but they were divided about the placement of other priorities such as ‘develop a closer relationship with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’ (Chapter 5, pp.201-202). When teachers were confronted in the first interview with the notion of tolerance and compassion as rated the highest, many interviewees queried such a suggestion. While, as a group of teachers, they were convinced tolerance and compassion were important, individually, they felt that there were other, more important, priorities as well. Many recently assigned RE teachers in this study demonstrated a preference for the personal and spiritual formation of their students but they also believed there was more to be considered. Perhaps the severity of the criticisms of Benson and Guerra (1985) have become dated because many RARE teachers in this study had completed their accreditation, were increasingly familiar with the content, and were inclined to present a strong faith witness.

Lay teachers in this study did consider that the faith formation of students was important but they did feel insecure in teaching faith aspects, such as organising liturgies or the use of Scripture (Chapter 5, p.188 and Chapter 6, p.228). The tentativeness with which recently assigned RE teachers approached these aspects is a matter of great concern. The need for further training in liturgy, for example, could alleviate the tensions between celebrating priests and teachers. Such tensions reflected the research work of Tinsey (1999) about the misunderstood relationships between priests and teachers in Catholic secondary schools. The lack of confidence in using the Scriptures appropriately seemed to be due to a lack of prior training (Chapter 3, p.98). Otherwise, recently assigned RE teachers avoided these faith
aspects and focused their attention on what they believed they knew more about, in this case, human formation. In the second round of interviews, most RARE teachers saw the majority of their students as needing ‘life-skilling’ and human formation before religious formation (Chapter 7, pp.254-255). Recently assigned RE teachers felt more comfortable with assisting the personal development of their students and were able to give encouragement wherever possible as well as feel valued by their students (Chapter 7, p.257-258).

What did appear to emerge from the interviews were different perspectives as to what the recently assigned RE teacher should be trying to do next. Some interviewees believed that knowledge about Church teaching was appropriate when such teaching related to the personal and spiritual formation of students. Some interviewees believed that knowledge and appreciation of God and the Church was appropriate to encourage a Christian spirituality to be lived out within a faith community (pp.280-281). One suspects that the choice as to what to do next was related to the personal spiritual and faith formation of the RARE teacher. Diana observed that the personal faith stance of the teacher had to be taken into account when implementing the draft RE Units. She made the point that ‘… to try and integrate Church teaching into somebody else’s life is impossible if you aren’t actively seeking that in your own’ (Chapter 6, p.238). The implication seemed to be that the faith position espoused by the draft RE Units was not fully implemented if the teacher did not hold a similar position. As Jessica commented about her personal faith stance:

Yes, I think it’s important to have a strong faith but it does not necessarily mean it’s the same as that espoused by the Pope. I still think you need to have a strong faith.

(Jessica, first round of interviews)

Similarly, other interviewees in this study considered themselves to have a ‘strong faith’ but this faith was not necessarily commensurate with the stance presented by the draft RE Units. This disparity in faith stances raises questions about heterodoxy. One wonders whether these teachers felt that, as authentic and committed as they were, their personal faith stance was suited to implementing the PAREC, as mandated by the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia (CECWA 2001, par.79). For some RARE teachers the disparity was resolved by choosing to avoid teaching aspects of the RE Units with which they disagreed or found personally too
challenging. It was also possible that only those aspects of the Units that were in
tune with the spiritual and faith formation of the teacher were implemented in a
heartfelt manner. Concerns about the consequences of such an approach related to
the idiosyncrasy of the faith development of students (Chapter 3, p.102) warrants
further investigation.

Many of the recently assigned RE teachers had undertaken studies towards their
Accreditation as an RE teacher. Yet to know the religious content was not the same
as having a disposition to heartily proclaim it (Chapter 3, p.103). In this research, the
teachers interviewed believed their ‘personal faith commitment’ was of paramount
importance to teaching the draft RE Units but not necessarily reflective of the stance
taken in the RE Units. As the teachers interviewed in the first round spoke about
their personal development (p.295), they believed they would benefit from retreats
and similar activities to assist their spiritual and faith formation. Perhaps these
activities are a step in the right direction in providing further grounding in the
religious and spiritual formation of recently assigned RE teachers (Chapter 3,
pp.102-103).

Summary: Holistic and Ongoing Formation

To summarise this section, recently assigned RE teachers felt the press of the
exigencies in implementing the draft RE Units. The context-view expressed by these
RARE teachers is portrayed in Figure 8.1, (p.305). Figure 8.1 represents a model of
the situation that the teachers have reported. The intensity of the curriculum demands
perceived by the teachers is represented as a great weight that applies an ongoing
pressure on them. This pressure is countered by the exertions recently assigned
teachers make in their responses to cope with the curriculum demands. The support
(represented by stylised cupped helping hands) teachers received from their
formative experiences provide the assistance and security they need to manage the
circumstances.
Recently assigned RE teachers realised that the curriculum demanded further understanding and skills that were far more diverse than earlier anticipated. The teachers sought further opportunities for ongoing spiritual and religious formation at the school and system level. These opportunities needed to be systematic and sustained with particular support from experienced colleagues. Furthermore, RARE teachers recognised that they needed this ongoing formation in order to follow their mission to become a person of integrity and faith.

The concerns raised here suggested that recently assigned RE teachers were on a journey of formation, a pilgrimage. This pilgrimage led them through different experiences and insights into what it means to become an excellent RE teacher as described in the next section ‘Towards Excellence in RE Teaching: A Model’. The implementation of the draft RE units was but one part of this pilgrimage. Recently assigned RE teachers were faced with challenges or forces that were to make or
break them personally and professionally as an RE teacher. In response to these challenges, the next section proposes a model of the dimensions to be considered in the formation of RARE teachers as these teachers implemented the draft Units.

