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Primary school assembly perspectives and practices: implications for pupils' spiritual development

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Primary School Assembly Perspectives and Practices: Implications for Pupils' Spiritual Development.

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Contents

Abstract

Since 1988 the spiritual development of pupils has been a stated aim of the whole school curriculum. By 1994, OFSTED's report into religious education and collective worship had identified the failure of collective worship in primary schools (more usually known as 'assembly') to contribute satisfactorily to pupils' spiritual development. Using a case study approach, this present research has sought to reveal ways in which teachers' perspectives on the spiritual and their assembly practices might impact upon pupils' spiritual development. The current assembly practices at six Somerset schools were examined together with the perspectives that those taking the assemblies bring to that experience. Data from observations and interviews was analysed in relation to those activities deemed conducive by the inspectorate to the promotion of spiritual development. The same data was also analysed in relation to those factors which are seen to affect the selection of assembly elements and activities. The findings suggest that whilst assemblies may be perceived to contain many of the elements currently recommended for spiritual development, factors relating to assembly organisation, accommodation, practices and content could nevertheless in some cases be impacting negatively on pupils' spiritual development. In addition, not only is the concept of the spiritual variously understood by both teachers and inspectors, but training for the development of pupils spiritually is not well established. The research raises questions about the suitability of current assembly practices for developing pupils spiritually. Furthermore it suggests that unless and until teachers and inspectors develop a more consistent understanding of the complex nature of spirituality and how pupils can best be developed spiritually, based on present and future research and adequate training, pupils' spiritual development is unlikely to be well served by primary school assemblies.

Acknowledgements

Tables

Appendices

Chapter 1

Focus and rationale of the research

The whole issue of school 'assembly' is notoriously thorny, with public debate generating much ill-informed comment and sensationalised media headlines encouraging polarisation around restrictive images of both worship and school assemblies (Gent, 1989). Confusion exists in the minds of many, including teachers, as to the purpose of assemblies, the nature of their relationship to Religious Education (RE) and their role within the curriculum as a whole (PCfRE, 1994).

The Education Reform Act 1988 (ERA) however, does not use the term 'assembly' referring only to daily acts of 'collective worship'. During the past 50 years though, it has become common practice to use the term 'assembly' rather than 'collective worship' within the school setting. This is not only because a shorter wording is preferred but also because of a growing uncertainty about the nature and appropriateness of worship within a school (Gent, 1989). In addition, 'assembly' suggests a breadth of practice which sees collective worship as one element or dimension within the whole assembly experience. Other elements include matters of 'housekeeping' such as notices about competitions, sports' results or litter in the playground, or questions of discipline such as behaviour in the toilets. In other words, the assembly provides a forum for matters concerning the school population as a functioning community and encouraging certain values, as well as providing an opportunity for worship.

Religious education and collective worship, though frequently linked in legislation and supporting documents are however quite distinct, although Holm (1975) recognises that insofar as assemblies express the life and concerns of the community and explore what is significant to the pupils, they can make an implicit contribution to RE. The 1988 ERA replaced the term 'religious instruction' from the Education Act of 1944 with 'religious education' and referred to a curriculum subject, open to inspection by HMI, which involved the class teaching of religion.

Sealey (1985) questions the validity of juxtaposing 'religious' and 'education' in this context, claiming that education is a study of the world of experience rather than the experience itself. He characterises experience as a "first order" process, and study of that experience, i.e. education, as a "second order" process whereby pupils are brought to the threshold of "first order" experience. Simulated experiences are useful devices for bringing pupils to a better understanding of the phenomenon under study but they are not the ultimate aim of the study. He contends it should not be the aim of RE to produce religious, moral or spiritual pupils since this would involve engagement, commitment or involvement in "first order" experience thus taking pupils beyond the threshold of education. Visiting places of worship, Christening a doll or preparing a Seder meal are valid insofar as these activities bring pupils to a greater knowledge and understanding of religion. According to Sealey (op. cit.) the word religion is sufficient title for a subject deemed to be parallel with English, History or Science, provided it is understood that this means pupils should study and understand religious claims. He quotes Hirst's (1974) view that:

> "(this) will demand a great deal of imaginative involvement in expressions of religious life and even a form of engagement in these activities themselves..... (but) this must not, however, be confused with asking pupils to engage directly in any religious activities for the sake of these activities themselves" (p. 84).

Whilst 'worship' is not defined in the legislation, paragraph 57 of the 1988 Act states that:

> "it should be taken to have its natural and ordinary meaning. That is, it must in some sense reflect something special or separate from ordinary school activities and it should be concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine being or power".

Sealey (op. cit.) characterises 'worship' as a "first order" experience of the believer, and therefore not part of an educational process, the function of which is to study, not to practise "first order" experience, thereby logically separating religion (as a curriculum subject) from worship. Further exploration of this apparent paradox

is, however, beyond the scope of this study. Hull (1975), for reasons connected with making assemblies serve the whole school curriculum, also calls for any specific responsibility for 'worship' to be removed from teachers of religion.

Current legislation places both RE and collective worship within the overall aim of the basic curriculum to promote spiritual development, but they are not seen as the sole means of achieving this aim, which is considered a cross-curricular responsibility. A recent report, OFSTED (1994), identified serious weaknesses in the management, resourcing and delivery of RE at the primary phase with "some (schools relying) inappropriately on acts of collective worship to deliver the RE curriculum." (p.18) Furthermore, whilst inspection showed that collective worship within primary schools made a strong contribution to the ethos and quality of the school community, concern was expressed about its contribution towards spiritual development, although the nature of that concern was not made explicit.

Following the 1988 ERA assemblies became newsworthy, generating a host of articles, pamphlets, books and INSET courses, but there seems to have been very little research on school assembly and its role, either as part of the whole curriculum or within the framework of RE, especially at primary level. In addition, little appears to have been written on the theoretical justifications for the practice of 'assembling'. It is surprising that a practice which traditionally has occupied a part of each day in most schools should have largely escaped such scrutiny. This present research concerns the extent to which current assembly practices are contributing to the spiritual development of pupils in the primary school.

A problem which presents itself immediately concerns the concept of 'spiritual development', since the theme of children's spirituality, as opposed to the religious education of children, is a relatively new subject of academic interest. There are many competing accounts of the nature and sources of 'spirituality' and these will be considered more fully below (see Chapter 2), but there are nevertheless features which are commonly considered to fall within its domain. OFSTED (1994) states:

> "Spiritual development relates to that aspect of
> inner life through which pupils acquire insights into
> their personal existence which are of enduring
> worth. It is characterised by reflection, the
> attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a
> non-material dimension to life and intimations of
> an enduring reality".

The document offers no further explanation for this definition and although the meaning of "intimations of an enduring reality" is unclear, there is no suggestion that the spiritual is necessarily characterised by any involvement with religion or concept of deity.

Whatever working definition is used, an answer as to whether assemblies do in practice contribute to spiritual development also requires an assessment of the spiritual attainment of pupils. It is claimed, (OFSTED, 1993), that all areas of the curriculum may contribute to a pupil's spiritual development therefore it might be difficult to determine how much development is specifically attributable to assembly practices and so this question will be left to others.

As to the extent to which assembly practices *can* theoretically contribute to the spiritual development of pupils, this requires an exploration of the kinds of experiences which are likely to promote spiritual development, and an analysis of assembly practices to see if they are able to provide those experiences.

A further question that arises concerns those factors which affect assembly practices. Theories about how children learn help determine (amongst other things) what organisational forms and pedagogical strategies are deemed appropriate to the achievement of our educational aims (Open University, 1990). But, since teachers play a central and active role in the numerous interactions which shape the curriculum (Open University, op. cit.) it also makes sense to research the perspectives they bring to the assembly experience. Arising out of this initial discussion, although prior to the completion of the literature review, four research questions were formulated.

Research Questions

1) What kinds of experiences are likely to promote the spiritual development of pupils?

2) What experiences are provided by current assembly practices?

3) To what extent can assembly practices theoretically contribute to pupil's spiritual development?

4) What perspectives do teachers bring to the assembly experience?

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In view of the fact that schools have had a statutory obligation since 1944 to contribute to, and since 1988 to promote, spiritual development, very little has been published in book or journal form on the subject during the past 13 years although this is now beginning to change. A search for references on one College of Education library's database revealed that out of 200+ 'finds' on spiritual education, only 4 related to schools. There were 1000+ 'finds' on moral education and 2000+ on religious education, the majority of which were school related. An extensive trawl of books on collective worship in schools and allied subjects written prior to 1988 has produced only one reference to spiritual development (Barratt, 1982).

In stark contrast are website postings of which there are currently over three and a half million referring to spiritual development in the English language. The overwhelming majority of these are American in origin but again only a small proportion are concerned directly with the American public school system.

There have, however, also been materials published for use in schools which, whilst not attempting to address the subject of pupils' spiritual development *per se*, do offer teachers ideas and guidance concerning assembly topics and modes of presentation. Insofar as these may influence current practices, an analysis of a selection of the more widely available publications is included in the review that follows.

The Nature of Spirituality

Spirituality is a hard concept to define. Everyone is considered to have spiritual capabilities (National Curriculum Council, 1993) but there is little general agreement about the precise nature of the spiritual, how and in what context it is best developed and how it is to be assessed. Such difficulties may well explain the limited amount of material and research on the subject over recent years and the uncertainty and confusion amongst those charged with

the responsibility for spiritual provision in schools identified by Waters (1975) and Davies (1998).

For many years following the 1944 Education Act the term 'spiritual' (as it applied in schools) was generally considered to be synonymous with religious (Priestley, 1985). Pupils' spiritual development was expected to take place through acts of worship and Religious Instruction or Scripture. By the time of the 1988 ERA attempts were being made to identify a distinctive spiritual component in the curriculum and these attempts continue to date. Some writers argue that spirituality can only be properly located within a religious framework (Blake, 1996; Broadberry, 1978; Kelly, 1990; Marenbon, 1996; Warner, 1996; Wilson, 1993 and Wood, 1991).

Others, who argue for a secular dimension, maintain that "spirituality is a wider and more accessible concept than religion" (King, 1996, p.343) and is "not confined to the development of religious beliefs or conversion to a particular faith" (White, 1996, p.34). That spiritual education is something totally cross-curricular, and not located within any single discipline or group of disciplines, but is intrinsic to the normal educational processes, is echoed by Bond (1992), Ewens (1991), Minney (1991) and Rossiter (1996).

Attempts at a "third way", stressing the indivisibility of the secular and religious aspects of spirituality are presented by Starkings (1993) and McClure (1996). For Starkings the religious and the secular options are related in that they both involve moving beyond the purely material, in essence different sides of the same spiritual coin. He sees the arts as a mediating instrument. For McClure the secular and the religious occupy opposite ends of a spiritual continuum with 'spiritual competence' a necessary prerequisite for religious faith.

A fourth group whom I shall characterise as 'sceptic', are sufficiently concerned about the nature of spirituality to doubt whether any attempt at definition is possible or that we can ever arrive at a clear understanding of stages in spiritual development (Rodger, 1996). Priestley (1985, p. 116) cites the researches of Hardy (1979), Hay (1982) and Robinson (1983) which "suggest that

schools are poor environments for expressing personal spiritual experience". McCreery (1996) states that there is no evidence to show a relationship between designed activities and spiritual development.

The ambiguity of the term in current usage is frequently alluded to in the literature (Carr, 1995 & 1996; King, 1996; Webster, 1987). Rather than attempting to establish a definition of the spiritual, Carr (1995) argues that the best that can be done is to "search for conceptually relevant or significant distinctions and differences in the labyrinth of usage" regarding the term. Carr is writing from a philosophical perspective, and such an approach is possibly of limited value in the practical world of teaching. Priestley (1985) likewise regards attempts at definition as futile, owing to the "dynamic" nature of the spiritual. He talks of conceptualising the spirit as an attempt to "catch the wind" yet concludes that to educate the spirit is essentially to affect "what a person is and what he or she might become, not just what they can do or might know".

A common thread found in the literature is that spirituality is concerned with the 'inner life' (Dickson, 1997; King, 1996; Rossiter, 1996; White, 1996) or involves some form of transformation of the 'self' (King, 1996; N.C.C., 1993; Wood, 1991). Insofar as spirituality also impinges upon questions of personal belief, (Self, 1997; White, 1996) value and meaning, (King, 1996) it also affects the relationships between the individual and the rest of society and the universe as a whole (Clouder, 1998; Myers, 1997; N.C.C., 1993; Rodger, 1996).

Spirituality is said to engage the emotions (Priestley, 1985), the imagination (Ashton, 1993; Minney, 1991), aesthetic sensitivity (Rossiter, 1996) and the human capacity for awe and wonder (Lear, 1991; White, 1994). Arising out of this engagement comes empathy with others (Minney, 1991) and the ability to construct a personally meaningful, coherent and comprehensive outlook on life (Wood, 1991).

For the purposes of this study, spirituality will be taken to mean that form of human awareness or capacity which enables pupils to perceive and appreciate aspects of phenomena or experiences

8

beyond or beneath the obvious or mundane (Ochs, 1983), and to relate to these aspects in such a way as to weave them into the fabric of their lives. It is characterised by a process in which matters at the heart and root of existence shape and change a pupil's relationship with reality, through the personal acquisition of meaning and values. This implies an awareness that spirituality is not merely a way of knowing, but also a way of being and doing. On the basis of this definition, the task of the school would seem to be to present pupils with opportunities to explore beneath the surface of phenomena and suggest ways in which relationships might be established between themselves and the said phenomena.

Spiritual contexts

The contexts which are said to promote spirituality depend in part on whether a secular or religious framework is envisaged. There are a few writers with feet in both camps, who maintain that, rightly understood, all education is a spiritual activity whilst of special significance are religious traditions since they specifically address matters of morality, personal relationships and personal searches for meaning (Hill, 1989; Kibble, 1996; King, 1996; Priestley, 1985; Webster, 1987 & 1995).

For secularists the whole curriculum is an avenue to the spiritual and what is of major importance is the provision of contexts which stimulate and support spiritual development (Rodger, 1996). Foremost are opportunities throughout the curriculum to reflect upon natural beauty or mystery, works of art, music or other human constructions, and deeds or occurrences which evoke a range of emotional responses (Lear, 1991; Minney, 1991; White, 1994 & 1996).

Those who locate spirituality within a religious framework look to collective worship and RE to promote spiritual development. Wood (1991) believes that spiritual formation is non-normative in that it says nothing about the sorts of capacities and dispositions that pupils should develop, these being appropriate only to a particular religious tradition. There are those who claim that whilst spiritual experience might occur in individuals who are outside any

religious tradition, such experience needs the mediation of a tradition in order to be expressed or shared (Lealman, 1986). Marenbon (1996) warns that any attempt to promote spirituality in schools, stripped of religious ritual and doctrine is an attempt to find something between every religion and none, and will ultimately result in a threat to academic provision. He argues that to include the teaching of morality and spirituality in the curriculum will reduce the time available for academic subjects, provide teaching in this field which will lack intellectual rigour, dilute the quality of teaching overall because matters will need to be addressed that are irrelevant to the main concerns of academic subjects and will reduce the academic content of teacher training courses to allow for training in moral and spiritual education.

Collective worship is sometimes seen as an opportunity to focus explicitly on those areas of human experience such as beliefs, values, feelings and aspirations which impact on individuals' lives (McCreery, 1993) and to lead to an appreciation of the trans-personal, (those concerns outside or beyond the immediate), the transcendent, (those matters arrived at following a process of going over, beyond or through various obstacles or limitations which may lead to changes in the individual), the mystical or the numinous, (pertaining to the divine), (Kibble, 1996), or to "love God" (Kelly, 1990).

RE, insofar as it introduces pupils to aspects of religion beyond the public phenomena, i.e. to the believers' inner experiences of the sacred, is deemed to provide an empathetic route to spiritual development (Hammond et al., 1990). By "empathetic route" is meant an awareness that one's own point of view is not the only one, and having the opportunity to see things from other perspectives, stepping albeit metaphorically into another person's shoes and attempting to appreciate the feelings they may experience. This approach is offered in contrast to one which concentrates purely on external phenomena such as rituals, doctrine or moral stances, avoiding the experience of the believer, possibly from fear of the charge of indoctrination or possibly because it is more common in late twentieth-century Britain to value the scientific, the rational or the material world rather than the inner experiences of believers (Hammond et al., 1990).

Accessing the Spiritual

There is a certain amount of agreement in the literature as to the kinds of activities which are assumed to access the spiritual. This is despite the fact that some writers contend that spiritual growth is not subject to direct influence by the decisions or actions of others (McCreery, 1996; Rodger, 1996; Rossiter, 1996).

Priestley (1985) suggests that it is "style and manner" rather than content which evokes and excites the human spirit, a theme which is taken up by King (1985) who provides a series of 7 "exploratory steps" which she envisions as a journey, via the senses with young children. These steps, she argues:

1) "encourage a questioning and searching attitude about the self",

2) "arrange for periods of quiet, of silence, of relaxation and recollection for the purpose of inner listening",

3) "explore the theme of being rooted" by exploring one's own family, culture and traditions,

4) "practice acts of awareness to develop the sense of wonder",

5) "cultivate openness of mind and heart",

6) "develop the sense of one's own value and worth",

7) "explore the nature of human fulfilment" through literature, poetry, painting and music. (p. 138)

Implicit in these 'steps' is the notion that the spiritual journey begins with the self and progresses towards an understanding and appreciation of that which lies beyond.

Hill's (1989) list of 7 objectives for assisting spiritual development across the curriculum, whilst not presented in detail here, also includes activities and approaches which develop critical and evaluative reasoning capacities, provide opportunities to exercise powers of self-initiated learning, imagination and creative production and enlarge the capacity for empathising with others. What is significant about the methods endorsed by these writers is that they recognise the necessity for active pupil involvement in a process which is both inductive and practical, whereby doing leads to being and action forms the basis for reflection (King, 1985). In other words, spiritual development, like learning in general, is not a simple matter of receiving appropriate knowledge

and attitudes, but involves constructing certain changes within the individual, (von Glasersfeld, 1989).

McClure (1996) suggests that the spiritual dimension shares certain characteristics with other forms of learning, e.g. the engagement of imagination, emotions, cognition and reason. In addition, certain capacities and predispositions are also required of an individual whatever form of learning is involved, namely, the capacity for silence and reflection, the ability to listen and concentrate and the capacity to become totally absorbed.

Spiritual development?

There is an assumption amongst most writers on spirituality that all children are endowed with an innate spiritual capability (Myers, 1997; White, 1996). What is disputed, however, is how this capability changes through time. Rodger (1996) and Webster (1995) claim that we are at a very early stage in the systematic understanding of spirituality and that 'growth' in this area is by no means automatic. Doubt is even expressed by some as to the suitability of using the term development in relation to the spiritual at all (Rossiter, 1996). White (1994) argues that because learning is a social enterprise and not a natural process, developmentalist views get in the way of pupils' learning. It is more a matter of inducting pupils into socially approved standards. This could be characterised as a straightforward clash between advocates of the classical tradition in education and the view of the romantics.

The classical view has probably been best presented by Hirst (1970) who distinguished seven 'forms of knowledge', each 'form' characterised by distinctive clusters of concepts, logical structures, testable expressions and exploratory techniques and skills. According to this view the concepts associated with spirituality, whilst not constituting such a 'form of knowledge' into which pupils are initiated, might nevertheless comprise a sub-section of a 'form' or make up a 'field' of knowledge which draws concepts from several 'forms' (Hirst, 1973). Unfortunately, Hirst does not make reference to spirituality, and a discussion concerning the place of spiritual concepts within this theory of knowledge is beyond the scope of this present research. The romantic view holds that

spirituality is an essential human characteristic which grows as a result of personal interaction with the external world (Golby, 1989).