8.3 Towards Excellence in RE Teaching: A Model

Over the two years of research on how recently assigned RE teachers coped with implementing the draft RE units, it became apparent that the teachers were themselves being informed and formed by the experience (Figure 8.2, p.307). The enthusiasm of RARE teachers to become good RE teachers developed into a search for authenticity, integrity and motivation. There were changes in the ways these teachers used the curriculum materials and in their teaching approach (pp.275-276). There were also changes in their beliefs about their role as an RE teacher and why they taught Religious Education (pp.279-280). Recently assigned RE teachers reached a point of asking themselves, “Why am I doing this?” (p.280). Wanting to teach RE was very much related to the conditions the RARE teachers experienced (Chapter 3, p.59). These teachers were beginning or recently assigned teachers (Chapter 3, p.56) but the question may be true for experienced teachers faced with teaching an unfamiliar learning area in their first few years (Chapter 3, p.60). The point is, if the curriculum and personal demands of the draft RE Units were so great, to continue to teach RE was possibly too much for recently assigned RE teachers. The efficacy of the RE teachers was connected to the disposition they felt towards RE teaching due to their formative experiences.
**Figure 8.2  Integrated Model of Teacher Formation in response to Curriculum Exigencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Key Concerns</th>
<th>Formative Experiences</th>
<th>Key Dispositions</th>
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| 1     | *Instruction* | Concerns for self (survival): due to demands of getting ready, finding resources and meeting expectations.  
        |               | *initial content knowledge with prior training and background & developing content knowledge* | *Surety* Changes in perceptions about the use of curriculum materials to cope with these demands. |
| 2     | *Prowess* | Concerns for the tasks: due to demands of organising lessons, covering the content and developing repertoire of strategies.  
        |               | *ongoing content knowledge & developing pedagogical content knowledge* | *Confidence* Changes in perceptions about the use of teaching strategies to cope with these demands. |
| 3     | *Empathy* | Concerns for impact of teaching on students: due to demands of evaluating outcomes, rapport with students and growing awareness of students’ learning needs.  
        |               | *ongoing content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge & developing experiential content knowledge* | *Insight* Changes in beliefs or understandings about the nature and purpose of the curriculum to cope with these demands. |
| 4     | *Modelling* | Concerns for efficacy: due to demands for authenticity, commitment, example, and integrity.  
        |               | *ongoing content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge & experiential content knowledge* | *Vocation* Changes in professional character and deepening reflection of personal beliefs, values, and spirituality to cope with these demands. |
In looking at the changes the teachers experienced (Figure 8.2, p.307), as they dealt with the personal and curriculum demands of teaching the draft RE Units, a pattern of experiences in teacher formation emerged. The emergence of such a pattern indicated that teachers required a period of adjustment to the demands of curriculum implementation. Teachers needed time to understand and appreciate the personal and professional demands of curriculum implementation (Chapter 3, pp.93-94). The amounts of time varied between different concerns. Whereas adjustments to initial concerns were immediate with accessibility to curriculum materials, later concerns required a longer period of reflection, great effort, and careful consideration. Without supportive formative experiences, dissatisfaction, exhaustion and poorer teaching became evident (Chapter 3, p.96).

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

*Instruction and Surety:* In the survey and the first round of the interviews, teachers were very concerned about their preparation for teaching the draft Units. They planned what they were going to teach by becoming familiar with the content of the Units and the strategies and resources available in the Teacher’s Manuals. In these initial stages, the focus was on ensuring they were familiar with as much of the content as possible and had enough activities and materials to keep the students occupied. In large measure, this involved the frequent use of Mastersheets and Student Books. After a year of teaching the Units, teachers felt more secure about the structure and sequence of the teaching and learning program in the Units. A
sense of surety developed as they had access to a range of activities and resources. Recently assigned RE teachers began to re-assess the quality of the curriculum materials that were offered in the draft Units. This reassessment was due in large measure by how teachers perceived the reactions of their students to the language and relevance of the content.

**Prowess and Confidence:** The frustration of the classroom experiences that resulted from the shortcomings of using the Mastersheets and Student Books forced the recently assigned RE teachers to rethink what they were doing. They recognised that they needed to accommodate more closely the learning needs of their students with a wider variety of accessible and relevant resources and strategies (p.276). Most teachers grew in confidence when they chose to follow this path by expanding their repertoire of teaching skills with collegial support (p.287). The more competent teachers felt they became with the content and strategies, the more assured they were in dealing with diverse backgrounds of their students. Some recently assigned RE teachers continued to be challenged by their students and felt frustrated in not being able to teach the way they believed RE should be taught.

**Empathy and Insight:** A significant development for the recently assigned teachers was the realisation that a direct pastoral rapport with their students was a key ingredient in successfully implementing the draft RE Units (p.285). Teachers became more engaged in dialogue with their students. In so doing, they were able to gain insights into the learning needs of their students. Teachers became more concerned about the personal spiritual and religious formation of their students (pp.284-285). As a result, RARE teachers were more critical of their selection of the content and how this content was to be taught in interesting and relevant ways to students (p.276). Such critical judgements heightened tensions within some teachers about their loyalties towards the perceived expectations of how the Units were supposed to be implemented. For others, there was a growing turmoil about their personal integrity in relation to the beliefs and value presented.

**Modelling and Vocation:** By the second round of interviews, recently assigned RE teachers related their belief that it was important to be a model person to their students (pp.288-289). This modelling was not only in terms of the human qualities they possessed but also in the faith witness they presented (pp.289-290). For most recently assigned RE teachers, it was this strong faith commitment that was
significant to continuing their RE teaching. For some teachers, the nature of the faith commitment espoused by the draft PAREC proved too challenging to their sense of identity and integrity (pp.290-291).

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

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

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

(Jacobs 1996, p.5)

Jacobs (1996, p.15) has developed a model of the forces of educational excellence applied to Catholic education (Figure 8.3, p.311). Jacobs (1996) believed that Catholic teachers progressed from being competent (to become good classroom teachers) to excellent (to become authentic, purpose-minded teachers) when they moved from asking the question ‘What do we need to do?’ to ‘Why do what we do?’ The latter question led to a sense of calling or vocation as part of the necessary inspiration for teaching in a Catholic school.
Figure 8.3: The Five Forces of Catholic Educational Excellence

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Forces towards Excellence

“What do we need to do?”
1. Manage the school and its classroom.
2. Develop warm, interpersonal relations.
3. Provide good curriculum and instruction.

“Why do what we do?”
4. To communicate moral and intellectual values.
5. To mediate Catholic culture.
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Adapted from Jacobs (1996, p.15)

It appeared that the latter question, ‘Why do what we do?’ was the question recently assigned RE teachers were asking themselves in the second round of interviews.

When teachers were mindful of such a question in their teaching lives then they were beginning the journey from being a competent teacher to an excellent teacher (Jacobs 1996). It was a process typical of recently assigned teachers in their quest to consolidate their pedagogical content knowledge (Manuel 2003, p.35). There was a ‘turnabout’ (Hansen 1995, p.24) or defining moment when recently assigned teachers experienced a change in outlook about the purposes of their teaching. Excellent teachers were the ones who articulated to others the importance of Catholic moral and intellectual values in their teaching and were able to draw upon their understanding of the Catholic school culture to contextualise the purpose of their teaching (Jacobs 1996).

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

Figure 8.4 (p.313) adapts Jacob’s (1996) model in the light of the findings that emerged from this research and represented in Figure 8.2 (p.307). Recently assigned RE teachers initially focused their concerns on assimilating four key aspects or layers to their personal and professional formation. Each of these layers complements the forces in Jacob’s (1996) model of excellence (Figure 8.3, p.311). In their quest to become competent RE teachers, the teachers in this study declared that they spent much of their preparation time in learning the content themselves and working out how they were going to teach the draft RE Units. Within a year of teaching the draft RE Units, recently assigned teachers had commented in the survey and in the first round of interviews that they needed to modify their teaching practices (p.279). The first two layers of ‘Instruction-Surety’ and ‘Prowess-Confidence’ (Figure 8.2, p.307) reflected the forces within the ‘What do we need to do?’ portion of Jacob’s model (Figure 8.3, p.311). Once these forces are operational then teachers have the capacity to consider the next set of forces within ‘Why do what we do?’ sections they transform their teaching.

The change in teaching practices was focused on ascertaining and accommodating the academic and spiritual learning needs of their students. It was not just enough to provide a warm, friendly learning environment but also to be a sincere and balanced model to students. To do so, recently assigned RE teachers believed that a direct pastoral rapport with their students was paramount in assisting the human formation of their students. As the teacher interacted with the class and took a keen interest in individual students, the students were influenced by the example of the teacher as a person with admirable human qualities. In the process of acting as a mentor or role model to their students, the teachers were confronted by the worth of their own sense of identity as a person of faith. These changes are summarised in the next two layers of teacher formation: ‘Empathy-Insight’ and ‘Modelling-Vocation’ (Figure 8.2, p.307). The next two layers may be considered part of the forces engaged in the ‘Why do what we do?’ sections of Jacob’s model (Figure 8.3, p.311). The impact of these forces become fully realised once teachers have developed the reflective skills to evaluate their teaching as part of the professional formation. As a result, as
indicated in Figure 8.4, excellence in RE teaching is enhanced by an integration of formative experiences.

**Figure 8.4: The Dimensions of Excellence in Religious Education**

<table>
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<th>Formation towards Excellence in Religious Education</th>
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**“What do we need to do?”**
An assimilation of:
- To manage the RE classroom.
- To provide the designated curriculum (draft RE Units of work) and instruction in personal, religious and spiritual formation.
- To develop warm, interpersonal relations in the RE classroom for human formation.

**“Why do what we do?”**
An integration of:
- To communicate the Catholic religious culture and tradition.
- To mediate the Catholic religious dimension of moral and intellectual values with the students’ lived experience.
- To become an authentic person with spiritual integrity and an ‘apostolic intention inspired by faith’*

*Adapted from Jacobs (1996, p.15)

* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1982, par. 24)

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

This change in focus seemed to have begun for many of the recently assigned RE teachers over the duration of the study. The comments from the teachers interviewed seemed to suggest that they had reached an important moment in their RE teaching career. This moment of insight about their own purposes and principles of teaching Religious Education sustained their enthusiasm to teach RE and defined them personally as passionate, committed teachers of faith. As Edward reflected about his RE teaching and his faith commitment:
A calling? It’s more a deliberate action to make, to give evidence that I’m living a Christian life on earth. Having all the faith in the world is good but also you’ve got to make use of it. So that’s what my RE teaching is, making use of my faith for God’s service.

(Edward, second round of interviews)

In this study, many recently assigned RE teachers were in agreement with Edward that they are making use of their ‘faith for God’s service’. It was the development towards such a disposition that energised and sustained them through the rigours of the personal and professional demands placed on them in implementing the draft RE Units. They were able to share their personal experiences of living the faith or what may be otherwise called ‘experiential content knowledge’. In this respect, the recently assigned RE teachers saw their witness more significantly than their teaching (Chapter 3, pp.99-100).

The teachers who had made the decision that their RE teaching was a vocation reflected the exhortation of an ‘apostolic intention inspired by faith’ (Chapter 3, p.100). While Nancy recounted in her first interview how she struggled with her ‘naughty boys’ (p.278), a conviction to teach RE appeared to be emerging in the second interview:

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

(Diana, second round of interviews)

This disposition in teaching RE as a vocation helped RARE teachers, as faith witnesses, to articulate a deeper understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices (experiential content knowledge), to relate the draft RE Units to the personal, spiritual and religious development of their students (pedagogical content knowledge) and to impart the content of the draft RE Units (content knowledge). Figure 8.4 (p.313) highlights these aspects of the formation of RARE teachers in becoming excellent RE teachers. While the faith witness or experiential content knowledge, content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge of teachers were identified, the comments from the recently assigned RE teachers suggested that these aspects were interrelated and operated concurrently with each other.
The concurrence of these knowledge forms may be deemed as the makings of RE teachers with a vision towards excellence in RE teaching. An excellent RE teacher required personal authenticity, spiritual integrity with an apostolic zeal to teach the ‘Good News’ and a commitment to ongoing professional and faith formation in teaching Religious Education as a vocation. Educational reform needs to consider these dimensions or ‘forces’ (Jacobs 1996). These forces are a part of the formation (or conversion) of recently assigned RE teachers, as competent RE teachers, to becoming excellent RE teachers. The process of conversion is ongoing and teachers need to reflect personally on how to improve their teaching practice, to become lifelong learners as a way of coping with curriculum exigencies (O’Donoghue 1997). There are three levels of reflection to be developed: ‘technical rationality’, ‘practical reflection’ and ‘critical reflection’ (O’Donoghue 1997, pp.32-33). Firstly, in the case of technical rationality, teachers improve their practice when they learn to consider alternative ways of teaching in the classroom. Secondly, with practical reflection, teachers clarify the assumptions about the value of their teaching and thirdly, with critical reflection, teachers examine critically the contexts of their teaching. Recently assigned RE teachers did reflect upon their teaching, albeit both positively and negatively. The more comprehensive they became in their reflection for improvement and renewal (as the teachers themselves suggested on pp.298-299), then the more likely they were able to see RE teaching as a worthwhile profession deserving of teachers of excellence.

8.4 Chapter Summary

Key concerns emerged about the competence and character of recently assigned RE teachers. The survey responses indicated a number of important issues in relation to accessibility and frequency in use of resources as well how teachers adjusted their teaching strategies to suit the needs of their students. Furthermore, there were a number of initial concerns about what teachers perceived as the catechetical expectations of the curriculum. Over the course of the two rounds of interviews, the perceptions of teachers focused less on resources and strategies to a re-evaluation of their persona as a teacher and their faith witness to their students.

The data collected provided evidence that recently assigned teachers experienced deepening layers of personal and professional formation. They wanted to be competent classroom managers and they also wanted to be highly respected RE
teachers. While experience and familiarity with the draft Units was important, it was
the positive social relationships that teachers developed with students and colleagues
alike that were invaluable to their personal and professional esteem. If recently
assigned RE teachers were going to implement the draft RE Units in effective and
inspiring ways in their classroom, addressing the needs of these teachers for ongoing
personal and professional formation was vital.