Notions of development and growth imply an initial genetic state which gradually unfolds towards a state of maturity. This analogy may be misleading since, insofar as spirituality is an aspect of mental life and mental life is considered open ended, can we speak of a state of spiritual maturity beyond which we cannot go? And how do we characterise spiritual maturity (White, 1994)? However spiritual change is characterised it is reckoned by many to involve a lifelong process of encounter and response to the personal experience of life itself, most of which actually takes place outside of school (Kibble, 1996). This perspective is shared by Rossiter (1996) who states that the nature of spiritual change is so complex, involving emotions, attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour, and is influenced by so many non-school factors, that it is not realistic to postulate simple causal links between the schools' interventions and pupils' personal development.

Minney (1991) however, claims there is a scale of progression for spiritual development beginning with wonderment at natural beauty through wonderment induced by great music or art, to admiration of great deeds or the noblest human qualities and the arousal of appropriate feelings in response to disasters and/or acts of violence. Wood (1991) prefers to speak of spiritual formation rather than development. Those who are "well formed" spiritually have the capacity and disposition to think, feel and act according to their chosen world view.

A different approach, expressed in terms of stages, is offered by Peck and Covey (1997). Peck's 4 stages are:
1) chaotic/anti-social,
2) formal/institutional,
3) sceptic/individual and
4) mystical/communal.

Stage 1 is characterised by a certain unruliness and chaos which becomes intolerable to the point where, often after a sudden conversion, there is a desire to submit to the authority of a religious institution, Stage 2. In time, the teachings of the institutions are questioned and disbelief may lead to the abandonment of religion

altogether, Stage 3. Stage 4 is characterised by a sense of community and interconnectedness with the world where the language of religion may be used but expressing somewhat different ideas.

Covey (op.cit.) speaks of 'dependence', 'independence' and 'interdependence'. The dependence stage appears to match Peck's 2nd Stage, where an institution provides order and meaning. The independence stage corresponds with Peck's 3rd stage where instead of relying on others, people start thinking for themselves. The interdependent stage is characterised by an understanding that dependence and independence are not mutually exclusive and that what is important is co-operation and mutual and shared reliance.

Both authors recognise that there are not always clearly marked transitions between the stages and a certain amount of two-way movement among them is possible, but they serve as a map, an analytical tool for understanding the process of spiritual development. In the primary school it might be expected that the majority of pupils would be operating at the dependence stage, with the very youngest possibly still in a state of spiritual chaos, but if pupils are encouraged to think for themselves, some may well take on the characteristics of Peck's sceptic stage.

Levine (1999) offers a different model of cognitive capacities in relation to spirituality. She argues that an analysis of the cognitive processes involved in adult spiritual experiences reveals that they are precisely those which children possess. She rejects traditional psychological models which formulate children's cognition as deficient when compared with that of adults', suggesting that a hierarchical stage theory of cognitive skills is unhelpful, if not positively misleading when considering how children might be helped to develop spiritually.

In order to describe the cognitive underpinnings of spirituality, Levine has selected what she claims to be "core features of those human expressions which are claimed to reveal the spiritual" from within the Christian, Judaic and Buddhist traditions. She has deduced that when adults experience union with God, faith, or

engage in ritual or interpret sacred texts as having multiple levels of meaning, they crucially employ specific cognitive skills which children habitually exhibit. These cognitive skills include the ability to suspend the self-other dichotomy and the rules of Aristotelian logic in favour of what she designates "metaphorical logic". In addition, spiritual experience requires the temporary rejection of socially constructed schemas, as well as the suspension of both the correspondence theory of truth and hypothetic-deductive reasoning.

A detailed rehearsal of Levine's arguments is beyond the scope of the present research, but the implications for schools and for assembly practices in relation to pupils' spiritual development could be far reaching in that it could be argued that if schools designed opportunities to utilise their pupils' inherent cognitive skills, spiritual experiences would be taking place. There would be no need to speak of the spiritual as a condition to be worked towards, but rather a type of experience for which provision is made.

The notion of spiritual development is also challenged by Watson (2000) from a somewhat different perspective. Her research into the descriptions of spirituality provided by respondents from across a range of religious and non-religious backgrounds leads her to conclude that whilst spiritual experiences might be universally similar in quality, it is individual beliefs which shape what is understood by spirituality. She maintains that the current trend in education is to use a model of spirituality which assumes that everyone has a spiritual nature, that spirituality is experientially based, and that it can be developed by general classroom methods. This model, she contends, both ignores the diversity which exists in people's understandings of spirituality and appears to reject the notion that spiritual development can only take place meaningfully within the context of a particular belief system.

She argues that in a pluralist society the state education system should not be promoting one particular model of spirituality. Instead of attempting to 'develop' all pupils, irrespective of faith or life stance, what schools should be doing is encouraging pupils to explore different models of spirituality, ultimately allowing them to make their own sense of the world and their place in it, in

recognition of the fact that each individual is responsible for making their own spiritual progress along their chosen path. In other words knowledge about the spiritual content of a particular religious belief system can provide insight into the meaning and value that that religion has for its followers and has a place in the school curriculum. It might even help some pupils on their spiritual journey, but Watson feels spiritual development and its experiential dimension is definitely not the proper concern of state schools. Clearly this perspective removes spiritual development from the curriculum of non-denominational schools and from their assembly agendas and sits in direct contrast with the views of Levine as outlined above.

The Nature of Teacher Intervention

If we accept that changes in the spiritual take place throughout life and in response to many out of school influences, then the impact of schooling can only be partial. Some writers have questioned the appropriateness of embarking on such intervention with very young children (Ashton, 1993; McCreery, 1996), with Robinson (1982) claiming that contact with adults can lead to a withering, not a flowering of the spirit. In contrast, others argue that pupils will not only learn more from the people who surround them than from an 'aims and objectives' approach to spiritual development but, there is a direct correlation between children's awareness of the spiritual and the spiritual awareness of their teachers, (McClure, 1996). In other words, the possibility of raising children's spiritual awareness is dependent upon their teachers' spiritual understanding.

Where intervention is deemed desirable and/or necessary there is a recognition in the literature that it needs to start from where the learner is (Myers, 1997; Rodger, 1996). For Rodger (1996, p. 46), "something within (the pupils) will have to be invited to engage with what is offered". Myers (1997) explains this in terms of a familiar object (such as a child's own cuddly toy) being brought into the potentially "new" space of the classroom and perhaps asking the child to talk about it or including the toy in class activities, so that 'mediation' can take place between the newness and what is familiar.

McCreery (1996) argues that development of the spiritual needs to start with the questions pupils ask as they begin their encounter with

the world. Teachers need to find ways of encouraging such questioning and then exploring issues as and when they arise. By this means teachers are more likely to be addressing the spiritual in a way that has meaning for the pupils. Myers (1997) touches on this when she includes everyday experiences as one of the four conditions necessary for spiritual development. The others are:

2)   the provision of hospitable space which equates with the "non-threatening learning environment" posited by Watts and Bentley (1989),

3)   adult presence which equates with Vygotsky's "more knowledgeable other", (Wood, 1994) and

4)   expectation of transcendence which assumes that something new will be acquired by the child as a result of the experience.

This transcendence is a process of going over, beyond or through various limits or obstacles, from the known to the unknown, during which something currently understood on one level takes on a different layer of meaning. In other words, it is incumbent on the caring adult to recognise the potential for spiritual development in a situation and create the right conditions for it to occur.

Recent research (Erricker, 1998) indicates that of crucial importance for effective intervention is the willingness and ability to listen to children's narratives, a point also made by Darby (1996) when she stressed the need for teachers engaged in developing the spiritual to become companions who listen attentively to the significant moments and experiences of children's lives.

In addition to using pupils' questions and narratives about the world as a starting point, Ashton (1993) advocates harnessing their "creative energy for imaginative thought", believing that "human beings become spiritually dead once speculative thought ceases". She clearly values the power of reflective thinking as a route to the spiritual, and warns against the kind of education which encourages pupils to give weight to scientific explanations at the expense of their own imaginings.

This approach is echoed by Levine's (1999, p. 137) thesis that "children's cognition already includes those components which are quintessential to spirituality". The role of the teacher then become

one of providing opportunities for utilising these cognitive skills within the total school experience, including that of assembly, through activities which encourage interpretation, speculation, fantasising, experimentation, problem solving and role play, thereby enabling pupils to encounter the spiritual experientially.

Assessing the Spiritual

There are questions about the ethics of evaluating pupils' spiritual development (Rossiter, 1996). The National Curriculum Council (1993) advises schools not to attempt to assess pupils on their spiritual or moral development. Whether this is because non-cognitive aspects cannot be reasonably measured, (Rossiter, 1996) is not made clear, yet schools are inspected on their provision for spiritual development. It might be argued that unless progress can be measured in some way, provision for this progress cannot be realistically inspected. Alternatively, the appropriateness or worthwhileness of activities designed to promote spiritual development might be assessed by inspectors rather than any outcomes in relation to particular pupils. In other words, inspection might be more usefully directed towards checking the inputs rather than attempting to assess intangible outputs.

Inspecting the Spiritual

An analysis of 54 OFSTED reports chosen at random from primary schools in Somerset and Birmingham (see Appendix 3) reveals a body of understanding pertaining to spiritual development and the respective roles played by assemblies and various curriculum subjects in promoting it. The statutory structure of an OFSTED inspection report requires that comments upon spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are grouped under one heading. Attempts are made to comment separately on these dimensions, usually by means of dedicated paragraphs, but this is not always successful, reflecting possibly a lack of clarity in understanding the difference between, especially, the spiritual and moral elements.

There are guidelines for inspectors about the kinds of activities which address the spiritual aspect of the curriculum. There is, however, a diversity of terms used to describe what is happening to pupils on the spiritual front, but because these terms are not defined, it is difficult to know with any degree of certainty exactly

what the various terms mean. Some reports refer to spiritual 'awareness' (McKechan, 1997; Murray, 1994), others to spiritual 'development' (Clegg, 1995; Highfield, 1997) or 'growth' (Simpson, 1997; Zachary, 1995) and yet others to spiritual 'appreciation' (Wright, 1995) or 'enrichment' (McNally, 1995) and often the terms are used interchangeably without any suggestion that they might carry different meanings (Stokes, 1997).

What is clear, is that the whole curriculum is expected to contribute a spiritual dimension to the pupils' education, and those schools that fail to provide opportunities across the curriculum are criticised for not doing so (Arnold, 1995; Hibbert, 1995; Towl, 1996). Only Maths and Design & Technology were omitted from the list of subjects mentioned in which spiritual matters could be addressed. It may be the official view that these subjects do not provide opportunities for developing pupils' spirituality; a view not shared by Hill (1989) whose seven objectives (op. cit.) apply to all curriculum subjects, or a participant in the pilot study (see Chapter 4 below) who specifically mentions Mathematics lessons as providing opportunities for developing awe and wonder. Recent research by Davies (1998) reports that 41.9% of his sample of primary Headteachers' considered Maths contributed to spiritual development, whilst 26.3% thought similarly of Technology. The activities which are deemed by OFSTED inspectors to promote spirituality include:

        a)   reflection,
        b)   discussion,
        c)   self-expression,
        d)   worship,
        e)   listening and
        f)   exploration.

Reflection

This activity above all others is what the inspectorate deem to promote spirituality. According to Davis (1996), the focus of the quiet reflection should be aspects of the pupils' own lives, whereas Owen (1996d) includes the issues that affect them, and those of others. For Camplin (1996) the focus of reflection should include the significance of faith and prayer, whilst Cole (1996b) suggests it should be the work of great artists.

Discussion and Self-expression

Whereas reflection is essentially an inner activity, discussion and self-expression are outward forms of activity. Highfield (1997) states pupils should be encouraged to contribute their own thoughts and ideas about aspects of human life which raise fundamental questions about purpose and values. Hola (1996) values the opportunity for pupils to express their beliefs and feelings through a variety of media such as the performing and creative arts as well as discussion.

Worship

Daily acts of collective worship consisting of hymn singing and prayers are not considered by Kerly (1994) sufficient for developing spirituality. Inspectors stress the need to incorporate opportunities for reflection upon and discussion about religious and moral themes and spiritual values in order to assist pupils in their personal search for meaning. Among the reports analysed however, there were two instances where it was claimed that saying grace at lunchtime contributed to spiritual development (Simmonds, 1995a and 1995b) and another where short periods of prayer at the close of each morning and afternoon session did likewise (Owen, 1995a). Nowhere was it suggested that these activities were the subject of either reflection or discussion, and hence no justification was offered for the claims.

Listening

Listening to music, poetry and stories is recommended for developing spirituality as long as associated opportunities for reflection, discussion and self-expression are provided (Arnold, 1995; James, 1996; Simpson, 1997).

Exploration

This activity is primarily associated with the natural world. The reports claim that spirituality is enhanced by exploring the wonders of the environment (Clegg, 1995; Stokes, 1997; Bradshaw, 1996a).

The inspectors advocate reflection, discussion and self-expression in most curriculum subjects, during assemblies, collective worship and activities such as Circletime (Cole, 1996a; Davis, 1996; O'Brien, 1997). Active listening is felt to be ideally promoted in

music, literature and poetry lessons as well as assemblies and collective worship (Camplin, 1996; Highfield, 1997). Science lessons are seen to provide the best opportunities for exploration of the natural world (Davies, 1997; Dolley, 1996; Hill, 1996c).

These activities (together with their extended meanings) were printed on to small "attribute" cards and used during the interview phase of both the pilot and main research as an instrument with which to characterise the observed assembly segments (see below).

The attributes of spiritual awareness, development or growth are never clearly defined within the reports, but tantalising glimpses are to be found.
Being spiritual is deemed to involve having the capacity for:
a)   self-knowledge (Hibbert, 1995),
b)   empathy with the feelings of others (O'Brien, 1997),
c)   sensitivity and reverence towards living things (Owen, 1995b),
d)   appreciating family love and caring relationships (Camplin, 1996),
e)   a sense of awe and wonder (Eastwood, 1996),
f)   curiosity (Gossage, 1996),
g)   celebrating human achievements (Owen, 1995a) and
h)   understanding and applying religious principles to their own lives (Davies, 1997).
From this data it would appear, in the minds of the inspectorate certainly, that assemblies which provide those opportunities outlined above could be making a positive contribution towards pupils' spiritual education. Hard evidence that this is so is not only missing from the reports but has not yet been established in the field of educational research.

Assemblies and Collective Worship
The Durham Report of 1970 recognised that many schools tended to use the term 'assembly' to describe the act of worship (McCreery, 1993). Yet schools may assemble together for a variety of reasons (Webster, 1995) and this practice be valued for reasons other than religious ones (O'Keeffe, 1986). In fact an assembly need not involve worship at all (McCreery, 1993).

Smith (1981) believed that the main value of assemblies was to foster community spirit, to promote a feeling of togetherness, which echoed an earlier conclusion (Plowden Report, 1967) that the value of assemblies lay in their unifying role within a school. This notion also finds expression with those who see assemblies as providing important opportunities for generating and reinforcing school ethos (McCreery, 1993; O'Keeffe, 1986) and celebrating shared values (McCreery, 1993).

There is an argument for assemblies to be thought of as an integral part of the school curriculum, contributing to the educational work of the school, rather than something on the sidelines, resistant to change and "the bit that doesn't fit" Hull (1969, 1971, 1975). This view contends that the main concern of the life of the school should be exhibited in the daily assembly (Hull, 1971) and that worship should be banned (Hull, 1969).

Several writers speak of the need for a clear understanding of the nature of school assembly so that in their planning, neither the law nor the philosophy of the school is compromised (Webster, 1995) and staff and pupils can contribute without compromising their own beliefs and values (McCreery, 1993).

Worship

The law requires all county schools to provide a daily act of collective worship (OFSTED, 1994). The 1988 ERA does not explain or justify the purpose or value of worship but assumes it to be an essential part of children's education (McCreery, 1993).

The compatibility of the principles of worship with the principles of education has been questioned (Hull, 1971). So has the frequency of school worship which as a regular act is not always considered an appropriate activity in the community's schools (Holm, 1975). Holm (op. cit.) suggests quality is more important than quantity. The British Council of Churches (1989) argues that education seeks to prepare children to question, scrutinise and evaluate, whereas worship assumes the truth of certain propositions and that these are shared by those in the assembly hall. Rather than insisting on acts of collective worship, assembly practices ought to be providing those experiences which will lead to it (Hull, 1971). There has been

much discussion on the validity of having worship every day, especially when most faith communities do not even demand this of their adherents (McCreery, 1993).

Yet despite these objections, the legislation remains in place, and so attempts have been made to provide a rationale which not only meets these objections but also meets the demands for spiritual education (Gent, 1989; Hull, 1969, 1971 and 1975; O'Keeffe, 1986; Webster, 1995).

The New-style Assembly

If the curriculum is to promote spiritual development it needs to include a learning area that looks directly and specifically at questions of human meaning, purpose and value. We can agree that all subjects should address spiritual issues but this is no substitute for providing curriculum space and time where such issues are the central focus (Rossiter, 1996). Assembly time could provide just such an opportunity as long as it is:

> a) *inclusive, in that it should be an activity and experience to and from which all those involved can contribute and gain, whatever their personal commitment or life stance,*
>
> b) *curricular, in that it must be seen as part of the whole school curriculum and therefore planned, executed and resourced as an "intentional learning experience" which focuses on as well as launches what goes on elsewhere in the school and*
>
> c) *educational, in that as a learning experience it should be "consonant with other educational activities".* (Gent, 1989, pp.6 - 7).

The implications of such an approach could be far reaching in that they conjure a vision of school assemblies very different from that held in the popular mind today. There would be no place for pupils of all faiths or none being expected to offer worship to a named deity (Holm, 1975). A common conception amongst primary aged pupils that assemblies are episodes of amusement for them whilst their teacher prepares the classroom for lessons would hopefully fade away (Smart, 1996). And the learning opportunities could be broadened to include opportunities for:

a)	celebrating achievements and differences;
b)	fostering a sense of group identity and appropriate behaviour for large gatherings and
c)	exposing and reflecting upon common values including moral values (Gent, 1989).

Clearly, collective worship has to be an element within the assembly experience (legally) but this could be interpreted as concerning concepts, principles and conduct which are worthy of celebration as examples of the highest achievements of the human spirit (Hertfordshire, 1989). By adopting this broad definition of worship, whereby all pupils and staff can both contribute and gain, whatever their personal commitment or life stance, and linking it imaginatively with life as the pupils know it (Hull, 1969), it could become possible to educate spiritually without indoctrination or nurture into a specific religion (King, 1985).

Assembly materials

An examination of a selection of published material for primary school assemblies, taken from the staff reference shelves of several Somerset primary schools and the Diocesan Library in Wells, reflects some of the changes that have taken place during the last five decades. The materials can be analysed under the four headings of; aims, format, content and delivery. The oldest works, (Brimer, 1969; Hilton, 1965; Prescott, 1954) clearly reflect the legislation and practice of their day in that assemblies were expected to be a religious service and were to take place at the start of each school day. Editorial comments were addressed to Headteachers who it was assumed would lead the service. The assembly model followed a set pattern:

1)	introduction of the theme,
2)	a child to read a poem or literary extract,
3)	hymn,
4)	introduction to Bible reading,
5)	another child to read extract from the Bible,
6)	the Lord's prayer sung or said,
7)	final prayer completing the service.

There are lists of 'Opening and Closing Sentences', prayers with responses (Prescott, 1954) and the belief that not only would the Lord's Prayer form an integral part of most services but:

"a Scripture reading is always given. The reason is that we believe that the authority of the Bible is needed and can be appreciated even by primary age children." (Brimer, 1969)

There was a suggestion (to Headteachers) that they might consider dramatising some extracts, although "if the reading by the children is good, it is fairly safe to expect the service to be interesting and dignified" (Hilton, 1965).