Recently assigned teachers needed practical support and affirmation from their more
experienced colleagues. They needed to be able to access a wide range of formative
programs in content and pedagogy as well as opportunities for personal and spiritual
renewal. Such needs formed the basis for recommendations that will be discussed as
part of the focus of the next chapter.
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 (Szacsvay 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 (Szacsvay 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’ (Engebreston 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.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1
Letter to Director of Catholic Education seeking permission to conduct research

30 March 1998

XX XXXXX XXXX
Director
Catholic Education Office of Western Australia

Dear XXXXX,

Currently, I am undertaking studies towards a doctorate at the University of Notre Dame Australia. My thesis focuses on the teaching practice and understandings of [recently assigned] RE teachers by providing a picture of how these teachers implement the draft RE Units. I wish to seek permission to conduct my research in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton.

The thesis research is a qualitative study drawing on survey, interview and observation techniques. The first part of this research consists of a survey. Its purpose is to obtain data from teachers who are in their second to sixth year of teaching experience in Religious Education. Recently, my supervisor, XXXXXXX and the Dean of the College of Education, XXXXXXX, both commented on the high standard that had been applied to the preparation of the survey. I have enclosed a copy of the survey for your perusal and comment. *The survey is not an evaluation of the draft RE Units of Work.*

From the survey a much smaller random sample of the total group will be selected and invited to participate in an interview and observation of their teaching in practice. As a consultant in this Office, I believe the rapport already established with schools and many teachers will assist in the gathering of valuable data.

The study is timely because little systematic research has been done in this area of RE curriculum implementation. The research explores how teachers access and use the resourcing provisions and teaching approach of the draft units of work.
The findings of this study could be a significant foundational database to RE curriculum writers in the preparation of future units and to religious educators responsible for the training and ongoing formation of RE teachers.

At a personal level, the study invites [recently assigned] secondary RE teachers to reflect upon their own RE teaching. This reflection can assist them to improve themselves both professionally and personally. Within schools, Principals and RE Coordinators may benefit from the findings which could provide insights into how they can support better their RE teachers, particularly those who are inexperienced or have little formal training.

Lastly, this study may be significant to a wider educational audience. As a study on the implementation and adoption of a curriculum innovation, the findings may be valuable to educators similarly involved in providing ‘practical, professional development plus good support documents that outline accessible resources’ (Interim Curriculum Council 1997, p.11). It may also be valuable to personnel responsible for training pre-service and in-service teachers in other curriculum areas.

I look forward to discussing this research proposal with you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hackett
APPENDIX 2
Letter to Principals seeking permission to conduct research

Mr Chris Hackett

April 28, 1998

XXXXXX
Principal
XXXXX Catholic College
PO Box
Suburb
WA Post Code

Dear XXXXXX

I am a doctoral student at the University of Notre Dame Australia undertaking research work into the teaching practice and understandings of [recently assigned] secondary RE teachers as they implement the draft secondary RE Units of Work.

I am seeking your permission to approach your school’s RE Coordinator and [recently assigned] RE teachers to participate in this study.

Initially, with the support of your Coordinator of RE, I wish to invite teachers who are in their second to sixth year of teaching experience in Religious Education to complete a survey.

I have enclosed a copy of this survey for your perusal. The survey is neither an assessment of a teacher’s competence in teaching RE nor an evaluation of the draft secondary RE Units of Work.

From the survey a much smaller random sample of participating [recently assigned] RE teachers will be selected and invited to participate in an interview and observation of their teaching in practice.

Involvement in this research is on a voluntary basis only. The study will maintain complete confidentiality about your school and responses from teachers.

The findings of this study could provide an important database for RE curriculum writers and for the training, support and ongoing formation of RE teachers. Principals and Coordinators of RE could benefit from the study as the findings could provide insights into how schools can support better their RE teachers.

Participation in the study could also provide opportunities for [recently assigned] secondary RE teachers to reflect critically upon their own RE teaching.
My supervisor is Xxxxxx at the College of Education. She can be contacted by phone on xxxxxx. The Director of the CEOWA, Xxxxxx, has approved my request to approach you in this matter.

If you or your Coordinator wishes to discuss my request further, I may be contacted by phone at work on xxxxxx or at home on xxxxxx. Alternatively, you can contact me by email on xxxxxx.

Thank you for reading this letter. I look forward to your assistance. Would you please complete the form below and place it into the return-addressed envelope enclosed. This form will need to reach me by Friday, May 8.

Yours sincerely

Chris Hackett

Cut along here

Please tick the appropriate box.

☐ Yes, I approve your request to approach the school’s Coordinator of RE and [recently assigned] RE teachers about involvement in this research.

☐ No, I do not wish the school to be involved in this research.

Signature:

Principal, X Catholic College
APPENDIX 3
Letter to RE Coordinators outlining procedure for completing surveys

Mr Chris Hackett
XXXXXX,
XXXXXX
Home XXXXXX
Work XXXXXX
email: XXXXXXXXXX

Date
Name XXXXXX
Coordinator of RE
School
Address
Suburb, Post Code

Dear XXXXXX,

Subsequent to our telephone conversation, I enclose the coded surveys for teachers to complete by Wednesday, May 20.

The purpose of this survey is to obtain data from teachers who are in their second to sixth year of teaching experience in Religious Education. It is neither an assessment of their competence as RE teachers nor an evaluation of the draft RE Units of Work.

The survey is an important part of my doctoral thesis on the understandings and teaching practice of [recently assigned] RE teachers. It is hoped that the findings from such research will assist religious educators responsible for providing the training and ongoing formation of present and future RE teachers.

The survey is divided into 5 sections:

Section 1: Instructional resources
Section 2: Teaching approach
Section 3: Underlying principles
Section 4: Professional experience
Section 5: Demographic details.

A code reference is included to maintain the confidentiality of their responses. They are asked to supply only the day and month of their birth-dates. This birth-date code reference may be used to identify a much smaller random sample of the total group surveyed. This sample of teachers will be invited later to participate in an interview process. If a teacher in your school is selected for this, a request for an interview will be made through you. Their identity will remain anonymous until they choose to accept the request and contact me by mail, phone or email.
I estimate that the survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. When they have completed the survey please remind them to put into the envelope provided for them and hand on to you. Place these completed surveys into the large, return-addresses envelope and mail to me by **Wednesday, May 20**.

Again, thank you for your assistance and especially a ‘big’ thank you to your staff.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hackett
APPENDIX 4
Introductory Letter about Survey to recently assigned RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Perth and the Dioceses of Bunbury and Geraldton, 1998

Mr Chris Hackett
XXXXXX,
XXXXXX
Home XXXXXX
Work XXXXXXX
email: XXXXXXXXXXX

Date
School
Address
Suburb, Post Code

Dear Participant,

The purpose of this survey is to obtain data from teachers who are in their second to sixth year of teaching experience in Religious Education. Specifically, the survey explores the understandings and practice of [recently assigned] RE teachers in implementing the draft RE Units of Work as part of their classroom teaching.

*It is neither an assessment of your competence as RE teachers nor an evaluation of the draft RE Units of Work.*

The survey is an important part of my doctoral thesis on the teaching practice of [recently assigned] RE teachers. It is hoped that the findings from such research will assist religious educators responsible for providing the training and ongoing formation of present and future RE teachers.

The survey is divided into 5 sections:
Section 1: Instructional resources
Section 2: Teaching approach
Section 3: Underlying principles
Section 4: Professional experience
Section 5: Demographic details.
A code reference is included to maintain the confidentiality of your responses. You are asked to supply only the day and month of your birth-date. This birth-date code reference may be used to identify a much smaller random sample of the total group surveyed. This sample will be invited later to participate in an interview process. If you are selected for this, a request for an interview will be made through your Coordinator of RE. Your identity will remain anonymous until you choose to accept the request and contact me by mail, phone or email.

I estimate that the survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. When you have completed the survey please place it into the stamped, self-addressed envelope and mail to me by Friday <to be decided>.

Thank you for agreeing to answer this survey.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hackett
APPENDIX 5
A Survey on the Teaching Practice of recently assigned RE Teachers

Section 1 Instructional Resources

This Section has items that refer to the curriculum materials you use in your RE classes. Your responses will assist in describing how [recently assigned] RE teachers use their instructional resources.

Accessibility

For each statement, circle the category that best reflects your experience as a beginning RE teacher in using the Teacher’s Manuals and Student Books provided by the draft RE Units. The numbers represent the following: 1 = strongly agree SA, 2 = agree A, 3 = uncertain U, 4 = disagree D and 5 = strongly disagree SD

As a beginning RE teacher, I tend to find…

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>RE Units are easy to follow.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>RE Units are useful in my classroom teaching.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>RE Units reduce lesson preparation time.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>RE Units provide sufficient background material.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Frequency of Use

5. Rank consecutively from 1 most frequently used to 6 least frequently used these resources in response to this statement:

As a beginning RE teacher, I develop my lessons mostly around…

- Mastersheets
- Resources from the Coordinator of RE
- Resources I have created
- Student Books
- Texts cited in the RE Units
- Other please specify: ________________________________
6. As a result of your experiences in teaching RE, what is the most important advice you would give [recently assigned] RE teachers about using the curriculum materials provided by the draft RE Units?

---

Section 2 Teaching Approach

This Section has items about the teaching approach you adopt in your RE classes. Your responses will assist in describing the teaching practice of [recently assigned] RE teachers.

Teaching process

For each statement, circle the category that best reflects your experience as a beginning RE teacher in using the teaching approach recommended by the draft RE Units. The numbers represent the following: 1 = strongly agree SA, 2 = agree A, 3 = uncertain U, 4 = disagree D and 5 = strongly disagree SD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tr>
<td>7. Presenting content as outcomes of learning useful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Following the sequence of objectives in the RE Units useful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Beginning with students’ experiences about a topic useful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. A process of sincere and patient dialogue with students useful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Linking students’ experiences with the Gospels difficult.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Including learning strategies suited to the faith stances of all students difficult.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Organising class liturgies difficult.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Journal work is easy to include as part of my teaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Formal assessments are easy to include as part of my teaching.</td>
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</table>
16. Rank consecutively from 1 most preferred to 6 least preferred these teaching methods in response to this statement:

**As a beginning RE teacher, I prefer learning strategies that help…**

- Describe and explain information about Catholic beliefs and practices. [ ]
- Reveal the deeper religious meanings behind Catholic beliefs and practices. [ ]
- Interpret significant human experiences in the light of the Gospels. [ ]
- Reinforce student understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices. [ ]
- Stimulate active participation and creativity within students. [ ]
- Other please specify: [ ]

17. As a result of your experiences in teaching RE, what is the most important advice you would give [recently assigned] RE teachers about applying the teaching approach of the draft RE Units as part of their classroom practice?

Section 3  Underlying Principles

This Section has items that refer to your understanding of the underlying principles in teaching RE. Your responses will assist in describing the understandings [recently assigned] RE teachers share about the underlying teaching principles in RE.

**Religious dimension**

For each statement, circle the category that best reflects your support as a beginning RE teacher for the religious dimension of your school.

The numbers represent the following: 1 = strongly agree SA, 2 = agree A, 3 = uncertain U, 4 = disagree D and 5 = strongly disagree SD

As a beginning RE teacher, I want to assist in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organising…</th>
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<tr>
<td>18. School or class Masses.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation at school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
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<td>20. School retreats or RE seminar days.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Celebrations for key feast days or liturgical seasons at school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The inclusion of prayers at school assemblies or events.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Activities that raise awareness of the Church’s missionary work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Teaching RE**

For each statement, circle the category that best reflects your perceptions of teaching RE. The numbers represent the following: 1 = strongly agree SA, 2 = agree A, 3 = uncertain U, 4 = disagree D and 5 = strongly disagree SD.

As a beginning RE teacher, I tend to feel confident in…

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<th></th>
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<td>24.</td>
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<td>25.</td>
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<td>26.</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

29. Rank consecutively from 1 most important to 6 least important these aims of RE in response to this statement:

As a beginning RE teacher, I believe the aims of RE should encourage students to…

- Develop a closer relationship with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. [ ]
- Develop social justice and tolerance for others. [ ]
- Participate fully in formal prayers and liturgy. [ ]
- Relate the Gospel example of Jesus to their lives. [ ]
- Understand God’s intervention in human history. [ ]
- Other please specify: ________________________________ [ ]

30. Rank consecutively from 1 most emphasis to 6 least emphasis in teaching the content of RE in response to this statement:

As a beginning RE teacher, I believe the content of RE should emphasise…

- Actions for transforming society for the common good. [ ]
- Knowledge about Catholic beliefs and practices. [ ]
- Consequences of social issues and trends on human nature. [ ]
- How the Gospels relate to significant life experiences. [ ]
- What helps a person to reach full human potential. [ ]
- Other please specify: ________________________________ [ ]

31. As a result of your experiences in teaching RE, what is the most important aspect of the draft RE Units you would advise [recently assigned] RE teachers to regard as crucial for their students to learn?
Section 4  Professional experience

This Section has items that relate to your teaching experience in Religious Education. Your responses will assist in developing a picture of the professional background of [recently assigned] RE teachers.