During the 1970s, although the tradition of Christian, Bible based assemblies was continuing, (Martin *et al*, 1973; Petts, 1978) there were nevertheless indications that certain changes in practice were either already taking place or were thought by some to be desirable (Waters, 1975; Cheston, 1976).

An assembly book for Juniors (Martin *et al*, 1973) states in its Foreword that "the aim in these assemblies is to give the children an experience of prayer and to teach them to pray." Each assembly in this collection consists of a Bible reading, a song, a prayer and a hymn, with children allocated speaking parts to convey the message of the assembly theme. The authors had devised this style of presentation "so that the other children can identify themselves with the speakers more easily". A sense of participation was explicitly mentioned as being a desirable characteristic to promote.

Five years later, Petts (1978) was still referring to his publication as a "book of services" and yet elements of change are detectable. The book's Foreword states that "the services in this book conform to a regular pattern as this helps to produce a serene atmosphere so essential in the morning Act of Worship." The format is:
1)   scripture reading,
2)   key-verse,
3)   hymn,
4)   reading the modern parable,
5)   prayer,
which differs very little from the model suggested in Hilton's book thirteen years previously, but "any visual object which will help to draw the attention of the children and lead their thoughts into the

theme, should be used" (p. viii). Also, "daily, individual prayers will be encouraged if the leader gives a minute of silence for these before reading the set prayer." These two quotations could signal an awareness that pupils need to be actively involved in the assembly experience and have an opportunity for quiet reflection, although the Foreword also states:

"the Bible reading should not be omitted..... here
the main purpose is to instil in the children's minds,
through the modern parable, the teaching behind
the key-verse from the Bible reading".

Apart from the publications by Waters (1975) and Cheston (1976), details of which will be found below, the publications mentioned above, whilst covering a very wide range of subject matter or themes, seemed nevertheless to ignore the possibility that pupils in attendance might not share a Christian religious background. The assembly suggestions were designed for "corporate" worship rather than for the "collective" variety, "corporate" worship being the kind appropriate to a corpus or body of believers, whereas, "collective" worship is appropriate to a collection of people possessing a wide diversity of stances, religious, agnostic or otherwise. There was no mention in either Preface or Foreword of any contribution being made to the spiritual development of pupils.

Waters (1975) however, acknowledges in his Introduction that "the religious, moral and social climate in the country (was) changing..... rapidly". In his opinion therefore, it was no longer the role of the school to tell children what to believe, but through assemblies to impart understanding and insight, not secure commitment, and to influence and inform rather than instruct or indoctrinate. He suggested that what leaders of assemblies ought to be aiming for was a genre of expressed responses from the pupils such as, "that was interesting", "that made me think" or "what am I going to do about that?"

In her Preface, Cheston (1976) also recognised that the school population now included representatives of many different faiths as well as most branches of the Christian church, and suggested it was probably the wisest course to "leave the teaching of religion to the experts and concentrate on finding the basic standards of

behaviour common to all men (sic) of good will no matter what, if any, church or temple they attend(ed)." In other words, she wanted to emphasise a moral dimension to assemblies. In addition, she argued that in order to imbue assemblies with an inclusive characteristic, the period for quiet, if used, could be prefaced with the suggestion, "let us close our eyes and think."

Some publications of traditional assembly formats continued through the 1980s (Brandling, 1983; Farncombe, 1986; Fisher, 1982; Jackson, 1987; Thompson, 1986) but further changes were becoming evident. In the introduction to "Together Today" (Fisher, 1981) recognition is given to the vital role played by assemblies in providing time for "sharing common experiences and interests, and for cherishing individual worth." The themes presented by the book are seen as "meeting points", providing opportunities for discussion, a variety of shared experiences and links to all aspects of the curriculum.

In addition, the author recommends that "efforts should be made to include stories from all the major faiths so that children will gain in their understanding of non-Christian beliefs" (p. 8). The school assembly is no longer seen as a episode in Christian nurture, but according to the dust jacket, can be integrated with the curriculum to become a focal point in the life of the school, and by drawing on the cultural heritage of countries all round the world, is more suited to "our own multi-racial environment".

Furthermore, in the paragraph on prayers, it is stated that:
> "children should be allowed to think on themes themselves in a receptive and relaxed way. To listen, to be still, to experience oneself as a whole being - this too is a form of prayer." (p. 9)

Although the question of spiritual development is not addressed overtly, I would contend that the seed of the concept is being propagated in the above quotation.

Barratt (1982) claims that her approach in "The Tinder-box Assembly Book" ought to be thought of as "pre-religious", its aim being to develop "moral and spiritual awareness". In the five sections entitled Self, Others, Surroundings, Times of Difficulty and

Celebrations, she explicitly sets out how these themes might achieve this aim by:

> a) exploring what it is to be a human being by investigating different aspects of the personality: appearance and characteristics, emotions and needs,
> b) exploring the children's close relationships with other people and the relationships between human beings and other living things,
> c) sympathising with other people's points of view, and
> d) encouraging the children to realise and observe more closely the effects on them and others of the immediate surroundings (p. 3).

This is the earliest overt reference to spiritual development in an assembly book for teachers that could be found.

Not only were the aims of assemblies changing, but so too were their format, their content and the style of delivery. Brandling (1983) claimed in his introduction that "the modern assembly in a primary school is a very different occasion from that envisaged by those educationalists who decreed obligatory collective worship in the 1944 Education Act." And Hasler (1986) in his introduction, although writing for the 11 - 18 age group, maintained that "the traditional school assembly seems nearing its end". Publications were no longer specifically designed for use by Headteachers in recognition that "almost anybody in school may be asked to 'do an assembly' nowadays" (Griffin, 1983).

Assembly themes were becoming more varied, drawing upon pupils' own experiences, non-Christian religions, folklore, legend and factual passages, (Worsnop, 1980), and several authors were advocating closer links with the wider curriculum. Vause (1985) justified her provision of a wide range of curricular ideas by stating that "all fields of study have something to offer in extending the child's capacity to grasp and understand religious ideas" and Taylor (1981) argued that:

> "it is important to link the assembly theme with classroom work, for it is in the classroom that questions about belief as well as practice may

> *begin to come as the children of different cultural*
> *and faith backgrounds share their experience and*
> *knowledge"* (p. x).

Another development during the 1980s concerned style of delivery. The assembly as religious service was giving way to assembly as performance, possibly even, entertainment. Witcher (1982, p. 6) encouraged the presentation of assemblies that:

> *"will involve the whole class in some capacity, giving*
> *opportunity for participation in varying ways: singing,*
> *making music, acting, drawing and painting, reading*
> *and so on."*

She emphasised the essential role of music, not only to create a mood, but also to bind the school together by way of the shared act of listening and/or participating. In addition, along with Griffin (1983) and Taylor (1981), she encouraged the inclusion of drama in the assembly format on the grounds that, not only had it been a vehicle for teaching Christian truths for centuries, but was also, along with dance, a mode of presentation common to other religions.

The notion of assembly as performance is presented most obviously in Dingwall (1986). Based on his argument that "pupils are accustomed to watching television programmes where they have to be 'won over' quickly, or they will switch off or change the channel" (p. v), he provides guidelines for assemblies which conform to an audio/visual formula. The introduction must be brief (two to three minutes) and gain the immediate attention of the audience, introduce some of the main elements of the subject and make a strong impact. Any chosen narrative, dialogue, music or visual aids according to Dingwall must highlight the contemporary nature of the assembly theme and involve culturally diverse source material. He refers to the assembly participants as the 'production team' and says that "participants should be chosen carefully..... and given the opportunity to use their talents and skills to the full" (p. vii). Live music is to be preferred over disc or cassette, and with much talk about timings, audibility and rehearsals it is clear that the aim is performance " to enable morning assemblies to be both more relevant to the needs of today's schools and more enjoyable". This idea that assemblies should be enjoyable is

echoed by the General Synod Board of Education (1983) and Witcher (1982).

An examination of post '88 publications reveals that spiritual concerns are now stated as central to the purposes of assembling, (Beesley, 1993; Bond, 1992; Cooling, 1995; King, 1990; Lovelace, 1993; P.F.P., 1997; Self, 1997; Wood, 1991; Wright, 1995). In her "Assembly Kit", Wood (1991) states:

> "The spiritual development of pupils - the first educational aim stated in the ERA 1988 - and what have come to be called 'spirituality across the curriculum' and children's 'spiritual entitlement' lie at the heart of the quality of worship that children can be offered" (p. 8).

To reflect both the wording and the intention of the '88 Act, publications for use in the 1990s now present assemblies as opportunities for worship once again, of serious educational significance rather than episodes of entertainment with moral undertones.

Assembly formats are largely unchanged in that they continue to avoid the rigid "Bible, hymn, prayer" formula still common twenty years previously, preferring to encourage diverse activities and experiences which might include stories, songs and prayers but which also invite a range of responses including awareness, appreciation and adoration of, respect and preference for and commitment and devotion to, a variety of stimuli and phenomena. In particular most authors assume that an opportunity will be provided for quiet reflection (Bond, 1992; Endean, 1996; McDonnell, 1990; Williams, 1989; Wood, 1991; Wright, 1995) whilst others promote techniques such as stilling, relaxation or creative visualisation (also known as guided imagery or guided fantasy) as methods for acknowledging, exploring and developing the spiritual dimension of life (Beesley, 1990; Blackburn D.B. of E., undated; Stone, 1992).

The range of content remains wide despite the requirement that acts of collective worship should be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" (ERA, 1988). By concentrating on those characteristics shared by Christians and other traditions it is

intended that assemblies should be "purposeful collective spiritual act(s)" which encourage the full participation of staff and pupils (Brown and Brown, 1992). To this end several authors urge caution when using material such as prayers or songs which are specific to any one faith or which assume commitment. Brown and Brown (*op. cit.*) suggest that such material could be prefaced by words like " this is a prayer that is very important to some people, to Christians/Jews/me, etc." (p. 11).

Some changes in style of delivery are also discernible. Celebration rather than pure performance is in vogue (Beesley, 1993; Bond, 1992; Cole and Evans-Lowndes, 1991) and the role of the assembly leader is being promoted as one of "spiritual director" (Blackburn D.B. of E., *op. cit.*) rather than 'master of ceremonies'! In other words, there seems to be a growing sense, although largely unstated, that assembly leaders are once again responsible for the learning outcomes of the assembly experience and therefore need to plan and present with knowledge, understanding and skill.

Summary of Key Points and Implications for Research Questions

The original research questions concerned the nature of:

a)   assembly practices;
b)   the experiences likely to promote the spiritual in pupils;
c)   the relationship between assembly practices and pupil's
        spiritual development and
d)   the perspectives teachers bring to the assembly experience.

The literature review revealed the problematic nature of defining spirituality and therefore it is likely that teachers themselves will hold a variety of understandings of the term. It also suggested the kinds of experiences which are considered likely to promote spiritual development (however defined), although these remain somewhat speculative at present, and an analysis of assembly practices would reveal the extent to which those experiences are currently being provided.

Concerning the perspectives which teachers bring to the assembly experience, the literature review also suggested ways in which this might be shaped by teachers' own understanding of spiritual development, the role which they ascribe to assemblies within the

whole school experience and the extent to which they are familiar with and act upon published assembly material. The research questions can therefore be further refined to take into account such factors as:

a)   views on the purpose of school assemblies;

b)   the nature of spirituality;

c)   the nature of teacher intervention in developing the spiritual in pupils and

d)   the influence of published assembly materials.

These questions can now be re-stated as:

1)   What experiences are provided by current assembly practices?

2)   Which of the current assembly practices are deemed conducive to pupils' spiritual development?

3)   What perspectives on the spiritual are held by those delivering the assembly experience?

4)   What factors affect the choice of assembly activities?

The findings may have implications for initial teacher training, INSET or suggest modifications to our present understanding of the spiritual in the curriculum.

Chapter 3

An Account and Critique of the
Methodology employed in Data Gathering

The Nature of Research

All research belongs to a tradition or paradigm which makes assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge and the goals and aims of the research process (Maione, 1997). These ontological and epistemological underpinnings have methodological implications which can broadly characterise research as either qualitative or quantitative. Research within the qualitative tradition assumes that what constitutes reality cannot be separated from people's perspectives and perceptions, and that knowledge is the elicitation of perspectives, points of view and culturally specific actions. In addition it generally rejects the notion of a single reality to be uncovered, or that generalisations and causalities are to be revealed through such systematic scientific methods as hypothesis setting and testing.

In qualitative research, theory is often inducted from layers of evidence gathered during narrow investigations focusing on a specific area, the purpose of which is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the meanings and definitions of a situation as presented by informants. Truth claims within this tradition exist in the context of respondent validity, "saturated" concepts and the explanatory power of the interpretations rather than in the context of potential falsification through replicability of tests. This chapter will seek to explain these terms more fully and provide the theoretical underpinnings for the research as set out in Chapters 4 and 5.

The purpose of the present research is to throw light on why, according to OFSTED, collective worship in schools (or in common parlance, assembly) is not adequately promoting pupils' spiritual development. Although the research design includes features which, it is hoped, will enhance the likelihood that the results will "speak to situations beyond the one(s) immediately studied" (Schofield, 1993), its main aim is not to produce a representative

and unbiased measurement of the views of a population, but to deepen understanding of a social phenomenon by conducting an in depth analysis of the articulated consciousness of the actors involved in that phenomenon (Wainwright, 1997). For this purpose a case study approach will be adopted.

Case *Study*

The quintessential characteristic of case studies according to Tellis (1997) is that they strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action which are sets of activities engaged in by the actors in a social situation. They may seek to describe, understand or explain and can be single or multiple-case designs.

Because the focus of the present research was the "natural setting" of school assemblies and the "perspectives" of those taking them, a case study approach was considered most appropriate. Natural setting in this context means a situation which occurs normally during the day-to-day activity of the school and can be contrasted with the setting up of an artificial experiment (Open University, 1994). And since schools are obliged to hold assemblies each day, they are indeed situations which occur normally and therefore qualify as "natural settings". In addition the case study method is ideally suited to the focus on one particular element of an organisation, of which assemblies are specific examples (Blaxter *et al.*, 1996).

Case studies are said to be examinations of instances in action, whereby elements of a situation can be captured, portrayed and given meaning by the study of particular incidents and events and the selective combination of information on biography, personality, intentions and values (Walker, 1993). It is usual for case studies to use a mixture of data collection methods, typically, personal observation of particular incidents and events, conversations with informants to ascertain biographical information and possibly that concerning personality and straightforward interviewing to discover intentions and values (Bell, 1992; Blaxter *et al.*, 1996; Walker, 1993). The case study approach is concerned principally with the interaction of factors and events (Bell, 1992) and therefore an obvious choice for investigating the factors affecting the choice of assembly activities.

Validity Issues

Case study research is however considered to present some problems. As in all research, consideration must be given to validity, whether construct, internal or external validity, and reliability. A frequent criticism is that where it depends on a single case it is rendered incapable of providing a generalising conclusion. Although issues of generalisability have traditionally been given very low priority by qualitative researchers or considered irrelevant to their goals (Schofield, 1993), where the purpose of research is to shed light on an issue affecting more than one site, the question of generalisability becomes relevant. Since this research concerns the relationship between school assemblies and spiritual development in pupils, an issue affecting all schools in the state sector, potential generalisability needs to be considered.

In redefining generalisability for qualitative research as "fittingness", Schofield (1993) argues that studies gain their potential for applicability to other situations by providing "comparability" and "translatability", for which "thick description" is essential. Citing Goetz and LeCompte (1984), comparability:

> "refers to the degree to which components of a study - including the units of analysis, concepts generated, population characteristics, and settings - are sufficiently well described and defined that other researchers can use the results of the study as a basis for comparison." (Schofield, op. cit. p. 97)

"Translatability" refers to a clear description of theoretical stance and research techniques. "Thick description", which involves producing "densely textured facts" about a social context (Jary & Jary, 1995) provides the information upon which a judgement is made about the degree or extent of "fit". "Thick descriptions" provide sufficient information to enable comparisons (by way of similarities and differences) to be made between one study site and another making possible reasoned judgements concerning the likelihood that the findings from one study would provide a working hypothesis about what might occur at another (Schofield, 1993).

Tellis (1997) argues that the relative size of the sample does not transform even a multiple-case design into a macroscopic study. He contends that case studies do not need to have a minimum number of cases, or have the cases themselves randomly selected because it is not sampling logic that contributes to generalisability, rather it is replication logic. In other words, the single case studied is not taken to be representative of a total population, but the theory generated from the study is likely to be replicated at other sites. Citing Yin (1994), Tellis (1997) argues that results from multiple-case designs can strengthen the robustness of a theory. Case selection must therefore be done so as to maximise what can be learned in the period available for study.

From a somewhat different perspective Schofield argues that site selection should be made on the basis of typicality rather than convenience or ease of access since this enhances potential generalisability:

> "If policy-makers need to decide how to change a
> program or whether to continue it, one very
> obvious and useful kind of information is
> information on how the program usually functions,
> what is usually achieved, and the like" (Schofield,
> 1993, p. 98).

And whilst the study could involve any school site, however unusual or atypical, and still claim to be studying "what is", research which maximises the "fit" between its chosen sites and what typically exists in LEAs is likely to be more useful for understanding and possibly improving a particular educational aspect.

A further justification for multi-site studies is that they are said to help to eliminate "radical particularism" where the peculiarities of a particular site might be mistakenly assumed to apply elsewhere. Schofield (op. cit.) argues that a finding from several heterogeneous sites is likely to be "more robust" than one emerging from several similar sites. In the context of this research, whilst the initial study involved Voluntary Aided schools in both rural and suburban locations, the main study initially selected settings which included County schools, infant, junior, first and primary as well as urban, sub-urban and rural in order to fulfil the requirement for heterogeneity. All the selected sites however had received a good

showing in recent OFSTED reports as far as the spiritual development of pupils was concerned because:

a) schools with poor showings on spiritual development might feel too exposed, or involved in measures to improve the situation to take part, and

b) schools with good showings might reveal a higher incidence of assembly elements which are deemed conducive to spiritual development.

Further difficulties with case study research concern construct validity or reactivity and bias. Because this has to do with the extent to which a method of data collection possesses the quality of being sound or true e.g. a sound portrayal of an event, or a true reflection of a person's views, (Jary and Jary, 1995) it is necessary to take measures which will minimise opportunities for distortion. This is also called "content validity" (Nuttall, 1989) or "descriptive validity" (Open University, 1993, pp. 16 - 19). The validity of qualitative research commonly rests upon unobtrusive measures to ensure data reflect the scene studied, triangulation and respondent validation (Open University, 1996).

Although case study typically involves a lower level of reactivity than other approaches, such as the experiment, where the artificiality of the situation may lead subjects to respond in a different way to normal, this source of potential error is not absent (Open University, 1996). Researchers cannot be completely unobtrusive. The very presence of an observer at an assembly is likely to be a departure from the norm, and when signalled in advance, could encourage "performance mode" and thereby distort what might normally have occurred. Nevertheless, where disturbance of the natural scene is minimal, the less the likelihood that subjects will react to the researcher's presence.

The assembly observations in this research were planned to be non-participatory and so minimise reactivity. Triangulation is the employment of a number of different research techniques in an attempt to achieve descriptive validity (Jary and Jary, 1995). Respondent validation occurs when the findings and the researcher's interpretations appear credible to those involved. It is

a means by which a respondent can verify whether their views, understandings or actions are being accurately portrayed.

Data gathering by means of observation is considered largely non-reactive (Open University, 1996), but inherent in the use of any human instruments, such as researchers and subjects, is the possibility of bias affecting the study in unanticipated and unacknowledged ways owing to the private expectations, desires and interests of those instruments (Walker, 1993). Researchers themselves will affect the conduct of any research and its findings as a result of their own perspectives. Although complete objectivity is deemed impossible, researchers need to be aware of the ways in which they influence their research and openly acknowledge where such personal bias might be present (Blaxter et al., 1996).