Class contact time

32. How many classes of RE do you teach in each Year level?
   If no classes, then place a “0” within the brackets
   Year 8: [ ] classes
   Year 9: [ ] classes
   Year 10: [ ] classes
   Year 11: [ ] classes
   Year 12: [ ] classes

33. How many minutes of RE do your classes have, on average, over a 5-day teaching week?
   Fill in the bracket that applies to you to the nearest whole number
   [ ] minutes per week in lower secondary
   [ ] minutes per week in upper secondary

34. Which subject or learning area is your major teaching area?

35. Circle the number that best reflects your RE class contact time as a proportion of your teaching load.
   1. Less than 25% of my teaching load is in RE.
   2. Between 25% and 50% of my teaching load is in RE.
   3. Between 51% and 75% of my teaching load is in RE.
   4. More than 75% of my teaching load is in RE.

36. Circle the number that represents your years of teaching RE.
   1. I am in my second year of teaching RE.
   2. I am in my third year of teaching RE.
3. I am in my fourth year of teaching RE.
4. I am in my fifth year of teaching RE.
5. I am in my sixth year of teaching RE.

**Professional background**

37. State when you graduated, tertiary institutions attended and the degree or diploma titles conferred.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tertiary institution attended</th>
<th>Degree/Diploma Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>University of Western Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>University of Notre Dame Australia</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma of Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38. Have you completed a degree or diploma in Religious Education? Please circle the number
1. Yes   2. No

If yes, state graduating year, tertiary institution attended and degree or diploma title conferred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tertiary institution attended</th>
<th>Degree/Diploma Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Studies in Religious Education**

38. Have you completed a degree or diploma in Religious Education? Please circle the number
1. Yes   2. No

If yes, state graduating year, tertiary institution attended and degree or diploma title conferred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tertiary institution attended</th>
<th>Degree/Diploma Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Progress towards Accreditation to Teach RE**

*To meet Accreditation to Teach RE requirements teachers need to complete a Study component of 3 tertiary units or its equivalent and an Inservice component.*

39. Circle the number that represents your progress towards the Study component of Accreditation to Teach RE.
1. Not begun   2. In progress   3. Completed
40. Circle the number that represents your progress towards the **Inservice** component of Accreditation to Teach RE.
   1. Not begun    2. In progress    3. Completed

41. As a result of your experiences in teaching RE, what is the most important advice you would give [recently assigned] RE teachers about acquiring sufficient professional background to teach RE confidently in the classroom?

____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________

**Section 5  Demographic details**

*This Section has items that seek to obtain an overview of the demographic background of [recently assigned] RE teachers.*

**Personal background**

42. Please circle the number that represents whether you are a:
   1. Female lay teacher
   2. Male lay teacher
   3. Priest
   4. Religious brother
   5. Religious sister

43. Circle the number that represents your age range.
   1. 21–25 years
   2. 26–30 years
   3. 31–35 years
   4. 36–40 years
   5. 41–45 years
   6. 46–50 years
   7. 51–55 years
   8. > 56 years
**Birth-date code**

44. Please complete the code reference by writing the day and month of your birthday in the space provided. For example, 3rd November:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>MONTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AM1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your code reference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>MONTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Would you place the survey into the self-addressed envelope and post to me by Friday, <to be decided>.
APPENDIX 6
Initial Criteria for Selection of the Sample Group

Tables A6.1 to A6.3 outline how the sample subgroups of low, mean and high were selected. Likert scale items in the three categories of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying approaches were allocated scores from one to five. The lower score of one represents responses of ‘Strongly Agree’ and the higher score of five represents responses of ‘Strongly Disagree’. Mean scores represent typical responses (the average of all scored responses) on an item. Each column of lower, mean and higher scores was totalled to represent the total scores of each subgroup in each category.

Table A6.1  Instructional Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Scale Items in the Survey</th>
<th>Sample Subgroups</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items 1-4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lower Scores</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mean Scores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a beginning RE teacher, I tend to find…</td>
<td>Participants’ total score on Likert scale items that have the lowest total score in this category.</td>
<td>Participants’ total score on Likert scale items that match the mean total score in this category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. RE Units are easy to follow.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. RE Units are useful in my classroom teaching.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RE Units reduce lesson preparation time.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RE Units provide sufficient background material.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Subgroup Scores</strong></td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scoring Range: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree. Scores are given to the nearest first decimal place.
Table A6.2  Teaching Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Scale Items in the Survey</th>
<th>Sample Subgroups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants' total score on Likert scale items that have the lowest total score in this category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items 7-15</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>As a beginning RE teacher, I tend to find...</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Presenting content as outcomes of learning useful.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Following the sequence of objectives in the RE Units useful.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Beginning with students’ experiences about a topic useful.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A process of sincere and patient dialogue with students useful.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Linking students’ experiences with the Gospels difficult.*</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Including learning strategies suited to the faith stances of all students difficult.*</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Organising class liturgies difficult.*</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Journal work is easy to include as part of my teaching.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Formal assessments are easy to include as part of my teaching.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Subgroup Score</strong></td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:

Scoring Range: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree. Scores are given to the nearest first decimal place.

* On Items 11, 12 and 13 the mean scores were calculated by subtracting the initial mean score from 5 because the items were written in the negative.
Table A6.3  Underlying Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Scale Items in the Survey</th>
<th>Sample Subgroups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower Scores</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mean Scores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ total score on Likert scale items that have the lowest total score in this category.</td>
<td>Participants’ total score on Likert scale items that match the mean total score in this category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items 18-23</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a beginning RE teacher, I want to assist in organising...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. School or class Masses.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation at school.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. School retreats or RE seminar days.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Celebrations for key feast days or liturgical seasons at school.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The inclusion of prayers at school assemblies or events.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Activities that raise awareness of the Church’s missionary work.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items 24-28</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a beginning RE teacher, I tend to feel confident in...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Managing the demands made on my own faith stance.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Presenting Catholic beliefs and practices.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Relating students’ experiences to Catholic beliefs and practices.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Fostering an atmosphere of Christian love and respect.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Fostering positive relationships with my students.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Subgroup Score</strong></td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scoring Range: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree. Scores are given to the nearest first decimal place.
APPENDIX 7
Letter to RE Coordinators about contacting participants
for the First Round of Interviews

Mr Chris Hackett
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXX
Home XXXXXXXXX
Work XXXXXXXXX
e-mail: XXXXXXXXXXXXX

<REC First & Last Name>
Coordinator of Religious Education
XXXXXXX Catholic College
XXXXXXXX
XXXXXX
XXXXXXXX

Dear <REC First Name>

As mentioned in our last telephone conversation, I am proceeding to the next phase of my doctoral research through the University of Notre Dame Australia. I enclose a list of coded participants that I wish to interview as part of this next phase. When the interviews have been completed you will receive a summary of the findings of the survey.

The purpose of the interview is to explore in greater detail the views of [recently assigned] RE teachers about how they implement the draft RE program. In particular, I am interested in finding out why different groups of [recently assigned] teachers use certain curriculum materials and teaching approaches in their classroom.

At this stage I am concentrating on obtaining a range of interviews. The interview will take approximately 20 minutes and the interviewee’s responses will remain confidential. A transcript of the interview can be given to the interviewee for verification.

Would you pass on to these teachers their letter of invitation to participate and ask them to contact me by mail, phone or email by Monday 19 October.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth-date Code</th>
<th>Teacher Type</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>RE Years Taught</th>
<th>Main Subject Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/08</td>
<td>Female lay teacher</td>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>Second year</td>
<td>English (Lower Secondary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/10</td>
<td>Male lay teacher</td>
<td>31-35 years</td>
<td>Fourth year</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Birth-date code consists of the day and month of the teacher’s birthday.

Again, thank you for your assistance and especially a ‘big’ thank you to your participating teachers.

Yours sincerely,
Chris Hackett
APPENDIX 8
Letter of Invitation to Participant to be involved in the Interview Phase of the Study

Mr Chris Hackett
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXX
Home XXXXXXXXX
Work XXXXXXXXX
EmailXXXXXXXXXX

Dear «Birth-date_Code»

A few months ago you completed a survey as part of my doctoral research work through the University of Notre Dame Australia. The aim of the survey was to explore how [recently assigned] RE teachers implemented the draft RE program.

I truly appreciate the valuable contribution you made in the survey. Your responses reflected the thoughts and feelings of a number of other teachers. For this reason I need your assistance again in clarifying some aspects for me to understand better the responses received.

I wonder if you would consider participating in an interview. The purpose of the interview is to explore in greater detail why [recently assigned] RE teachers use certain curriculum materials and teaching approaches in their classroom.

Your responses will be respected because they are what you believe to be true. Your views will remain confidential—at no stage will your identity be known in the research findings. A transcript of this interview can be sent to you for your verification.

I appreciate that such participation could be challenging and I offer three options for you to consider:

Option 1:
*Face to Face Interview* – This interview will last about thirty minutes. I will meet with you at a time that is convenient.

Option 2:
*Telephone Interview* – This interview will last about thirty minutes by telephone.

Option 3:
*Extended Written Response* – I will send you the interview questions and invite you to reply with extended written responses within a week. There will be a follow up telephone call to clarify or discuss your responses.

If you decide to participate, would you complete the tear off slip below and place it into the stamped, return-addressed envelope by **Monday 19 October**.

Once again, thank you for your contribution. The data collected to date has been invaluable in describing the efforts and challenges of [recently assigned] RE teachers.
Yours sincerely

Chris Hackett

Return this slip in the stamped self-addressed envelope supplied by Monday 19 October

Tick the option you wish to participate in: Please provide the following information:

☐ Option 1 – Face to Face Interview Birth-date Code:____________________

☐ Option 2 – Telephone Interview Name:_______________________________

☐ Option 3 – Written Response School:_______________________________
APPENDIX 9
First Interviews Schedule

Introduction

The purpose of this interview is to explore in greater depth and detail your understanding of how the new RE program is implemented.

I appreciate the valuable contribution you made in the survey. The responses you made reflected the views of a number of other teachers. For this reason I need your assistance again in clarifying some dimensions for me to understand better the responses received.

Your responses will be respected because they are what you believe to be true for yourself. Your views will remain confidential–at no stage will your identity be known in the research findings. A transcript of this interview will be sent to you for your verification. The data obtained from this interview will be collated with other interviews.

This interview will last about thirty minutes. Do I have your permission to record your responses on this audio tape?

To help focus your responses, would you Refer to an RE Unit you taught last term.

Are there any questions before we begin?

Question 1:
Refer to an RE Unit you taught last term.

• Before you started, what considerations were uppermost in your mind about teaching this Unit to your students?

Question 2:
Many teachers indicated that they used the Mastersheets and the Student Book frequently in their lessons.

• Why do you think this is the case?
• How do you feel about using these materials?

**Question 3:**
A number of teachers commented that the curriculum materials in the Units should be matched or modified to the background or experiences of students.

• Why should this be the case?

• How do you respond to the view that such an approach avoids students learning about Catholic beliefs and practices?

**Question 4:**
A number of teachers found linking students’ experiences with the Gospels difficult.

• Why would that be the case?

• Should [recently assigned] RE teachers make more use of the Scriptures in their lessons? Explain.

**Question 5:**
A number of teachers indicated that organising liturgies was difficult.

• What difficulties are they referring to?

• Why do think many [recently assigned] RE teachers find organising class liturgies difficult?

**Question 6:**
Many teachers mentioned that developing social justice and tolerance for others was the most important aim of RE.

• How do you feel about this being the most important aim?

• What do you expect your students to have achieved by the end of a RE Unit? Why?
**Question 7:**
Can you describe for me the principles you follow or the vision you have in mind about the teaching of RE?

**Question 8:**
How did you come to follow these principles (or vision)? What influences were significant to you in developing your understanding of these principles (or this vision)?

**Question 9:**
Many teachers commented that having a sufficient professional background and strong faith witness was important to teaching RE. What would you like to see happen in the future to the formation of RE teachers?

**Closing**
Summary of key points made during the interview:

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. I appreciate that teaching RE is a challenging task. I hope that the remainder of the year is worthwhile for you.

I will be transcribing your responses and when complete I will give you a copy for your perusal. If you have any concerns then please let me know.
APPENDIX 10
Letter and Questions for Participants who agreed to do a Written Response

Dear <Participant>

Thank you for agreeing to answer the interview questions.

The purpose of these questions is to explore in greater depth and detail the understanding of [recently assigned] RE teachers in implementing the new RE program.

Your views will remain confidential – at no stage will your identity be known in the research findings. The data obtained from these questions will be collated with other interviewees.

In making an extended written response please Refer to an RE Unit you taught last term. Take the time to reflect carefully about the question. I would appreciate paragraph (or longer) answers–do not let the space provided inhibit your comments!

Please feel free to contact me at home or work if you have any queries about answering these questions. Your written responses should be returned to me in the return-addressed envelope by Friday October 30.