Tellis (1997) suggests three remedies for strengthening construct validity; namely, multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence and having draft reports reviewed by key informants. In this research the interviews themselves would provide an opportunity for the assembly takers to validate the data from the observation (multiple sources of evidence) since this data is intended to form the basis of a focused interview schedule. The opportunity to read and comment upon their own interview data is also to be offered to the respondents (respondent validation or review by key informants).

Internal validity and reliability are also seen as problematic. Internal validity concerns the relationship between the collected data and the claims made on the basis of that data. In explanatory case studies where propositional inferences are made from the data generated, if a claim accurately explains why a situation has the features ascribed to it, the term "explanatory validity" has been coined to apply to it (Open University, 1993). If the reason for assemblies not effectively developing pupils' spiritual development is because appropriate activities are not included, and the data gathered suggests that this is so, then this aspect of the research can be said to have "explanatory validity".

Pattern-matching is considered a useful analytical strategy for linking data to propositions (Tellis, 1997: Trochim, 1989). This

technique compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one. If the patterns match, the internal validity of the study is enhanced. It is most useful in explanatory case studies since explanation building can be thought of as a form of pattern matching.

Care, however, needs to be taken with this approach. The actual comparison between the predicted and actual pattern might not have any quantitative criteria and therefore the discretion of the researcher is required for interpretations. In addition, explanation building is an iterative process which can result in loss of focus, a problem which Chenail (1997) believes can be rectified by the use of what he calls the "Qualitative Research Plumb Line". In essence this procedure is simply a regular reference to one's research questions in order to establish whether the data being collected and the analysis of that data is helping to answer the original research questions.

Walker (1993, p.177) refers to reliability as "the degree of fit between the construct and the data", but argues that in case studies the usual problems of reliability are by-passed "by passing responsibility for them on to the audience" (p. 178). In other words the audiences' representations are as significant as the researchers'. Tellis (1997) believes that reliability is achieved by the development of what is referred to as a "case study protocol". A case study protocol not only contains the research instruments, but also the procedures and rules for using those instruments (essential in multi-case studies). The protocol is not only a major component in asserting reliability but also contributes to replicability. In the initial study of this research the researcher and "audience" were one and the same, so of greater importance was the aspect of reliability which relates to replicability.

Walker (1993) recognises that educational situations are rarely replicable but argues that reliability is increased where clear and explicit procedures are brought to each instance of data gathering. In other words, could other researchers apply the data gathering procedures without ambiguity in the same or similar situations and obtain comparable data? A major task of the initial study was therefore to design, apply and refine such procedures

both in readiness for the main research and with a view to enhancing reliability (Bell, 1992).

Philips (1993) states that qualitative research is subject to a variety of threats to its validity which other authors ascribe in part to the complexity of social interactions, which are seen as being characterised by the creation of multiple realities involving the construction of phenomena (Open University, 1994). In a general way, validity, also has to do with the relationship between the data to be obtained and the research questions. Clearly the collected data needs to be appropriate to the matter being investigated or the problem to be solved and different types of research questions will require different types of evidence.

Pilot Research

The focus of the initial study was school assemblies and whether the proposed research methodology and instruments would provide relevant data about:
a) pupils' ages and social and religious backgrounds;
b) the physical assembly environment;
c) what activities actually took place in the selected assemblies;
d) which, if any, of these activities were, according to current thinking, deemed conducive to pupils' spiritual development;
e) what perspectives on the spiritual were held by those delivering the assembly experience;
f) what relevant training has been received by assembly takers and
g) what factors affected the choice of these assembly activities.

Information about pupils' ages, social and religious backgrounds are recorded in OFSTED reports available via the Internet. Details pertaining to the environment in which assemblies take place is best obtained by direct observation. To find out what activities actually take place in an assembly, direct observation of those activities is more reliable than recollected data from either the assembly taker or pupils in attendance, or from planning documents. Recollections tend to be both subjective and selective

(Smart, 1996) and whilst planning documents, where they exist, might provide intentions in outline, they cannot provide the detail of what actually occurs.

For the perspectives on the spiritual held by those delivering the assembly experience, their relevant training and the factors affecting the choice of the assembly activities it is appropriate to obtain this information directly from the assembly takers. Such data can be gathered either by personal interview or questionnaire. A recent study by Davies (1998) to ascertain Headteachers' understanding of pupils' spiritual development and which aspects of schooling contribute to this used a detailed questionnaire combining both multiple choice questions and responses to topics on a five point Likert-type scale. Whilst it might be felt that this method is well suited to gathering general information, personal interviews can elicit information of a more specific nature, such as the reasoning behind the inclusion of particular activities in a targeted assembly.

The appropriate evidence for linking assembly activities directly with pupils' spiritual development is rather more problematic. Since there is as yet no method of assessing pupils' spiritual development and establishing a causal link between assembly items and individual pupil's spiritual competence, the best that can be achieved is to evaluate the likelihood of spiritual development being affected by elements in assemblies. And for this purpose, assembly activities need to be assigned to categories which might be considered conducive to spiritual development. Whilst this might be done by the researcher alone on the basis of their observations, an underlying purpose of this present research is to establish the extent to which assembly takers themselves are aware of and deliberately plan for what is likely to promote pupils' spiritual development. It would seem desirable therefore to gather this information directly from respondents by asking them to assign activities to the various categories. The accuracy and implications of such assignment can of course be evaluated at the data analysis stage.

The pilot research, therefore, was designed to include the direct observation of a number of primary school assemblies and

interviews with the assembly takers to ascertain their perspectives on the spiritual and what factors shape their assemblies. A detailed account of that pilot research follows in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Conduct of the Pilot Research

The initial study into assembly perspectives and practices was carried out at three Somerset primary schools for the purpose of conducting trial observations and interviews, including the piloting of a self-designed research instrument in the form of attribute cards. The results of the initial study, together with an assessment of the difficulties and limitations encountered, suggested refinements required in the main research the details of which are set out below.

The literature review revealed the diversity of philosophical stances underpinning views about pupils' spiritual development and the relationship between such views and the school curriculum. Any investigation into teachers' perspectives on spirituality and the role of assemblies in developing spirituality in pupils might be expected to reflect such diversity of views and suggest, possibly, which of these perspectives are likely to impact upon spiritual development.

The literature review also suggested the kinds of experiences which are considered likely to promote pupils' spiritual development and an analysis of current assembly practices could indicate the extent to which these experiences were being provided in the target schools. If Her Majesty's Inspectors are correct in identifying a need for more attention to be given to the way spiritual development might be promoted through collective worship (OFSTED, 1994), then one might expect to find an absence of some, if not all, of these experiences from school assemblies.

Assembly practices, however, are affected by a range of factors. As well as teachers' own understandings of spiritual development, tradition, training, published materials, legislation, diocesan requirements (in the case of Church schools), pupils' age, aptitude and background, and physical environment can all shape the assembly experience.

Four schools (identified only as Schools A, H, M and Y) were approached by letter initially requesting the opportunity to conduct a small piece of pilot research, the nature of which was briefly described. A follow-up phone call to the Headteachers established that three schools (A, H and M) were interested and two appointments were made (at Schools H and M) to discuss the project in greater detail. The Head of School A was content to arrange a date for observing an assembly at the time of the follow-up phone call, but a problem arose subsequently which, despite measures taken to avoid a similar situation, occurred again in the main research.

It was made clear by the Head of School A that he wanted the observation to be of one of the regular assemblies delivered by local religious leaders who also worked closely with other Church schools in the area. Although it had been anticipated that observations and interviews would be of teachers rather than visiting assembly takers, the offer was accepted in view of the fact that the primary purpose of the initial study was to test the data gathering techniques. Unfortunately since the "subjects" had neither been consulted nor informed of my intentions, they were observed (without their prior knowledge) but subsequently declined to take part in any interview.

A similar situation occurred at School M where the Head set a date for observation of a particular assembly without prior consultation with the teacher concerned. Fortunately she had been advised of my arrival and agreed subsequently to take part in a follow-up interview. No such problems arose in School H since it was the Head who was to be interviewed about her own assembly.

Ethical Issues

In the main research, an opportunity to speak to the whole staff about the project before any dates were arranged was sought via the medium of the initial letter to targeted schools, in order to obtain the consent and willingness of those taking part. The volunteering of unsuspecting staff by Headteachers would seem to raise questions of ethics. In the event, no opportunity to speak to staff was taken up by any of the Headteachers and again one

member of staff was "volunteered" without consultation, although they were subsequently willing to take part in an interview.

Although there is a wealth of material on research ethics in general, there is not so much on educational research in particular. What has been written focuses on questions of confidentiality, informed consent and minimisation of harm arising out of qualitative methods. Informed consent is seen as the key issue in research involving human participants (Evans and Jabucek, 1996). Drawing on Kantian moral philosophy, there must be respect for persons. Individuals must at all times be seen as ends in themselves and never merely the means to an end and in this tradition, research conduct is judged by the extent to which it recognises the principle of respect of persons.

The issue of informed consent is, however, problematic and open to a range of interpretations. Keigelmann (1996) argues that compatible with giving dignity to research participants is the need to disclose research agendas at the outset and provide ample opportunity to withdraw from the research process if desired. Obtaining prior informed consent in the case of qualitative styles of research is, according to Cassell (1982), self-contradictory because the research design is emergent and responsive and the direction of and conclusions to be drawn from the research are generally unknown. It is also possible for participants to be manipulated into giving consent since there may be many other pressures operating on them which influence their decisions including the power relations involved in the situation.

This question of the power relations between the researcher and the researched, if viewed from a somewhat different perspective can place rather different ethical concerns at the centre of the research process. Research becomes ethical where the research relationship is seen as collaborative (Hollingsworth, 1993), implying a mutual engagement in the process, or there is continuous interaction between the researcher and participant based on trust (Cornett and Chase, 1990). Part of this collaboration or continuous interaction ideally extends beyond the data collection phase to the point where participants have a say in how the information they generate is used. In the context of this research such an approach

is impractical. Participants have all been offered the opportunity to receive and comment upon the transcript of their interview, but I am assuming sole ownership of data and findings although it is not yet clear to what use the research will be put.

With regard to minimisation of harm, it has become common research practice that informants' identities should be protected to avoid embarrassment or potential harm, although according to Riddell (1989) it is impossible for anyone doing educational research to guarantee anonymity. Punch (1986) states that questions of anonymity and confidentiality arise particularly where there is an invasion of privacy or matters of a sensitive nature are being addressed. Whilst anonymity may protect participants from negative consequences, it also excludes them from the public ownership of the data and this according to Sabar (undated) accentuates the power differential between researcher and subject. This research uses pseudonyms for respondents and a randomly generated code for setting identification not just to accord with conventional research practice, but especially because of the sensitive nature of some of the data gathered, particularly that concerning individual religious/moral beliefs.

Data Gathering

Three assemblies were observed initially, two involving the whole school and one class assembly. Different ways of recording are available to an observer but since the purpose was to find out what activities took place within the assembly framework (an open-ended approach) field notes were taken to record events as they happened including brief notes about features in the immediate environment that may have had significance for the spiritual development of the pupils. No schedule was used for the pilot observations since not only are observation schedules normally used to collect quantitative data, but they also help to structure observations particularly where specific categories of behaviour are intended to be observed (Open University, 1991). Since the categories of behaviour were not known in advance, but were expected to arise out of the observations, a schedule was not deemed appropriate at this stage. The episodes recorded, together with environmental observations, formed the focus, and therefore schedule, for the subsequent interviews.

As stated earlier, no follow up interview was possible with the deliverers of the assembly at School A. At School H it had been necessary to conduct the interview with the Head immediately after her assembly owing to her busy schedule and so detailed preparation of an interview schedule was not possible. In the case of School M, six days elapsed between the observation and the interview making it possible to draw up a more detailed interview schedule based on an analysis of the observation field notes, and including some of the amendments suggested by the data gathering at School H (Table 4.1). This interview schedule was devised as a series of prompts which became modified and extended during the course of the interview as comparison with the interview transcript (Appendix 1) will show. Whilst the order of questioning broadly followed that of the interview schedule certain of the prompts were omitted i.e. Nos. 4, 8, 15 and 19, because the information was supplied during answers to other questions. Prompt 20 concerning the respondent's perspectives on spirituality was expanded across five questions to include aspects of training for assemblies and pupils' demonstration of spiritual development. It was agreed with the respondents that the interviews would be tape recorded for transcription and analysis.

The interview method is recognised as being a useful technique for collecting data which is unlikely to be accessible through either observation or questionnaires (Blaxter *et al.*, 1996). This study required data concerning the factors affecting choice of assembly activities and the deliverers' own perspectives on spiritual development and whilst theoretically such information could have been gathered by questionnaire, the interview format is more adaptable, allowing for responses to be investigated further if necessary (Bell, 1992).

A focused interview format was chosen to enable the respondents "to talk about what (was) of central significance to them" and allow "topics crucial to the study (to be) covered" (Bell, 1992) including a question concerning the respondent's own professional training for assembly delivery. Another advantage of the focused interview is that the framework established beforehand greatly simplifies the subsequent analysis.

Table 4.1
Schedule for Interview at School M on 2/12/97

1) Why class assembly?

2) How are assemblies planned?

3) "How many minutes to lunchtime?"

4) Quiet thinking re: friends and friendship.

5) From where did this theme evolve?

6) Morning prayer aloud. How is it learnt? Is it said every time? Why?

7) Showing Xmas card. What prompted it?

8) Question re: missing friends when some go swimming.

9) Activity of choosing friend and binding with string. Where did the idea come from? What was the intention?

10) "Who were Jesus' special friends?"

11) Poem - Golden Thread of Friendship.

12) Story - Naomi and Ruth.

13) Challenge.

14) Singing the Lord's prayer.

15) Prayer from card read out. Set assembly?

16) Impromptu discussion - was it planned?

17) Activity of holding hands and leaving in a chain.

18) Focus.

19) Traditional   Spontaneously arising

      Suggested by theme   Children led

      Suggested by author of set assembly guideline

20) Spirituality (understanding).

Table 4.2
Analysis of assembly activities (at School A) according to attributes considered conducive to spiritual development.

Key

A = time for quiet reflection B = addressing pupils' own questions or needs
C = active pupil involvement D = active listening
E = opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder F = worship

Activity	A	B	C	D	E	F
Children entering to music and lit candle	(?)1					
Greeting						
Dialogue concerning what was noticed on way to school (by Ms S)			x			
Recap of story of Joseph				x		
Singing with guitar accompanyment			x			
Exposition on Old & New Testaments and link with theme of music						
Story of Fall of Jericho illustrated with stills using OHP (by Mr S)				(?)2		
Recap of story with discussion (by Ms S)			x			
Discussion about deaf people singing			x			
Exposition about voices being God-given						
Learning new hymn using OHP (by Mr S)			x			
Prayer with Amen response from pupils						x
Candle extinguished						
Headteacher dealt with a number of administrative matters						
Children dismissed in class groups						

(?)1 this could have been time for quiet reflection but the opportunity was lost because there was a lot of noise from setting up of equipment amd musicians and general chat amongst the pupils.

(?)2 this appeared to be an activity involving only passive listening since no response was required until the recap activity which followed.

Table 4.3
Analysis of assembly activities (at School H) according to attributes considered conducive to spiritual development.

Key

A = time for quiet reflection   B = addressing pupils' own questions or needs
C = active pupil involvement   D = active listening
E = opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder   F = worship

Activity	A	B	C	D	E	F
Children entering to music and lit candle	x					
Greeting						
School prayer spoken aloud by every-one			x			x
Singing of hymn			x			x
Exposition on light and introduction to Advent			x			
Dialogue re: Advent calendars, mean-ing of Advent & Xmas preparations		(?)1	x			
Exposition with focus on Advent ring				(?)2		
Challenge concerning special signifi-cance of holly				x		
2 children light candle and read from card			x			
Continued exposition on Advent						
Prayer spoken out loud						x
Time for quiet reflection on partner school in South Africa	x					
Standing for singing hymn, spoken and sung blessings			x			x
Sitting silently to music	x					
Dismissal of children in class groups to music						

(?) these activities may have been addressing pupils' experiences.
The subject certainly was topical.

Table 4.4
Analysis of assembly activities (at School M) according to attributes considered conducive to spiritual development.

Key

A = time for quiet reflection   B = addressing pupils' own questions or needs
C = active pupil involvement   D = active listening
E = opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder   F = worship

Activity	A	B	C	D	E	F
Children gathering to sit on carpet						
Question regarding how many minutes to lunchtime						
Time for quiet reflection with hands together and eyes closed	x					
Morning prayer said aloud			x			x
Exposition on theme (Friends) including showing of Christmas card						
Dialogue about missing friends			x			
Individual children select friends to whom they are tied with string			x			
Further exposition about friendship						
Dialogue about Jesus' friends			x			
Listening to poem				x		
Listening to story of Naomi and Ruth				x		
Dialogue re: links between the story and the nature of friendship			x			
Challenge: 10 things that make a good friend				x		
Singing of the Lord's prayer			x			x
Prayer with Amen response from children						x
Discusion about distant friends		x				
Holding hands in long chain to return to work area			x			

Table 4.5
Analysis of factors affecting selection of assembly elements at School M.

Key
a = traditional, meaning common school practice   b = spontaneously arising
c = suggested by the theme   d = suggested by author of an assembly guideline
e = something initiated by children themselves   f = functional expedient

Activity	a	b	c	d	e	f
Children gathering to sit on carpet	(?)					(?)
Question regarding how many minutes to lunchtime		x				
Time for quiet reflection with hands together and eyes closed	x					
Morning prayer said aloud						x
Exposition on theme of Friends including the showing of Xmas card			x			
Dialogue about missing friends			x			
Children select friends to whom they are tied using string by Ms L			x			
Further exposition about friendship			x			
Dialogue about Jesus' friends			x			
Listening to poem			x			
Listening to story of Naomi and Ruth			x	x		
Dialogue concerning links between the story and the nature of friendship			x			
Challenge: 10 things that make a good friend	x					
Singing of the Lord's prayer	x					
Prayer with Amen response from children	(?)					
Discusion about distant friends						x
Holding hands in long chain to return to work area		x	x			

(?) please see main body of text for discussion about these entries.

Some researchers have suggested that pre-conceived interview schedules are unacceptable in qualitative research because they have already predicted in detail what is relevant and meaningful to the respondents about the research topic. They also pre-structure the direction of the enquiry within the researchers' own frame of reference in ways that give little time and space for their respondents to elaborate their own. Whilst the focused interview does direct the enquiry towards certain topics, in this case the segments of the assembly, it is the type of question asked which will enable the respondent to elaborate their own views, e.g.

> "Tell me a little bit about what you think spirituality
> is all about?"

In addition, the interviewer is not bound exclusively to the questions in the schedule and can supplement if required.

Additional to the oral interview format, each respondent was asked to provide a spoken assessment of which of the following elements (typed on small "attribute" cards) had been included in their assembly:

Card A time for quiet reflection
Card B addressing pupils' own questions or concerns
Card C active pupil involvement
Card D active listening
Card E an opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder
Card F worship.

The reverse of each attribute card displayed a fuller explanation with examples in case the meaning of any element was unclear (see Appendix 2). These elements were those identified from the analysis of OFSTED inspection reports as promoting spiritual development (see pp.19 - 21 above). At both Schools H and M, the section of the interview using the attribute cards was not audio-recorded, and this was possibly a mistake, since the dialogue which did take place during the procedure was lost and from memory (though not recorded via field notes either) a justification for having included all the elements in the assembly was offered by both respondents.

Data management

Qualitative data needs to have order imposed on it and be so organised that meanings and categories begin to emerge (Open University, 1993). The raw data from the pilot consisted of:

a)   field notes made whilst observing the assemblies;

b)   interview tapes and

c)   annotated interview schedules.

The segments of activity identified during the assemblies and recorded in the field notes were transferred to matrices, using the pre-specified categories suggested by the literature review and contained in the attribute cards. The interviews were also transcribed, and data from the interview at School M concerning factors affecting selection of assembly elements was also transferred to a matrix, (Table 4.5).

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Analysis is about the search for explanation and understanding, in the course of which concepts and theories are likely to be advanced, considered and developed (Blaxter et al., 1996). All analysis involves the coding of data: that is, assigning data items to categories as instances (Open University, 1996). Not only are there various stages of analysis (Open University, 1994) but many writers on research methodology, (Blaxter op. cit. 1996; Burgess, 1984) recognise that analysis is a continuous process. It takes place as soon as data collection begins (Open University, 1993) since decisions about what to observe and record and which questions to ask in interviews are forms of preliminary analysis. In qualitative analysis, the task of coding involves simultaneously deciding what are the most appropriate categories for making sense of the data and then assigning data items to them (Open University, 1996).

Analysis and Interpretation of Pilot Observations

As stated earlier, the raw data collected during the observation phase was codified in matrix form and these matrices were examined and compared for significant patterns, similarities and differences as well as areas for improvement. The purpose of the data gathering and its analysis was to shed light on the nature of assemblies, in terms of style and content, to ascertain the extent to which such style and content might contribute to pupils' spiritual development. In addition, it was hoped to also reveal the ways in

which the perspectives of the assembly takers might shape the nature of those assemblies. The observation data and its codifying into matrix form was a means of describing the nature of the targeted assemblies.

The codifying of observation data at pilot School A (Table 4.2) suffered because of the inability to conduct the follow-up interview with the assembly takers, Mr and Ms S. It is possible that they would have assigned the segments differently, according to their intentions perhaps, and this suggested that for the main research, the respondents should be asked to categorise each element separately rather than being asked whether the assembly as a whole contained the desirable attributes. This is an example of modification within the data gathering process to enable more efficient and effective analysis.

Examination of the pilot "Spiritual attribute" matrices (Tables 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4) revealed that not all segments of activity were assigned to a category. This could have been for a variety of reasons: the activity contained none of the required attributes, there was doubt about its qualification for a category or it was not included for consideration for reasons which are unclear. The assembly at School A contained eight out of fifteen segments which were unallocated. A follow-up interview might well have reduced this number.

Four segments were unallocated following the assembly at School H out of a total of fifteen and four also from School M out of seventeen segments. These included segments of exposition which were delivered without opportunity for pupil response and therefore were not allocated to category D (active listening). At pilot Schools A and H the greeting was unallocated because it had been omitted for consideration. Whether an accompanying response from the pupils (had this been recorded) could have placed it in category C (active pupil involvement) is debatable. Are responses to greetings, as well as "amens" at the close of a prayer examples of active or passive involvement? There is an argument which considers these responses as calling for little or no thought and therefore qualifying for "passive involvement" status.

55

Examination of pilot attribute matrices (Tables. 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4) also revealed very uneven distribution of activities within categories. No segments of activity were allocated to categories B (addressing pupils' own questions or needs) or E (opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder) at pilot School A. There was even doubt as to whether any activity could be assigned to category A (time for quiet reflection) because in the opening activity of children entering to music and lit candle, the opportunity seemed to be lost owing to the noise generated by the setting up of equipment, the musicians and general chat from the pupils, and no other activity seemed to offer that opportunity.

At pilot School H, there was doubt about whether the dialogue about Advent calendars qualified for category B (addressing pupils' own questions, needs or concerns). The reverse of the attribute card suggests that this might be interpreted as covering everyday experiences, topical matters and pupils' achievements, and there is a sense in which Advent calendars could be considered "topical" at the beginning of December when the observation took place. The doubt arises however over whether the pupils themselves can be regarded as having generated interest in the topic. They may have done, but there was no evidence to show that this was the case.

At pilot School M, there were no segments of activity assigned to category E (opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder), although Ms L claimed that all attributes were present. Separate categorisation of items during the interviews in the main research overcame this problem although it must be appreciated that this still remains a subjective exercise.

It was evident from all three "Spiritual attribute" matrices that category C activities (calling for active pupil involvement) were the most numerous. It must be borne in mind however that pupil participation of itself does not necessarily contribute to pupils' spiritual development; the nature of the activity would need to be relevant in some way. If such participation required pupils' engagement with their own experiences or contributed to their acquisition of meanings and values then it could be relevant. Westerhoff (1977) points out that spiritual awareness is always

personal and therefore particular and rarely predictable. And the research of Robinson (1977) suggests that what becomes relevant is often not known or appreciated until many years after the experience itself. A question which might form the basis for future research is whether assemblies which contain no segments of active pupil participation can nevertheless contribute to spiritual development.

The data from these pilot matrices also suggested that certain elements considered conducive to spiritual development might be largely absent from primary school assemblies. There were no recorded instances of opportunities for experiencing awe and wonder and only one firm instance where pupils' own questions or needs were addressed. It might have been that the subject matter of the assemblies did not lend itself to these elements or that they had not been planned for inclusion on these occasions. It is also possible that the assembly deliverers were unaware of the significance attached to these elements.

Following the analysis of data from pilot School H an attempt was made to formulate activity selection criteria as follows:
(a)   traditional, meaning common school practice;
(b)   spontaneously arising;
(c)   suggested by the theme itself;
(d)   suggested by an author of an assembly guideline;
(e)   something initiated by the children themselves.
Another possible category emerged during the course of the interview at School M when the respondent attributed her selection of the "Morning Prayer" to a need *to bring them all back together*, *"getting them back as one body"* following the earlier separation of the class while one group had gone swimming. Such a selection criterion was deemed a 'functional expedient' and included in the selection matrix in the main research.

A "selection factor" matrix was drawn up to show the factors affecting the selection of assembly elements and used at pilot School M (Table 4.5). Whilst this showed that a majority of segments were selected on the basis of being theme related, category (c), three segments were traditional school practice, (a) with a further two possibly falling into this category. There was evidence of

spontaneity, category (b) and the use of published assembly guidelines, category (d) and one segment which was pupil instigated, category (e).

But given the crucial importance of personal experience to spiritual awareness, a low incidence of focus upon pupils' own questions and needs could be a significant factor in the extent to which current assembly practices can contribute to pupils' spiritual development.

Analysis and Interpretation of Pilot interviews

Once transcribed, the responses were compared question by question, noting similarities and differences and themes which emerged. Gaps in the information provided were also identified which could be rectified in the main research by more detailed questioning.

A preliminary analysis of both the observation and the interview tape at School H suggested that improvements were needed in data collection in the following areas:

a)   concessions to spiritual focus evident in the assembly environment;

b)   factors affecting choice of assembly activities and

c)   personal planning strategy for the observed assembly.

Additional questions concerning a) and b) were included in the interview schedule for School M, e.g.

> "Did you have a focus this time? I noticed the globe and the cross. Would you call those your focus?"

and those questions directly related to the selection criteria but although more data was provided by the respondent at School M concerning c), this aspect needed an interrogative structure capable of revealing the perceived links between the planned activities and spiritual development, if any. The main research interviews therefore included the question:

> "When planning assemblies, to what extent are spiritual objectives driving the content or the format of the assembly?"

The pilot interview data appeared to suggest that current initial teacher training is still not preparing entrants to the profession for assembly delivery although no evidence was collected concerning training for the spiritual development of pupils. Neither teacher interviewed during the pilot project claimed to have received any initial training for the conduct of assemblies.

> Ms K:*I don't actually remember having any training at all for taking assemblies, so it's something that you pick up as you go along and it seems to me that NQTs coming into school perhaps aren't having the training either.*

> Ms L:*I don't think that assemblies were mentioned in any way to be honest. I don't remember them being mentioned. Nobody ever told me how to take assembly. Well our RE co-ordinator actually she's not..... She's been here two years now, her subject was RE at college and she said to me that she was never taught how to do an assembly. So even though her own subject was RE she said "I've never been taught" and I said "come on tell me how to do it" and she said you know "we were never taught"..... I've never been taught how to do assemblies. All that I've..... we.....it's just watching other people, reading bits.*

Only Ms K claimed to have had any INSET, on the topic of worship, and that had been organised by the Diocese rather than the Local Education Authority. And although both respondents had been asked about their training for developing the spiritual in pupils, neither mentioned that they had. It could have been that the problem lay in the question i.e.

> "What training have you had for doing things like assemblies and developing the spiritual in pupils?"

A separate question about the spiritual was posed during the main research interviews as a direct result of this finding.

Another suggestion that emerged from this very limited data was that the choice of assembly theme could be a crucial factor

affecting the selection of assembly elements. Themes can, however, be selected for a variety of reasons. An RE syllabus may be required to be followed, or a link with the wider curriculum might be thought desirable. In addition a particular theme might be felt to be ideal for addressing certain issues which may or may not service spiritual development. Theme selection may also be idiosyncratic, based on whim or personal preference. This suggested that the main research should attempt to establish the reason behind the choice of theme.

Clearly it might be sensible to suggest that the selection factor most in evidence could be of crucial significance in the development of pupils' spirituality. If, for instance, it had been shown that published materials were used predominantly, then future research could be directed towards these in an attempt to assess their potential efficacy in pupils' spiritual development. Alternatively, investigation into assemblies composed of mainly spontaneously arising segments might also provide useful insights into how pupils' spiritual development could be affected.

In the case of pilot School M, the chosen theme "Friendship" was chosen to link with curriculum requirements.

> Ms. L: *It's part of our RE policy in Base 3. Part of our*
> *curriculum is Jesus and his friends and then we go*
> *on to talk about qualities of friends and things like*
> *that, so it's following our RE syllabus, our RE policy.*
> *It was following up the work we have been doing.*

If assembly segments are chosen to link with curriculum considerations, this may also be a focus for future research.

The question pertaining to concessions to spiritual focus in the environment raised an issue concerning the need/desirability for visual focus owing to the anxiety displayed by some children when the closing of eyes was called for.

> Ms L: *I think some of them need a focus because I*
> *think some of them, in a way, worry if they've got*
> *their eyes shut.*

This issue could also provide an avenue for future research.

Suggested alterations in the conduct of the main research

On the basis of the findings from the preliminary research it was decided to:

1) select two batches of schools for investigation in the main research; one group of Church schools and another of County schools for comparison and for providing a firmer basis for generalisation;

2) organise opportunities to speak to the staff at participating schools before observations begin to maximise understanding and co-operation and avoid the possibility of unwilling respondents who might render the data collecting process less effective;

3) arrange for sufficient time between observations and interviews for the drawing up of sufficiently detailed interview schedules;

4) incorporate the categorising of each segment of activity according to desirable attributes and selection factors within the body of the interview and record the entire proceedings;

5) include in the interview schedule questions about:
a) the provision of spiritual foci,
b) the perceived links between the selected activities and pupils' spiritual development,
c) the sources and inspirations for the selected activities;

6) ensure that a separate question is included in the interview schedule about training for pupils' spiritual development.

The main research questions were further refined as being:

1) What elements characterise school assemblies?

2) To what extent are elements currently deemed conducive to pupils' spiritual development included in school assemblies?

3) To what extent are the choice of assembly elements affected by a) tradition, b) published materials, c) wider curriculum considerations, d) assembly purposes?

4) In what ways do the assembly leaders' perspectives on the spiritual shape the assembly experience?

5) What are the perceived needs of assembly leaders for improving the contribution to pupils' spiritual development of school assemblies?

A detailed account of the main research follows in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Conduct of the Main Research

A total of eight Somerset primary schools were selected initially from the OFSTED Report web site, four County schools and two each from the Controlled and Aided sectors. (During the course of this research the designation of schools has changed. The designation 'County schools' is no longer used, but for clarity the old nomenclature has been retained.) Each school had been adjudged better than satisfactory in respect of the spiritual development of its pupils in their most recent OFSTED report, and both urban, sub-urban and rural settings were represented as well as the various organisational formats across the primary age range. It was hoped that by investigating across the range of possible settings, factors common to all the schools might emerge, or factors which appear to be related to particular settings.

Three schools from each category were approached by letter, the fourth being kept in reserve should any school decline to take part in the research. In the event several schools turned down the opportunity to participate, claiming pressure of other commitments, whilst one school failed to respond to either the letter or follow up phone calls. Interested schools were subsequently sent a resume of the intended research for greater clarification, but despite my offering the opportunity of a visit to explain to the staff in greater detail what participation in the research would involve, only one Headteacher asked for a personal visit before arranging dates for observation. Ironically, it was this Head who volunteered a staff member without either asking or informing them beforehand.

Owing to the demands traditionally made on schools during the second half of the Autumn Term, it was not possible to begin data gathering until the beginning of the Spring term. With three of the original six schools having declined to take part, it was necessary to approach the reserves and select replacements. Further refusals and the need to approach yet more schools extended the data gathering period beyond that envisaged initially.

Eventually observations and interviews took place at six Somerset primary schools, identified as Voluntary schools L, V, W, County schools F and J and Foundation school B which is included with the County schools as it has no religious foundation. The observation phase presented no difficulties. Each observed assembly lasted approximately 20 minutes and the field notes taken provided the raw data for drawing up interview schedules and selection and attribute matrices (Tables 6.1 - 6.6 and 7.1 - 7.6). There were however, technical problems involved with the interviews. The sound quality of the interview at School L was poor owing to the fact that the main microphone had been positioned too far away to pick up the respondent's voice clearly, especially as the volume of each response tended to diminish towards the end of the sentence. Although this interview provided much useful data, transcription was very difficult, with many gaps in the text.

At School W it was discovered that the backup recorder hadn't been turned on when the interview was interrupted by a phone call, whereas at School J the pause button had remained down on the main recorder throughout the interview, with the backup recorder providing the only audio record. The quality of this recording was also very poor with passages of dialogue missing owing to mechanical malfunction. At School F the positioning of the attribute cards on a low table alongside the respondent resulted in many responses being uttered away from the direction of the microphone. Nevertheless, as is shown in Chapter 6, it was possible to collect a substantial body of data.

Blaxter et al (1996) state that analysis of data is an on-going process and is likely to have begun long before collection is completed. Raw data needs to have order imposed on it and be so organised that meanings and categories begin to emerge (Open University, 1993). This requires considering the condition, nature and management of the data, the process of analysing data sets and its eventual interpretation.

The raw data under consideration consisted of:
a)   field notes in A5 note-book form made whilst observing the assemblies,
b)   A4 sheets of annotated interview schedules and

c)   interview tapes (both standard and mini),

from both the pilot study and the main research. A basic consideration in the process of analysis is not only the condition and form in which the raw data is to be found, but also the facilities available with which to carry out that analysis. Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) is widely used by social science researchers for the purpose of storing, retrieving and coding data, such as the Atlas-ti, Ethnograph or NUDIST packages, but the present researcher having considered the merits of the NUDIST program decided that on this occasion the analysis could easily be done manually, using paper and pencil with subsequent computer word processing.

Managing the data

"Data in its raw state does not constitute the results of..... research," (Blaxter et al, 1996) and therefore one essential research phase is that of managing the data by reducing its size and scope so that it can be reported upon both adequately and usefully. In the pilot project, segments of activity were identified during the assemblies, recorded in the field notes and transferred to matrices, (Tables. 4.2 - 4.4), using the pre-specified categories suggested by the literature review and contained in the attribute cards (see Appendix 2). Identifying segments of activity within the assembly experience is recognised as being both a selective and a partisan process, (Blaxter, et al, 1996). The aim was to capture the entire assembly experience beginning with the entry into the assembly location and ending with the pupils' exit from that space, but nevertheless a selection from the totality of occurrences was recorded. A segment of activity was identified as a discrete and distinctive group of behaviours or occurrences having a specific purpose e.g. singing a song, telling a story or playing music, one assumption being that these happenings, (rather than the appearance of shadows on the wall, the hum of the radiator or a sudden sneeze), constituted the significant elements of the assembly, another being that they possessed the potential for positively contributing to pupils' spiritual development. Another type of occurrence which was also recorded, were those which though not necessarily intended or anticipated could nevertheless possess the potential for contributing negatively to pupils' spiritual

development, e.g. a telephone interruption. This methodology was employed in the main research.

Assigning the segments of activity to categories on the matrices is also a form of coding, whereby items or groups of data are given codes (in this instance A - F) thus standardising the data for analytical purposes. These matrices also provided the structure for the subsequent focused interviews.

The interviews were also transcribed, (for a sample see Appendix 1), and data from the interview at pilot School M concerning factors affecting selection of assembly elements was also transferred to a matrix, (see Table 4.5). Transcribing interview tapes enables the content of each respondents' responses to be focused on in considerable detail and to be presented to illustrate points of significance. The 'standard' format for transcription was chosen, using that traditionally employed for play dialogue. These forms of management were applied to the data collected in both the pilot study and the main research.

Analysis is about the search for explanation and understanding, in the course of which concepts and theories are likely to be advanced, considered and developed (Blaxter et al., 1996). All analysis involves the coding of data: that is, assigning data items to categories as instances (Open University, 1996). Not only are there various stages of analysis (Open University, 1994) but many writers on research methodology, (Blaxter et al., 1996; Burgess, 1984) recognise that analysis is a continuous process. It takes place as soon as data collection begins (Open University, 1993) since decisions about what to observe and record and which questions to ask in interviews are forms of preliminary analysis. In qualitative analysis, the task of coding involves simultaneously deciding what are the most appropriate categories for making sense of the data and then assigning data items to them (Open University, 1996).

Interpretation is the process by which meaning is put on to collected and analysed data and comparison made with meanings advanced by others, (Blaxter et al, 1996). A critical element of the data analysis process is relating one's own conclusions to other relevant research or writings whilst nevertheless

asserting what is of significance, what is suggested and how the study might be developed further. The description and interpretation of the main research data is presented in the following Chapters.

Chapter 6

Description of Main Research Data (1)

As stated earlier, it was decided to collect data from the Voluntary Aided sector (Schools L, W and V), and the Local Authority sector (Schools F, J and B). For the purpose of initial analysis, the data from within each sector was compared to begin with before attempting cross sector comparisons.

Matrix Data from VA Sector

Examination of the "Spiritual attributes" matrices (Tables 6.1 - 6.3) shows that once again not all segments of activity were assigned to a category. The entry and dismissal procedures were unassigned although where accompanied by music (School W) it was considered by the respondent both a time of quiet reflection, A and active listening, D although on the occasion of the observed interview it was *"just used as background"*. It could be argued that these segments, whilst part of the total assembly experience are peripheral to the core activity and therefore contain none of the required attributes.

At School L two further segments were unassigned; the greeting and introduction of the guest (the researcher) and the delivery of notices about topic prizes and after-school training. At School W three further segments were unassigned; the greeting and introduction of guest (the researcher), the lighting of the candle and its eventual extinguishing. At School V two segments were unassigned, connected with the entry procedure and introduction to the assembly topic.

The attribute matrices also revealed varying distributions of activities within categories. At School L, out of the eight assigned, there were no activities allocated to category C (active pupil involvement) and only one which the respondent claimed addressed pupils' own questions or needs, B. Four of the eight segments were deemed providing time for quiet reflection, A, three of which were also categorised under F (worship).

Table 6.1
Analysis of assembly activities (at School L) according to attributes considered conducive to spiritual development.