Yours sincerely

Chris Hackett
Birth-date Code: ____________________
Name: ____________________________
School: __________________________

Question 1:

Refer to an RE Unit you taught last term.

- Before you started, what considerations were uppermost in your mind about teaching this Unit to your students?

Question 2:

Many teachers in the survey indicated that they used the Mastersheets and the Student Book frequently in their lessons.

- Why do you think this is the case?

- How do you feel about using these materials?

Question 3:
A number of teachers commented that the curriculum materials in the Units should be matched or modified to the background or experiences of students.

- Why should this be the case?

- How do you respond to the view that such an approach avoids students learning about Catholic beliefs and practices?

Question 4:

A number of teachers in the survey found linking students’ experiences with the Gospels difficult.

- Why do you think that would be the case?

- Should [recently assigned] RE teachers make more use of the Scriptures in their lessons? Explain.
Question 5:

A number of teachers in the survey indicated that organising class liturgies was difficult.

- What difficulties are they referring to?
- Why do you think many beginning RE teachers find organising class liturgies difficult?

Question 6:

Many teachers mentioned that developing social justice and tolerance for others was the most important aim of RE.

- How do you feel about this being the most important aim?
- What do you expect your students to have achieved by the end of a RE Unit? Why?
Question 7:
Describe for me the educational and theological principles you follow or the vision you have in mind about the teaching of RE.

Question 8:
How did you come to follow these principles (or vision)? What professional and personal influences were significant to you in developing your understanding of these principles (or this vision)?
Question 9:

Many teachers commented that having a sufficient professional background and strong faith witness was important to teaching RE. What would you like to see happen in the future to the formation of beginning RE teachers?

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. Please place your responses into the return-addressed envelope and send to me by Friday October 30.
APPENDIX 11
Letter of Invitation to participate in the Second Round of Interviews

Mr Chris Hackett
XXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXX
Home XXXXXXXX
Work XXXXXXXX
email: XXXXXXXXXXXX

Dear «M_1st_Name»

About six months ago you participated in an interview as part of my doctoral research work through the University of Notre Dame Australia. The aim of the interview was to explore in greater detail how beginning RE teachers implemented the draft RE program.

I truly appreciate the valuable contribution you made in the interview. Your responses reflected the thoughts and feelings of a number of other teachers. You will find a transcription of your interview attached to this letter.

From analysis of these transcriptions there are a few key issues still to be further investigated. I wonder if you would consider participating in a second interview. The purpose of this second interview is to present you with some of the findings and to seek your opinions about them.

This interview will be shorter than the first and your views will remain confidential. A transcript of this interview will also be sent to you for your verification.

I understand that at this time of the year, teaching can be very hectic. However, if you could spare twenty minutes I would be very grateful.

If you do not mind I will contact you in the next week to discuss the possibility of your involvement in this second interview.

Yours sincerely

Chris Hackett
Thank you very much for agreeing to do this second interview.

The questions in this interview are designed to explore how you feel about teaching RE since the last interview.

Do you have a copy of your transcript from the first interview with you?

Before you answer these questions please reflect upon your responses from the first interview.

The more complete an answer you can give, will be very much appreciated. Feel free to use examples where appropriate.

Q1: Where do you stand now in relation to your RE teaching? Are things still:

- the same as the last interview?  
- worse?  
- different?  
- better?

Q2: To what extent do you feel teaching RE is similar to the other subjects you teach? Use an example to explain your response.

Q3: To what extent do you feel teaching RE is different to the other subjects you teach? Use an example to explain your response.

Q4: What is the best and most special about teaching RE for you?

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions.
Thank you very much for agreeing to write answers to the second interview questions.

These questions are designed to explore how you feel about teaching RE since the last interview.

You will need to have a copy of the transcript of the your written responses to the first interview questions with you.

Before you answer these questions please review your responses from the first interview.

The more complete an answer you can give, will be very much appreciated. Feel free to use examples where appropriate.

Q1: Where do you stand now in relation to your RE teaching? Are things still:

- the same as the last interview?  
- worse?

- different?  
- better?

You can select one or more of the bullet points to support your response.
Q2: To what extent do you feel teaching RE is **similar** to the other subjects you teach? Use an example to explain your response.

Q3: To what extent do you feel teaching RE is **different** to the other subjects you teach? Use an example to explain your response.

Q4: What is the **best and most special** about teaching RE for you?

*Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions.*

Please place your completed sheet in the return-addressed envelope and post to me by **Monday, May 17**.
December 7, 1999

Dear «M_1st_Name»

Please find attached a transcription of the interview I conducted with you about six months ago. You may recall this second interview was a follow up and sought to clarify some important issues about teaching RE, its similarities and differences to other subjects and its significance to the RE teacher.

Just a reminder that only the birthdate code and demographic coding will be included in the research. No names of the person interviewed or their school will be mentioned.

The process of transcribing has taken longer than I expected but I am very appreciated of what you had to say and for the opportunity of interviewing you. If you have a query or concern about your transcript then feel free to contact me about it.

At the time of the interview I mentioned that I would give some indication of where the study is going. Over the next six months I will be analysing the data gathered from the survey and the first and second interviews in greater depth. In the meantime, some of the things emerging are:

♣ Most of the RE teachers surveyed are English teachers.
♣ Most of the RE teachers surveyed are female.
♣ Most of the RE teachers surveyed have Accreditation B.
♣ Most of the RE teachers surveyed believe in a strong faith witness.
♣ Most of the RE teachers surveyed believe that a positive rapport with students is important.
♣ RE Teachers interviewed consider familiarity with content is important.
♣ RE Teachers interviewed want flexibility in using strategies and resources.
♣ RE Teachers interviewed want further ongoing formation.
♣ RE Teachers interviewed consider that their own learning area is helpful to teaching RE.
♣ RE Teachers interviewed believe that their RE teaching is improving.

By no means are these things definitive and there is still a lot more analysis work to do. Nonetheless, I think the contributions you and others have made have been very beneficial to my research. Again, thank you.

Yours sincerely

Chris Hackett
## Appendix 15

**Sample Group of Participants and Changes to their Circumstances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym of Participants</th>
<th>Participated in First Round of Interviews</th>
<th>Participated in Second Round of Interviews</th>
<th>Teaching RE at the Same School*</th>
<th>Moved to a Different School*</th>
<th>Teaching RE at a Different School*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darla</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
<td>✔</td>
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* = Possible changes in circumstances between first and second round of interviews

✓ = Yes  ✗ = No  Did not participate in Second Round of Interviews
### Appendix 16

**Distribution of Quotations from Participants**

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*Note:*

|               | Did not participate in Second Round of Interviews |

386
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