Key

A = time for quiet reflection   B = addressing pupils' own questions or needs
C = active pupil involvement   D = active listening
E = opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder   F = worship

Activity	A	B	C	D	E	F
Pupils gather to sit on hall floor						
Greeting, response & introduction of guest						
Lighting of candle	x				x	x
Liturgical phrase with response	x				x	x
Notices about topic prizes and after school training						
Recap about risk takers with dialogue				x		
Telling of story interspersed with dialogue				x		
Dialogue about how we can find out about Jesus		x				
Quiet time	x					
Prayer with "Amen" response	x					x
Dismissal						
Total	4	1	0	2	2	3

Table 6.2
Analysis of assembly activities (at School W) according to attributes considered conducive to spiritual development.

Key

A = time for quiet reflection   B = addressing pupils' own questions or needs
C = active pupil involvement   D = active listening
E = opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder   F = worship

Activity	A	B	C	D	E	F
Entry of pupils with bags and coats	x			x		
Orchestral background music						
Greeting, response & introduction of guest						
Recap about light				x		
Lighting of candle						
Exposition about Jesus being light of the world						
Demonstration with volunteer		x				
Dialogue about feelings		x	x			
Further exposition & demo		x				
Continued dialogue about the light of Jesus		x	x			
Final segment of exposition & demo		x	x			
Bible readings with explanation	x			x		
Prayer with responses			x			x
Lord's prayer said aloud			x			x
Hail Mary			x			x
Candle blown out						
General notices & dismissal to music		x				
Total	2	6	6	3	0	3

Table 6.3
Analysis of assembly activities (at School V) according to attributes considered conducive to spiritual development
Key

A = time for quiet reflection   B = addressing pupils' own questions and needs
C = active pupil involvement   D = active listening
E = opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder   F = worship

Activity	A	B	C	D	E	F
Entry of pupils without music						
Reminder about orderly entry						
Introduction re: things that challenge						
Selection of children as "focus objects"		x	x			
Q & A about their choice		x	x			
Exposition about the meaning of challenge in the context of the 2 children		x	x			
Dialogue about challenge and the charity run	x	x	x			
Explanation about what is to be on the tape				x		
Intervention by child re: another (abseilling)		x				
Tape welcome & music & introduction	x	x		x	x	
Candle lit by teacher	x					x
Singing of song with actions		x	x		x	x
Listening to story of Steve McDonald	x	x	x		x	
More exposition re: future challenges		x	x			
Pause tape for dialogue conoe trip and personal challenges	x	x	x	x		
Singing of another song			x			x
Time to reflect, music background & voice over. Tape off	x				x	x
School prayer with hands together & eyes closed			x			x
Candle blown out & dismissal						
Total	6	10	10	3	4	5

At School W no activities were allocated to category E (opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder) and only two to A (time for quiet reflection). One of these was the Bible reading and the respondent expressed doubt about its allocation to category A whilst being sure it belonged to category D (active listening).

> Mr. Q: *I'm hesitating over time of quiet reflection. I didn't necessarily give them time but, I mean, it was an opportunity for them to reflect, even when I was reading it, about what we'd talked about; about what they'd seen.*

By far the greatest number of segments (nine in all) were distributed between categories B (addressing pupils' own questions or needs) and C (active pupil involvement).

At School V all categories were represented, with the majority (twelve out of fifteen) distributed between categories B and C. The respondent allocated six segments to A (time for quiet reflection) but whilst several of them may well have provoked inner contemplation, only one, the candle lighting, provided the conditions of "quiet". These may well have been better allocated to category D (active listening).

The pilot project had revealed that category C activities (active pupil involvement) were the most numerous. The main research data from Schools L, W and V revealed that categories B (addressing pupils' own questions or needs) and C (active pupil involvement) were the most numerous in Schools W and V but not at School L. It is debatable whether the assembly theme or the treatment was of crucial significance here. At School W the chosen theme was "Jesus is the light of the world" and at School V it was "Personal Challenge" and in both cases links were made relating these topics directly to the experiences of the children themselves. At School L however, in spite of episodic dialogue around the story from "The Risk Takers", no such overt links were made. Whether this reflected a limitation of the topic itself or the respondent's style of delivery is unclear.

The matrices concerning selection factors at Schools L, W and V (Tables 6.4 - 6.6) revealed that tradition played a significant role in shaping the assembly experience. At School L, seven segments of

Table 6.4
Analysis of factors affecting selection of assembly elements at School L

Key
a = traditional, meaning common school practice   b = spontaneously arising
c = suggested by the theme   d = suggested by author of an assembly guidline
e = something initiated by the children themselves   f = functional expedient

Activity	a	b	c	d	e	f
Pupils gather to sit on hall floor	x					
Greeting, response & introduction of guest	x					
Lighting of candle	x					
Liturgical phrase with response	x					
Notices about topic prizes and after school training						x
Recap about risk takers with dialogue				x		
Telling of story interspersed with dialogue				x		
Dialogue about how we can find out about Jesus		x				
Quiet time	x					
Prayer with "Amen" response	x	x				
Dismissal	x					
Total	7	2	0	2	0	1

Table 6.5
Analysis of factors affecting selection of assembly elements at School W

Key
a = traditional, meaning common school practice   b = spontaneously arising
c = suggested by the theme   d = suggested by author of an assembly guideline
e = something initiated by the children themselves   F = worship

Activity	a	b	c	d	e	f
Entry of pupils with bags and coats	x					
Orchestral background music	x					x
Greeting, response & introduction of guest	x					
Recap about light						
Lighting of candle			x			
Exposition about Jesus being light of the world			x			
Demonstration with volunteer					x	
Dialogue about feelings						
Further exposition & demo					x	
Continued dialogue about the light of Jesus			x			
Final segment of exposition & demo					x	
Bible readings with explanation			x			
Prayer with responses	x		x	x		
Lord's prayer said aloud	x					
Hail Mary	x					
Candle blown out						x
General notices & dismissal to music	x					
Total	7	0	5	1	3	2

Table 6.6

Table 6.6
Analysis of factors affecting selection of assembly elements at School V

Key

a = traditional, meaning common school practice   b = spontaneously arising
c = suggested by the theme d = suggested by author of an assembly guidline
e = something initiated by the children themselves   f = functional expedient

Activity	a	b	c	d	e	f
Entry of pupils without music						X
Reminder about orderly entry						X
Introduction re: things that challenge	X					
Selection of children as "focus objects"			X			
Q & A about their choice			X			
Exposition about the meaning of challenge in the context of the 2 children			X			
Dialogue about challenge and the charity run			X			
Explanation about what is to be on the tape	X					
Intervention by child re: another (abseilling)					X	
Tape welcome & music & introduction				X		
Candle lit by teacher	X					
Singing of song with actions				X		
Listening to story of Steve McDonald			X			
More exposition re: future challenges			X			
Pause tape for dialogue conoe trip and personal challenges	X					
Singing of another song				X		
Time to reflect, music background & voice over. Tape off				X		
School prayer with hands together & eyes closed	X					
Candle blown out and dismissal	X					
Total	6	0	6	4	1	2

activity out of the eleven identified were deemed to be common school practice (a) with none allocated to either categories (c) suggested by the theme, or (e) initiated by the children themselves.

At School W, eight segments of activity out of the seventeen identified were allocated to category (a) common school practice, whereas a total of eleven segments were assigned to categories (c) and (e). At School V, traditional elements (a) and those suggested by the theme (c) were represented equally, six segments of activity in each category, whereas only one segment, the intervention by a child concerning a forthcoming abseilling event, was categorised under (e) something initiated by the children themselves. Spontaneity was largely absent from the observed assemblies except at School L where a segment of dialogue about how to find out about Jesus and the words of the prayer arose spontaneously, although the respondent agreed a prayer would always be included in the assembly format but that on this occasion she had just *"made it up."*

The influence of authors of assembly guidelines was only strong where the focus of the assembly had been the "Together" tape, (School V with five segments). This is understandable since the tape was designed to provide a total assembly experience, although the respondent did modify it with pauses for dialogue and additional items both before and after the taped contribution. Only two segments at School L were suggested by the author of an assembly guideline (d), the story preceded by a recapitulation of the "Risk Takers" theme. At School W only the initial prayer was provided by an outside source.

Comparison of Matrix Data

It was hoped that by comparing the data from both "attribute" and "selection" matrices, patterns might emerge indicating which types of activities (in terms of their supposed conduciveness to pupils' spiritual development) are likely to be generated when certain choices for including those activities are made. When results from the three "selection" matrices were aggregated, those activities assigned to category (a) common school practice, were by far the most numerous. These activities were deemed by the respondents to belong predominantly either to category A (time for quiet

reflection) or category F (worship). This might suggest that as far as these schools are concerned assemblies provide a forum for the development of pupils' spirituality largely through worship and quiet reflection, which, since they were church schools, is not surprising.

Category (c) activities, suggested by the theme, were next in numerical significance as a selection factor and these were deemed predominantly to belong to either category C (active pupil involvement) and category B (addressing pupils' own questions or needs). This might also suggest that for the respondents there was an appreciation of the role of the personal in developing spirituality, by using the thematic format as a vehicle of coherence for inviting active participation and focusing on pupils' concerns in assembly activities.

Interview Data from VA Sector

In addition to questions relating directly to the observed assembly, respondents were also asked questions about:

a)   the organisation of assemblies in their schools;
b)   helpful assembly publications;
c)   the pupils' cultural/religious backgrounds;
d)   their personal perspectives on spirituality and spiritual development and
e)   their training for assembly taking and pupils' spiritual development.

Without exception these target schools employ a variety of assembly formats and call upon the services of several staff members, and in several cases, persons associated with the local church or other religious bodies. Except at School W, pupils also attended assemblies within their own Key Stages. One reason behind this mix of arrangements was that it provided variety of both format and content.

> Ms. X: *It's for variety mainly, so that the children have different people coming to talk to them. They're experiencing different people's views, not just you know, the views of one teacher. It's also nice for them to be in Key Stage or year groups occasionally from time to time because the*

discussion which will come out of that will be of a much higher level for the older children and much more simple for the younger children so they will be able to access it at a more appropriate level.

Use of some published assembly material was reported but this was both varied and sporadic. At School L the observed assembly was based on a book discovered by chance.

Ms H: *I saw it in a catalogue and I thought I would send off for it..... it's just a set of stories which might be in a church library rather than..... it isn't aimed at children and I actually had to adapt them quite a lot.*

This respondent also acknowledged the usefulness of some published materials.

Ms. H: *.....good material for assemblies particularly the SALT stuff is..... for both the Head and Deputy Head who are both busy people..... it offers a huge choice of activities and you just have to do these cards.*

At School W the respondent cited a New Testament publication called "New World" which, whilst not designed specifically for school assemblies, was useful for locating Bible passages around certain themes. He also added *"there are lots of others that I dip into."*

The impression given by all respondents was that whilst they recognised the range of published materials available to assembly takers, their use was occasional, selective and a matter of personal preference.

The responses relating to pupils' background, which might be considered of significance in terms of spiritual provision were particularly interesting, if not surprising, given that all three target schools had religious foundations. To presume pupils' were actively Christian would be a mistake.

Ms. H: *.....nobody here has any other faith, but a lot of them..... are nominal Christians or agnostics anyway. When I did a survey on Sunday schools*

the only child in the whole of the juniors who went
to Sunday school was a Catholic child.

Even the Catholic school could not take denominational allegiance for granted.

> Mr. Q: *Only about a quarter of our school*
> *population are Roman Catholic. Some of the other*
> *children come from other Christian*
> *denominations..... some parents although they*
> *may not be church goers themselves would still like*
> *their children to have a specifically Christian*
> *education and some parents opt to send their*
> *children here because it is a small school and a*
> *generally friendly school basically.*

A similar situation applied at school V.

> Ms. X: *From recent work that we've done actually*
> *with OFSTED and so on and getting the parental*
> *notes back, a lot of children seem to have no*
> *religion.*

In addition, two respondents highlighted the home influence upon attempts at spiritual development at school.

> Ms. H: *I definitely am aware that for some children*
> *however their initial response to "now it's.....*
> *assembly" can be a negative one. Sometimes it*
> *comes from home without doubt, sometimes*
> *they're bringing prejudices from home.*

This aspect was further amplified when a question was asked as to whether parents chose the school specifically because of its church affiliation.

> Ms. H: *I have in fact heard parents take the*
> *opposite line..... or would have preferred it was not*
> *a Church school.*

At School V the respondent provided a specific example of how home attitudes encouraged a particular child to regard revengeful behaviour as normal, acceptable and even desirable and how no amount of in-class or whole-school discussion had modified her behaviour.

> Ms. X: *The thoughts that children bring with them from home very greatly affects their spiritual development and the way they treat other children around the school.*

These responses are of interest, particularly in the light of the data collected around general spiritual issues.

In response to the question about whether spiritual objectives were driving the content and/or format of the assembly at the planning stage, all three respondents claimed that they were.

> Ms. H: *I've never thought of it in those terms..... (but) now when I plan I can't see how you can divorce them, but I don't actually write them down specifically.*

> Mr. Q: *I suppose the spiritual aspect is the driving force behind it all.*

Even where the main component of the assembly had been the "Together" tape, the respondent was convinced that spiritual considerations had been addressed by the programme makers.

> Ms. X: *I think they've certainly thought about it and in the notes every week that we have with the tape..... they say what they would expect the spiritual development to take the form of such as..... personal goals, overcoming difficulties..... and over here we've got themes of determination, courage and spirit of adventure. So all these contribute to children's spiritual development because they're actually thinking inwardly about how these themes affect them and how they respond to them in their own life.*

As to what the respondents perceived spirituality to be, two of the three were very clear about it being intrinsically linked with the individual's relationship with God. In other words, they found it difficult to conceive of spiritual development outside of a religious framework.

> Ms. H: *For me, my spirituality is tied up with my faith. I don't see how I'd really divorce the two.*

> **Mr. Q**: *Our spirituality is tied up with Christianity. If you haven't got God, I can't see..... if I was without religion I couldn't see them developing any spirituality.*

A somewhat different view was expressed by Ms. X. She acknowledged that the whole issue of spirituality and its development was complex.

> **Ms. X**: *I think it's children having an awareness of their place in the world, knowing how what they do, their actions, how it contributes to the actions of other people and basically to how the world works as one. Spiritualism (sic) is knowing how you contribute to the things that go on around you and how you make up part of the world we live in. I actually think the religious aspect comes into that as well..... but it's less about a Christian god than about how we conduct our lives.*

When asked about how the pupils might best be developed spiritually the two respondents who emphasised religious tradition as providing the framework believed it was through familiarising them with the Christian mythos, message and practice whilst nevertheless demonstrating the relevance of this to their own lives.

> **Ms. H**: *Bearing in mind that the most I think I can do is to help them to see that Jesus is somebody who lives now and did really die for them..... they can actually make a spiritual journey for themselves towards Jesus. With the young ones when you can say this is what happened to me once, so then they're seeing somebody else, this isn't just talk, it's a very essential part of my life.*

> **Mr. Q**: *By learning that God loves us all individually and that he has shown us how to come to him through Christ and through our Christian beliefs..... and to give his children opportunity..... to pray privately as well as en masse.*

A further example of this approach in action was provided during the discussion about one of the observed assemblies. Mr. Q

explained how he used his own observations around the school to demonstrate the meaning of *"Jesus as the light of the world"* and how he attempted to provide *"a link between the New Testament and everyday situations."*

The respondent who placed a less central role on religion in the development of spirituality, believing it was more about how life was conducted, stated it could be *"developed by partly leading by example but partly talking through everyday issues"* and the children's worries and fears.

> Ms. X: *I do think it's important that we make a special time for it but..... it has to be inherent in every part of the work that we do in the classroom to have any meaning for children.*

As to how spiritual development could be recognised within pupils it was generally felt that their questions somehow revealed that it was taking place, although some doubt was expressed about whether this amounted to assessment and therefore inherently undesirable in this sphere.

All three respondents admitted that their initial training had not formally prepared them for either assembly taking or developing pupils spiritually. Various INSET opportunities had been, and were currently, available but these were exclusively geared to general spiritual development across the curriculum or RE rather than assembly taking. Much of the respondents' present knowledge they felt had been picked up on an *ad hoc* basis, informally through discussions with colleagues, watching fellow practitioners or sudden inspirations from literature or personal observations. There seemed to be little expectation that formal training should or would be provided. Ms. X considered herself fortunate to have had a tutor at college who initiated discussions on spirituality which *"probably arose rather than was planned."* She praised the recently revised Somerset Agreed Syllabus for its treatment of RE but criticised it for its lack of guidance on assemblies.

In addition, each respondent was invited to provide any extra observations which they felt could be relevant to the research as a whole. A common criticism about their current situation was the

lack of sufficient time for both the preparation and the delivery of the assembly experience.

> **Ms. H:** *When you think that the most you've got perhaps is twenty minutes or quarter of an hour by the time you've got in there, the amount of preparation and stuff is out of all proportion to what you can actually do for that fifteen minutes.*

> **Mr. Q:** *Sometimes my assemblies aren't very good inasmuch as..... I don't get time to prepare them. I do sometimes think afterwards, you know I wish I'd had more time perhaps to go into that a bit deeper.....*

> **Ms. X:** *I feel it would be quite nice to have more time to think about acts of worship and how we develop children's spiritual awareness. Sometimes it seems to be something that you pick up on the run, you know, "Oh my goodness, I have an assembly to do tomorrow morning, you know, where's the themes?"*

It was also recognised that with the squeeze on the timetable and the plethora of initiatives currently swamping schools, it was unrealistic to imagine that more time would or could be found for better planning or delivery of the assembly experience.

Summary of Data from VA Sector

Both tradition and thematic considerations strongly influenced the selection of assembly activities. Traditional elements were associated largely with worship and quiet reflection, whilst thematic elements assumed a high degree of active pupil involvement. Each school employed a variety of organisational formats with limited use of published assembly materials. All respondents claimed to have spiritual objectives, which for two of them were located within a religious framework despite weak religious affiliation amongst their pupils. And lack of training and preparation time for assemblies was cited by all respondents as problematic. The description of data from the County schools is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 7

<u>Description of Main Research Data (2)</u>

The research design had initially envisaged gathering data from three County schools, but it soon became apparent that this might not be possible. Although there were a couple of refusals to take part in the research from schools in the Voluntary sector, the rejections from County schools were significantly more numerous. Pressure of other commitments was usually cited as the reason for not taking part, but it is difficult to imagine that County schools have comparatively more demands made on their staff. It seemed to this researcher that there was an underlying unwillingness on the part of the schools approached to take part in the research in spite of them having received favourable comments on spiritual development in their most recent OFSTED reports.

This reluctance was also commented upon by several teachers whose anecdotal evidence was collected informally during the course of the data gathering period. It was suggested that perhaps teachers were far less confident or enthusiastic about assembly taking than any other school duty and therefore were unwilling to expose themselves to an unknown researcher, however benign or uncritical they (the researcher) purported to be.

Also it was said that collective worship was probably seen as an imposition and either of little interest or relevance especially if the teachers themselves hadn't any strong religious convictions. In addition many agreed that the notion of spiritual development, unlike linguistic or mathematical development was not clearly understood, and therefore anyone attempting to find out what teachers perspectives on the spiritual was, was inevitably going to expose their weakness, and "who in their right mind is going to agree to that?" (2000)

Of course, these remarks need to be treated with caution since they arose out of general conversations in non-research contexts and cannot therefore be regarded as authoritative, but they may nevertheless point to an underlying difficulty regarding the whole

issue of assemblies, the obligation to conduct acts of collective worship and develop pupils spiritually through that medium.

By February 2000, despite concerted efforts only two County schools had agreed to take part in the research project and the data from these schools, J and F, was subjected to a similar analysis to that undergone by the data from the VA schools. Unexpectedly however, a colleague at a Somerset Foundation school offered to take part in the research as the whole question of spiritual development, and in particular how it related to assemblies, was currently being evaluated at her school following an OFSTED report on the matter which had given cause for concern amongst the staff.

One criticism had been that no prayers had been observed, the inspector having failed to notice the singing of the Prayer of St. Francis. The staff clearly felt that their assembly practices were at odds with the expectations of the inspection team who seemed to associate opportunities for spiritual development with traditional Christian, religious ritual observance. The data from Foundation School B was incorporated into that collected at schools J and F.

Matrix Data from County Sector

Examination of the "Spiritual attributes" matrices (Tables 7.1- 7.3) shows that once again not all segments of activity were assigned to a category. The entry and dismissal procedures at School J and the dismissal procedures at Schools B and F were unassigned but at School F where entry was accompanied by music it was considered by the respondent both a time of quiet reflection, A and active listening, D. Once again it might be argued that as segments peripheral to the core activity they are probably less likely to contain the required attributes.

At School J four further segments were unassigned. By way of introduction to the singing of the song, the teacher had reminded the pupils about the topic of 'Light' which had apparently been the subject of previous assemblies. The researcher had omitted to ask the respondent to assign this segment. And the three separate segments of exposition about hands had also not been allocated,

Table 7.1
Analysis of assembly activities (at School F) according to attributes considered conducive to spiritual development.

Key

A = time for quiet reflection   B = addressing pupils' own questions or needs
C = active pupil involvement   D = active listening
E = opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder   F = worship

Activity	A	B	C	D	E	F
Children gathering to sit on carpet to taped music	x			x		
Music fades,children's observations sought,dialogue about frosty morning			x			
Children asked if looking forward to anything - various personal responses			x			
Question refined to focus on school expectations - various responses			x	x		
? card shown - child invited to hold card for general viewing			x	x		
Exposition about questions being a good way of finding things out				x		
3 volunteer "good readers" invited to front			x			
Listening to poems - readers praised and applause	x			x		
Story "Why do stars come out at night?" reading plus dialogue			x	x	x	
Further exposition about Q & A				x		
Prayer with Amen response from	x					x
School prayer with Amen response	x					x
Discussion about music which is played again	x		x	x		
Child thanked for help and given ? card to keep			x			
Children dismissed quietly to music						
Total	5	0	8	8	1	2

Table 7.2
Analysis of assembly activities (at School J) according to
attributes considered onducive to spiritual development.

Key

A = time for quiet reflection   B = addressing pupils' own questions or needs
C = active pupil involvement   D = active listening
E = opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder   F = worship

Activity	A	B	C	D	E	F
Entry of pupils to sit in rows, exit of staff						
Introduction to bag with assorted artefacts		x				
Reminder to inattentive pupils						
Recap about light						
Singing of song (So light up the fire)			x			
Expositions about choices regarding use of hands						
Dramatic illustration by 5 pupils to how Jesus used his hands			x			
Further exposition about helping hands						
Dramatic illustration by further 5 pupils of possible actions with hands			x			
Further exposition, bringing child from audience to praise & shake hands			x			
More exposition						
Invitation to bow heads, prayer with Amen	x					x
Remonstration followed by invitation to think about using hands positively		x	x			
Silence while teachers were sent for	x					
Dismissal from Hall in class groups.						
Total	2	2	5	0	0	1

Table 7.3
Analysis of assembly activities (at SchoolB) according to attributes considered conducive to spiritual development.
Key

A = time for quiet reflection   B = addressing pupils' own questions or needs
C = active pupil involvement   D = active listening
E = opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder   F = worship

Activity	A	B	C	D	E	F
Children gathering to sit on floor with music				x		
Question regarding what kind of music with response				x		
Recap on what they saw previous day with response						
Standing up to sing from words on OHP and piano accompanyment			x			
Sitting whilst words of song are analysed			x	x		
Who else is in our family? Responses from children			x	x		
Brief exposition about wider families				x		
Introduction of book "Grandpa Bodley and the Photographs"						
Question about who has photos of their families			x			
Reading of story				x	x	
Question re: whether story reminded them of photos they have at home			x		x	
Silent reflection about one special member of their family	x					
Words of prayer on OHP. Prayer said in groups according to colour coding		x	x			x
More exposition about photos helping when families are apart	x					
Challenge to bring a picture of family member for Thursday		x	x		x	
Asked to think about that person while music is played again	x				x	
Dismissal						
Total	3	2	7	6	4	1

although they probably would have been assigned to D (active listening).

At School B the segment of review concerning the previous day's assembly was unassigned, because the respondent argued that as it was a starting point there wasn't anything of substance to assign.

> Ms. B: *I wouldn't say I had got to any of the things you are saying there, because it's purely a starting stimulus to focus their minds.*

The researcher had also omitted to ask about the introduction of the storybook, but a similar response to that given about the review above might have been expected.

The attribute matrices also revealed varying distributions of activities within categories. At School J, out of the eight assigned, there were no activities allocated to category D (active listening) or E (opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder) and only one which the respondent claimed to be F (worship). Five segments were deemed providing opportunities for active pupil involvement, C, while only two were allocated to both A (time for quiet reflection) and B (addressing pupils' own questions or needs).

At School F, of the thirteen allocated segments, no activities were allocated to category B (addressing pupils' own questions or needs) and only one to E (opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder). By far the greatest number of segments (ten in all) were distributed between categories C (active pupil involvement) and D (active listening) whilst five were said to provide time for quiet reflection, A.

At School B, as at School F, by far the greatest number of segments (eleven out of fourteen allocated) was distributed between categories C (active pupil involvement) and D (active listening), although unlike Schools J and F there was a spread of segments across all categories including just one in category F (worship).

It was evident that all three assembly takers encouraged active participation in their assemblies as a total of twenty segments were allocated to category C (active pupil involvement) and a further fourteen were designated category D (active listening) activities.

Had the exposition segments at School J been allocated this figure would probably have been even higher.

The matrices concerning selection factors at Schools F, J and B (Tables 7.4 - 7.6) revealed that whilst tradition played a significant role in shaping the assembly experience, most activities were theme driven. At School F, six segments of activity out of the fourteen identified were deemed to be common school practice (a) with eight suggested by the theme (c). At School J, four segments out of the fourteen identified were common school practice (a) whilst five were suggested by the theme (c). At School B, seven segments out of sixteen were common school practice (a) whilst fourteen were suggested by the theme (c).

Again spontaneity (b) was largely absent from the observed assemblies, no segments being assigned to this category at School B. At School F two segments at the end of the assembly, one developing into a discussion about the music being played and the other where the child 'assistant' was given the visual aid of a question mark to keep were said to have occurred on the spur of the moment. At School J, the only spontaneously arising segment occurred, again towards the end of the assembly, when a group of inattentive pupils provided the assembly taker with an opportunity for expanding on the theme of using hands positively.

The influence of authors of assembly guidelines (d) was minimal in the observed assemblies. At Schools F and B the only qualifying segments were prayers whilst at School J one of the two short dramatised items had been taken from an assembly guideline. It ought to be acknowledged that other published material did play a significant part in the assembly at School F but this was a fictional work around which the assembly had been built and pieces of poetry to illustrate the theme. At School B a published story was also used to amplify the theme, but as the analysis of the interview data will show, the respondent at this school had definite views about the use of assembly guidelines.

Direct input by the children (e) was absent at Schools F and B, and at School J consisted of one segment which was the pupils' dramatisation around the theme of "Hands" which had been

Table 7.4
Analysis of factors affecting selection of assembly elements at School F

Key
a = traditional, meaning common school practice   b= spontaneously arising
c = suggested by the theme   d = suggested by author of assembly guideline
e = something initiated by children themselves   f = functional expedient

Activity	a	b	c	d	e	f
Children gathering to sit on carpet to taped music	x					
Music fades, children's observations sought, dialogue about frosty morning	x					
Children asked if looking forward to anything - various personal responses			x			
Question refined to focus on school expectations - various responses			x			
? card shown - child invited to hold card for general viewing			x			
Exposition about questions being a good way of finding things out			x			
3 volunteer "good readers" invited to front	x					
Listening to poems - readers praised and applause			x			
Story "Why do stars come out at night?" reading plus dialogue	x		x			
Further exposition about Q & A			x			
Prayer with Amen response from children			x			
School prayer with Amen response	x			x		
Discussion about music which is played again		x				
Child thanked for help and given ? card to keep		x				
Children dismissed quietly to music	x					
Total	6	2	8	1	0	0

Table 7.5
Analysis of factors affecting selection of assembly elements at School J

Key
a = traditional, meaning common school practice   b = spontaneously arising
c = suggested by the theme   d = suggested by author of assembly guideline
e = something initiated by the children themselves   f = functional expedient

Activity	a	b	c	d	e	f
Entry of pupils to sit in rows, exit of staff	x					
Introduction to bag with assorted artefacts			x			
Reminder to inattentive pupils						x
Recap about light						
Singing of song (So light up the fire)	x					
Expositions about choices regarding use of hands			x			
Dramatic illustration by 5 pupils to how Jesus used his hands				x		
Further exposition about helping hands			x			
Dramatic illustration by further 5 pupils of possible actions with hands					x	
Further exposition, bringing child from audience to praise & shake hands						
More exposition			x			
Invitation to bow heads, prayer with Amen	x					
Remonstration followed by invitation to think about using hands positively		x				
Silence while teachers were sent for	x					
Dismissal from Hall in class groups.	x					
Total	5	1	5	1	1	1

Table 7.6
Analysis of factors affecting selection of assembly elements at School B.

Key
a = traditional, meaning common school practice   b = spontaneously arising
c = suggested by the theme   d = suggested by author of an assembly guideline
e = something initiated by children themselves   f = functional expedient

Activity	a	b	c	d	e	f
Children gathering to sit on floor with music	x					
Question regarding what kind of music with response	x					
Recap on what they saw previous day with response of photos of families	x		x			
Standing to sing from words on OHP and piano accompanyment	x		x			
Sitting whilst words of song are analysed			x			
Who else is in our family? Responses from children			x			
Brief exposition about wider families			x			
Introduction of book "Grandpa Bodley and the Photographs"			x			
Question about who has photos of their families?			x			
Reading of story			x			
Question re:whether story reminded them of photos they have at home			x			
Silent reflection about one special member of their family			x			
Words of prayer on OHP. Prayer said in groups according to colour coding	x		x	x		
More exposition about photos helping when families are apart			x			
Challenge to bring a picture of family member for Thursday	x		x			
Asked to think about that person while music is played again	x		x			
Dismissal						
Total	7	0	14	1	0	0

created in an earlier drama lesson. Even this contribution had been altered by the assembly taker.

> Mr. B: *I had to censor theirs. That was a toned down version.*

It may be said therefore that all three assemblies were very much under the direction of the assembly takers although the organisation of the assemblies at School B (see below) meant that this was not always the case.

Comparison of Matrix Data

A comparison was made between the "attribute" and "selection" matrices at Schools F, J and B, to elicit patterns, if any, between activities chosen and the spiritual attributes they were deemed to possess. When results from the three "selection" matrices were aggregated, those activities assigned to category (c) suggested by the theme, were by far the most numerous. These activities were deemed by the respondents to belong predominantly either to category D (active listening) or category C (active pupil involvement). This might suggest that for the respondents there was an appreciation of the role of active involvement in developing spirituality, by using the thematic format as a vehicle of coherence for providing opportunities for interaction.

Category (a) activities, common school practice, were next in numerical significance as a selection factor and these were deemed predominantly to belong to either category C (active pupil involvement) and category A (time for quiet reflection). This might suggest that as far as these schools are concerned a route to spiritual development is through assemblies which emphasise active participation whilst also providing some opportunity for individual contemplation largely unstructured by formal religious ritual. This represents a significant difference between the assembly practices of the Church and County schools.

Interview Data from County Schools

In addition to questions relating directly to the observed assembly, respondents were also asked questions about:

a)   the organisation of assemblies in their schools;

b)   helpful assembly publications;

c)   the pupils' cultural/religious backgrounds;

d)   their personal perspectives on spirituality and spiritual development and

e)   their training for assembly taking and pupils' spiritual development.

All three target schools employ a variety of assembly formats and call upon the services of several staff members, and in one case the local vicar and other visitors were involved in assemblies from time to time. At School J, pupils also attended assemblies within their own Key Stages and had their own class assemblies each week. Variety was cited for this mix of arrangements as well as general organisational considerations.

> Mr. B: *The main reason is we want to use the facilities as much as we can in terms of computers and so on and rather than getting the whole school in assembly at once we ensure that the resources in school are being used all of the time..... except on those two days when the whole school get together. Second reason is to release some staff up to give them some free time to..... with the Special Needs Co-ordinators say to discuss individual pupils, or to meet with parents or to organise resources. It gives them a couple of sessions a week when they don't have to be in an assembly.*

At School B, the school population had outgrown the capacity of the Hall which necessitated splitting the pupils into Key Stage groups for assemblies on four days a week. To encourage a whole school ethos, the Friday assembly was attended by one class from each of the Year bands, so that pupils attended a "whole school" assembly on alternate weeks. The organisation at School B also differed in that within each Key Stage, one teacher took charge for the whole week, thereby enabling chosen themes to be developed in more depth.

> Ms. S: *It grew out of the idea that through the week we wanted to have a single theme that we could develop with the children. We wanted them to have opportunities to make their contributions to assemblies, but we also wanted opportunities to*

> *use story, poem, things like that to develop the ideas; to show them how themes could be developed across a broad range of things.*

Use of some published assembly material was reported but again this was both varied and sporadic. At School J the observed assembly involved a piece of drama which had been suggested by an author of an assembly guideline, but the respondent admitted that inspiration for assemblies was mainly *"things that happen in school."* At School F, although a number of assembly publications were readily available, it was more usual for the staff to *"dip in and so adapt the ideas."* This respondent also referred to general children's fiction.

> Mr. P: *If I like the ideas in a book I will build an assembly round it.*

The impression given by both respondents was that published assembly materials available played only a limited part in their assembly preparations, not least because according to Mr. P, *"some of the assembly books are very boring, tedious as anything."*

At School B, the respondent acknowledged that for less experienced assembly takers published guidelines could provide a useful starting point, but because she believed delivering assemblies was a "personal thing" she thought the ideas ought to come from her rather than being imposed.

> Ms. S: *Although I may prop that up by using their stories or their poems..... the sort of total package I like me to be the compiler, if you like.*

The responses relating to pupils' background, which might be considered of significance in terms of spiritual provision were particularly interesting in the case of School J. When asked to comment upon the link between collective worship and spiritual development, Mr. B stated *"if I mention 'God' or 'worship' in assemblies, generally speaking as soon as you mention that, children stop listening."*
When asked whether this had anything to do with home background his response was unequivocal.

> Mr. B: *The families that we have from year to year are not involved in the church, it's not something that's discussed at home or the parents are not especially involved in that aspect and the children don't take it terribly seriously. It's not greatly important to them.*

The number of children involved in some sort of church or other religious organisation was thought by this respondent to be very, very small at School J, possibly only one or two in each class out of a total school population of over four hundred pupils.

In response to the question about whether spiritual objectives were driving the content and/or format of the assembly at the planning stage, two respondents claimed that they were although they had reservations.

> Mr. P: *I find that difficult to judge. I mean I do tend to try to use the idea of a sense of awe and wonder within assemblies about the natural world for example. Whether it be about animal life or plant life or looking after the world or asking questions about the world, which if I remember was the assembly you saw about asking questions. I do feel that there is that sense in terms of spiritual development..... I tend to link it with ethos about caring for each other as well but with spiritual development I suppose the emphasis is very much on, you know, a sense of belonging to a community or to a world and the awe and wonder of that.*

> Mr. B: *To be absolutely honest I probably put that in because I know I have a legal obligation but my first and foremost is always one of moral and social development and contextualise that in a spiritual way as well.*

The respondent at School B, however, admitted that spiritual considerations did not drive the planning process. Themes were chosen which it was felt were suitable for young children and assembly records were consulted to ascertain which things worked

well before and which things didn't. Her main objective was to provide opportunities for reflection but planning focused on in-depth development of the theme.

> **Ms. S:** *I would say, if I'm really honest, that I don't think of it in terms of spiritual development. I think of it more in terms of time for children to reflect. Perhaps because that's the way I've done it for a long time and if you call that spiritual development, from the point of view we're trying to get the children to think more deeply and to think more personally, then yes, I always try to create opportunities where they're focusing their minds on to their perceptions of what our theme is.*

As to what the respondents perceived spirituality to be there was little agreement although all three respondents thought it was a difficult question to answer.

> **Mr. P:** *It's about feeling..... it's about things like respect. I know that's ethos as well but I do think it's about respect. It's about wonder, it's about awe, it's about asking questions. I was going to say understanding but I'm not sure it is. It's about accepting it's important to ask questions even if people don't know the answers. So I would focus very much on that.*

> **Mr. B:** *It is some sort of belief in something higher, some sort of greater force.*

> **Ms. S:** *I feel it is a very, very individual thing and I wouldn't like to make a definitive statement about it; except to say that perhaps it's something within you and I wouldn't like to go any further than that.*

When asked about how the pupils might best be developed spiritually one respondent thought that children needed to be given opportunities for experiencing awe and wonder and time for quiet reflection but he doubted whether worship was a necessary component of spiritual development.

> Mr. P: *I think it needs to be developed through not just assembly, through the curriculum, through ethos.*

He also spoke about self-professed atheists he had seen delivering assemblies which in his view had "*a great deal of spiritual development in them*". By addressing the concept of 'awe and wonder' "*they were inspiring those children without necessarily creating religious beliefs themselves.*"

The respondent at School J held a somewhat different view. He saw spiritual development as not only being affected by "*the whole gamut of social influences*" including "*other people and institutions, schools, politicians, the church*" but was intrinsically linked with both personal and social development.

> Mr. B: *I feel the most important thing about assemblies is moral and personal development. That's the chance for the school to guide pupils on relationships really, to guide their thinking on how we relate to each other and how we should behave and respond and about the sort of values that are positive.*

The respondent at School B took the view that developing pupils spiritually was a matter of getting pupils to think more deeply about something which on the surface they think they understand.

> Ms. S: *I think that (it) is very important in our fast living visual age that we encourage them to go beyond that in some way.*

As to how spiritual development could be recognised within pupils one respondent said he would observe that through children's behaviour whereas another stressed the ability to ask questions without necessarily expecting definitive answers. Ms. S however didn't think that one could determine whether a child was being developed spiritually. She acknowledged that certain comments or questions might reveal such development but just because a child didn't make significant comments or ask pertinent questions did not mean that such development wasn't taking place. She was most resistant to the idea that any attempt on the part of teachers or

inspectors should or could be made to quantify spiritual development or that they should expect to see evidence of it.

All three respondents admitted that their initial training had not formally prepared them for either assembly taking or developing pupils spiritually.

> Mr. P: *I never remember it being mentioned once.*

> Ms. S: *I trained as a secondary teacher so I didn't receive any training of any kind for any kind of RE, spiritual development, assemblies or anything else.*

Mr. P was also aware that for teachers recently in training the situation appeared not to have changed.

> Mr. P: *.....I have an NQT..... being involved in assemblies she really didn't know what to do.*

As for INSET, there was little enthusiasm displayed by either respondent at Schools F and J.

> Mr. B: *The only INSET I would say has related to assemblies would be individual guidance from the Headteacher..... I had to control 420 children in the hall and not to have disruption and riot in there! rather than spiritual or moral issues.*

Mr. P however, whilst aware of various INSET opportunities currently available declared that his development as an assembly taker had been by observing others.

> Mr. P: *Simply through practical experience of going into school, seeing it happen in school, seeing it done well (and not so well) and picking ideas from people who in my view have done it quite well. I mean I've seen such a variety of assemblies over the years; very, very formal assemblies, very structured assemblies which isn't really for me, and some less formal which actually has a purpose behind it.*

Again these respondents' present knowledge, they felt, had been picked up on an *ad hoc* basis, informally through discussions with colleagues, watching fellow practitioners or sudden inspirations from literature or personal observations. Ms. S however, had

received INSET on spiritual development through Benchmark following on from her school's OFSTED inspection, which had been of some help, mainly in helping the staff to focus on where they were going.

In addition, each respondent was invited to provide any extra observations which they felt could be relevant to the research as a whole. The respondent at School F felt that developing a policy about spiritual development was a crucial aspect of the task of developing pupils spiritually. He felt that clear policy guidelines would remove some of the accidental nature of spiritual development and looked forward to the rigours of creating such a policy along with staff and governors. The impression was given that an issue as knotty as pupils' spirituality needed the combined wisdom of many heads. He also suggested that with so many assemblies to provide for in a school year, it would be helpful to have a forum for the sharing of ideas, and for developing themes with appropriate resources.

The respondent at School J admitted that the whole subject of spiritual development was not an issue to which he had given a great deal of thought. He also saw that current legislation presented a potential dichotomy between teachers' personal beliefs and professional responsibility in that compulsory collective worship posed problems for some teachers. He provided anecdotal evidence of his previous Head who never said prayers in assembly because he could not bring himself to do so.

It ought to be made clear at this juncture that staff are under no obligation to lead acts of collective worship, the Head and governing body being merely responsible for ensuring that they take place according to the current legislation. Whilst this may be the position in law, in practice the refusal of teaching staff to lead acts of worship could be problematical from both an organisational point of view and possibly that of school ethos.

The respondent at School B was most concerned that no attempt should be made to impose upon assemblies the kind of prescriptive timetabling recently introduced into the Literacy Hour or the Mathematics lesson.

> Ms. S: *Please don't anybody tell me that I've got to do two minutes of reflection and three minutes of introduction!*

She did however, feel that the pattern of assemblies developed at her school had been beneficial for the children in that pupils had become actively involved in them and what they were doing was of value. She recounted instances of children bringing in contributions for the assembly focus table without being asked; of individual children asking to recite part of a prayer when it was next used. There was usually a good response to the challenge given to the children in the Tuesday assembly most weeks and there was a general understanding and acceptance that pupil participation was encouraged and valued.

Comparison of Data from the Different Sectors

Comparing the data collected from the Voluntary (see Chapter 6) and County sectors, certain similarities and differences manifested themselves. The observed assemblies were all part of a regime involving a variety of assembly takers and organisational formats. The pupils were expected to sit on the floor with their attention drawn to a visual focus. All the assemblies contained segments allocated to A (time for quiet reflection) and F (worship) and were shaped to a large degree by traditional practices (a) and to a lesser extent by published assembly material. None of the respondents had received any initial training for either taking assemblies or developing pupils spiritually.

When considering differences, however, it was difficult to draw clear distinctions between the perspectives and practices of assembly takers in the Voluntary sector as opposed to those in County schools. One apparent difference was the use of a lighted candle which featured in all three church school assemblies but not at the County schools, although as mentioned above, a visual focus was provided at all the targeted assemblies. The reason for this apparent difference could be that for the respondents at schools L, V and W, the candle, in line with broadly Christian tradition, represented either an acknowledgement of the presence of God or a stimulus for reflecting about Jesus or God. At School L in particular, a liturgical phrase was used when the candle was lit, the children responding with *"the spirit is with us"* and it was

common practice to make this response whenever a candle was lit in assembly. The respondents also reported:

> Ms. H: *We decided to use the candle..... because it is the light of the world and it is the light of Jesus.....*

> Ms. X: *Because when the candle's lit, quite often children do think "we've talked about God and a divine power" and they actually do focus their thoughts in a way which is more of a worship at that point.*

At school W, Mr. Q had been asked about the blowing out of the candle. He stated that the significance of this act was *"to show that..... the prayer time had come full circle"*, indicating that the lighted candle was associated with the period of direct dialogue with God i.e. prayer.

This apparent distinction concerning candle use may, however, be somewhat illusory. There was no indication from the County school data that candles were *never* used during their assemblies. It just happened that on the occasion of the observed assemblies no candles were used. At School B an unlighted candle was visible on a window sill which apparently was used occasionally by other staff members but not by the respondent because she preferred to ask children to close their eyes when reflecting or praying. It is known to this researcher that candles are routinely used in many County school assemblies although not the extent or the precise purpose of their use.

Another possible discernible difference between the perspectives of the Church school respondents and those from the County schools, related to candle use, concerns the role of worship in relation to pupils' spiritual development. There seemed to be consensus amongst the Church school respondents about assemblies essentially providing an opportunity for "engagement" with God, either through prayer or quiet reflection, even if the assembly topic was not specifically religious. The County school respondents however, expressed a somewhat different view. Whilst they all included acts of worship in their assemblies because of their obligation so to do, no respondent expressed a belief that

such an element was necessary for the spiritual development of pupils.

The other differences discernible in the data seemed more likely to be attributable to the specific features of each assembly (such as theme or personal preference) rather than to the type of school in which they occurred. The significance of the data as a whole will be considered in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Interpretation of Main Research Data

This research has attempted to ascertain how the perspectives and practices of assembly takers might affect primary pupils' spiritual development. In order to posit a relationship between these perspectives and practices and spiritual development it has been necessary to elicit:

a)   the views that practitioners hold about the nature of spirituality,

b)   the factors which have shaped these views and

c)   the practical outcomes of these views in relation to school assemblies.

In addition it would also seem necessary to distinguish between those practices which are institutional in origin and those arising from personal choice or understandings in order to more effectively direct any proposals for promotion or alteration.

Perspectives on the spiritual

The literature review (see Chapter 2) revealed that of those who attempt to define and locate spirituality, three contexts were possible, the religious, the secular and an occlusion of both those. All three positions were held by the respondents in this research.

That both Ms. H and Mr. Q were unequivocal in locating spirituality within the Christian tradition was clearly reflected in their assemblies, both in their choice of themes and the activities they had planned. They were supported in this task by the traditions and current ethos of their schools.

> Ms. H: *Of all the schools I've been at I like the framework we've got here best of all and I didn't think about it when I applied for the job but I find I am less defensive being in a Church school about saying what I want to say..... I find you can open them spiritually and I feel quite free to do it in a Church school because you've got the CEVA bit which I didn't think about when I took the job but it does make life simpler.*

> **Mr. Q:** *The whole aim, if you like, of the school is "salvation". Really, in a word, we are encouraging people, teaching children how to live good Christian lives and so live in the afterlife with God basically, so everything we do is geared to that.*

This perspective on the spiritual set out by Blake, 1996; Broadberry, 1978; Kelly, 1990; Marenbon, 1996; Warner, 1996; Wilson, 1993 and Wood, 1991 was not however, without its difficulties. Both respondents admitted that the majority of their pupils (and parents) were not necessarily totally sympathetic to the religious ethos of their schools. The only concession to this situation at School W seemed to be that whilst assembly topics generally followed the Church calendar, efforts were made to relate the material to the children's own experiences so that they could appreciate the link between *"God the Father, the gospels and us here in 1999."*

Having recognised the negative attitudes that many of the pupils bring to assemblies at School L, Ms. H referred to certain strategies her school had developed to combat these. As well as varying the groupings in which the pupils met for assemblies in order to target the activities more specifically to their age range, and the setting up of a Sunday Club on school premises, the respondent reported that informality and active participation was encouraged at the Key Stage assemblies and at the whole school assembly on Tuesdays. Parents were encouraged to attend the Friday assembly which focused on *"affirming and applauding the things that children do"*. In addition, Ms. H stated that in order to deflect possible criticism from parents who might object to ritual Christian behaviour during the act of worship she often reminded the pupils of the significance of the "Amen" response and left it open whether they responded or not.

Such resistance to the religious within the school context was not overtly referred to in the literature, although it might be inferred from some of the changes that began taking place in assembly practices from the mid-seventies onwards, (Barratt, 1982; Cheston, 1976; Dingwall, 1986; Fisher, 1981; Waters, 1975).

It could be argued therefore, that even if a religious context was necessary for the development of pupils' spirituality, pupil resistance could be a factor in diminishing the impact on their spiritual development of overtly religious assemblies. This resistance was also recognised by Mr. B whose personal perspective on the spiritual placed him firmly in the secular camp, (Bond, 1992; Ewens, 1991; King, 1996; Minney, 1991; Rossiter, 1996; White, 1996). In essence he espoused a humanist perspective.

> Mr. B: *Knowledge about human beings and the world and their experiences of the world and how people react and behave with each other; and looking at history and looking at human achievements and thinking about the qualities we have as human beings; and why we behave in the way we do and what guides us and what makes us think in certain ways.*

He preferred to leave worship as something the children could make their own decision about at some point in the future. He even characterised his prayer segment as "time for quiet reflection" rather than "worship" stating that if the prayer (which on the occasion of the observed assembly had been made up by himself) was not an invitation to think about a specific person or thing relating to the assembly topic, he always left *"a long space"* either side of it for pupils to address their own inner interests. This respondent appeared to be bringing pupils to the "threshold of worship" as suggested by Hull (1971) rather than insisting upon it.

It is clear from the data that this respondent regarded his assemblies as occasions for promoting pupils' moral and personal development. Of course it could be the case that this respondent believed he wasn't addressing pupils' spirituality when in fact, it could be argued that he was, but in his mind he certainly wasn't planning to do so. And insofar as he may be representative of a proportion of primary school assembly takers, it could be argued that it would be no surprise if assemblies delivered by those with similar perspectives either failed completely to contribute to pupils' spirituality or did so only in a partial or haphazard way.

It is also possible to locate the respondents at County school F and Foundation school B in the secular camp and although Mr. P

believed the assemblies at his school tended to address school ethos, and very successfully too in his opinion, there was an intention to develop the pupils spiritually through assemblies even if the attempts were somewhat haphazard.

> Mr. P: *And so in terms of ethos, community involvement, I was very, very confident about that side of assemblies and I liked what was happening in assemblies. I'm less sure in terms of spiritual development simply because I think that is much more difficult and I often wonder, when it does happen, when I do see it happen, whether it happens by accident.*

> Mr. P: *At times there are glimpses I feel..... of spiritual development being addressed, but how effectively and how well that's done in the long term, I find quite difficult.*

His particular perspective on the spiritual was that it was more to do with questioning rather than finding answers, thus sharing the views of both King (1985) and McCreery (1996) who recognised the importance of pupils' questions on the route towards spiritual development. He believed that spirituality certainly involved experiencing awe and wonder and required elements such as active involvement but he doubted whether worship was a necessary component.

> Mr. P: *The fifth one, worship, I'm not so sure about. Is it possible to have spiritual development without worship? I don't know. I'm not sure it's possible without these four* (pointing to the attribute cards) *but that* (pointing to the worship card) *it's an issue a lot of people would argue over.*

Ms. S made no reference to the role of religion in relation to spiritual development. In her view as long as children were given opportunities to think beyond the things being put in front of them it didn't matter whether it was done through acts of worship or something within the curriculum. This perspective closely resembles those of both Myers (1997) and Ochs (1983).

What was interesting about both respondents' contributions, however, was their uncertainty about spirituality and its development in the school assembly context. When asked whether a particular element of the observed assembly had any positive effect on raising spiritual development Mr. P's response significant

> Mr. P: *I find that a difficult one to answer. I'm not sure about spiritual development. I think it might be more to do with ethos. I think it shows a certain respect to the children involved, but whether it is spiritual development I'm not sure.*

But having acknowledged this to be the case he was looking to the formulation of a school policy on spirituality to address and remedy this situation.

> Mr. P: *The policy on assembly and the written policy on spiritual development which we said we would do, we put it on hold until we had our OFSTED action plan out of the way, so they're areas we need to look at and develop.*

Ms. S admitted that she was not sure what she understood by spirituality and recognised that one couldn't be sure about the effects of any given assembly element on a pupil's spiritual development.

> Ms. S: *'Cause you never know do you? I mean, these are just what you are hoping is happening.*

It is hardly surprising that without initial training in the subject and with inadequate INSET (see Chapter 7) that these teachers should express these doubts and uncertainties, and insofar as they are representative of primary assembly takers, is it not possible that assemblies could fail to address pupils' spiritual development adequately because of teachers' insecurely held knowledge base?

The respondent whose perspectives on the spiritual belong in both the religious and secular camps, as suggested by Starkings (1993) and McClure (1996), was Ms. X from Voluntary Aided school V. She defined spirituality as having an awareness of self and valuing others and understanding the interconnectedness amongst all people and the environment. She too was aware of how home

influences can have a greater impact upon a child's development than anything the school can do.

> Ms. X: *I have one little girl in the class at the moment who thinks that revenge is a perfectly OK thing to do. You know, someone pushes you over, you push them back and it doesn't matter how much discussion we do about, you know, "what would happen if we all did that, you know, we'd all end up fighting with each other and we'd be hurt and so on". She still thinks it's OK because that's the message she's getting from home and I do think that plays an enormous part.*

Clearly, teachers' perspectives on the spiritual can impact on assemblies in several ways:

a) there may be no attempt to develop the pupils spiritually;

b) low level confidence and competence may impinge upon the efficiency of spiritual development, and

c) a religious route to the spiritual may give rise to resistance and hostility from the pupils.

Any of these factors may help to explain why primary school assemblies are not, in the view of the OFSTED inspectors, more effective in promoting pupils' spiritual development.

In addition to the respondents' perspectives on the nature of the spiritual, they were also asked about how they would recognise spiritual development within their pupils. It was generally agreed that any evidence of spiritual development was likely to emerge through informal observation rather than formal testing of any kind, a view shared by Rossiter (1996).

> Mr. B: *I would observe that through children's behaviour.*

> Mr. Q: *One thing I would think would be from the questions they ask..... that they can actually see there is a link, there is a pattern behind it all.*

> Ms. S: *I don't think I can, with the exception of perhaps their comments or questions that might come out of things.*

This would seem to have implications for inspection. During the course of an OFSTED inspection significant behaviour, comments or questions might be observed, but to what extent would any individual inspector be able to recognise these as attributable to assembly experiences or indeed any other school generated activity? The respondent at School B felt that because spirituality couldn't be measured, perhaps all that OFSTED could realistically report was whether opportunities were being provided within the assembly experience for spiritual development to take place.

Assembly Practices

It is not only teachers' perspectives which can have implications for pupils' spiritual development. Assembly practices themselves, which may or may not be directly influenced by teachers' perspectives, can also be expected to affect spiritual development in some way. Whereas teachers' perspectives on the spiritual can impact on assemblies in certain general ways, they are not the only influences on the elements and activities which make up the assembly experience.

Traditional practices

It was revealed above, (see Chapters 6 and 7), that a significant proportion of the segments in all of the observed assemblies was categorised as "traditional, meaning common school practice". No data was collected on how these segments came to be "common school practice", but nevertheless, it is possible to suggest certain routes to the "traditional". These traditional practices included:

a)   entry procedures, sometimes to music,
b)   greetings,
c)   introductory or explanatory dialogue,
d)   candle lighting,
e)   singing,
f)   prayers including the Lord's prayer,
g)   dismissal procedures, sometimes to music.

Without a history of initial training in assembly taking or relevant INSET, (see Chapter 7) it is likely that teachers will replicate behaviours they have observed during their own education and from colleagues throughout their teaching careers. The review of

published assembly materials revealed that until the 1970's, assemblies were expected to be religious services modelled on Christian tradition, and it is interesting to note the similarity between the above list of "traditional" practices and the pattern suggested by the post-war assembly manuals, (see Chapter 2). The 1988 legislation re-established the requirement for a daily act of worship and so it is hardly surprising that some features of the 'service' style assembly survive as "traditional" practices in the observed assemblies. But as has already been indicated, overtly religious elements in assemblies can prove problematic to the point of possibly militating against some pupils' spiritual development.

Certain elements can become "common school practice" because they are dictated by the physical circumstances associated with the school building or the number of pupils or have been introduced to the school by Heads and other staff for particular reasons. The practice of daily gathering the whole school together for assembly was a legacy of pre-1988 legislation. Pressure of pupil numbers and limitations of space led to modifications such as sitting on the floor in multi-purpose accommodation and splitting assemblies into Key Stage, Year or Class groupings. These latter practices have been sanctioned by the 1988 legislation but the present researcher is unaware of any subsequent research into their impact on pupils' spiritual development.

One almost universal practice is to gather pupils to sit on the floor for assembly, very often in tidy rows. One respondent however, commented on the negative affect this can have on the assembly experience.

> Ms. H: *For some of them sitting on the floor for twenty minutes isn't very comfortable.*

All six participating schools usually followed this practice, although the observed assembly at School V departed from normal practice on that occasion by allowing the children to sit on benches because only one class was taking part that day. Two respondents remarked on how sitting arrangements were modified for Key Stage or Class assemblies. At School L attempts were made to make the Key Stage 2 assemblies *"more informal"* by grouping the children in a semi-circle around the focus table and at School J the

children tended to sit in a circle on the floor in class assemblies *"like Circletime".*

The implication would appear to be that whilst the formality of sitting in rows is necessary for large whole school groupings, when smaller numbers of children are involved the greater intimacy of a curved arrangement is preferred. This could be interpreted as being an instinctive attempt to provide the "hospitable space" which Myers (1997) alone cites as one of her necessary conditions for spiritual development. Certainly, large numbers of pupils gathered together on a hard floor, surrounded by equipment associated with other curriculum activities such as PE can give rise to discipline problems and unwanted distractions. The respondent at School J reported that both the entry music and the greeting, both elements of "common school practices", had to be abandoned periodically because of indiscipline.

> Mr. B: *They will listen to the music for a certain amount of time and suddenly it becomes muzak, it becomes background and they cease to listen and start to mumble.*

> Mr. B: *We have tried the "good morning" thing, but they tend to get a bit silly..... there's so many and you can't see to the back. There's always somebody who wants to make a meal of that.*

Traditional practices need not, however, be problematic. Candle lighting, which was routinely employed at three of the target schools, and occasionally at another, was positively welcomed by the children at School L and recognised by the staff as an effective visual aid.

> Ms. X: *We actually did an audit of acts of worship last year in the school and Ms. T who was the then Head said "well which do you like best?" and "which do you think could be improved?" and the candle was something that they decided they would very much like for their class assemblies. So we actually have them..... and it's nice for them because it helps them to concentrate.*

The use of candles can be a matter of personal preference, and the respondent at School B preferred not to use them with large numbers of pupils because she felt they were not necessarily an effective aid to concentration.

> Ms. S: *I think if they're trying to look at the candle, they're very easily distracted by somebody who's moving their head or fiddling with their hair or pushing their friend.*

Clearly some traditional practices may impact negatively upon pupils' spiritual development where they:

a) perpetuate religious ritual elements which are either unfamiliar to or unappreciated by significant numbers of pupils;

b) impinge upon the provision of "hospitable space" or

c) contribute towards indiscipline or distractions,

and this might suggest that in any review of a particular school's assembly practices, thought ought to be given towards "traditional" aspects to ascertain the possible nature of their impact upon pupils' spiritual development.

Practices resulting from Personal Choice

Three categories of assembly activity can be thought of as resulting from personal choice, these being (b) spontaneously arising, (c) suggested by the theme and (d) suggested by author of an assembly guideline. Even category (d) activities will have been chosen to fulfil a particular purpose, and where specific themes were expected to be followed (School W) or taped programmes used (School V), the assembly takers were free to select, augment and present material according to their own criteria. It is in the exercise of this freedom that personal perspectives on the spiritual can impact on the assembly experience.

All respondents were asked to what extent spiritual objectives informed the planning of the content and format of their assemblies, including Ms. X who based hers around a taped programme. The responses, although varied, revealed that documented planning in terms of aims, objectives and outcomes (whether general learning or specifically spiritual) was not common practice. In fact the question generated both surprised expressions

and hesitation although all respondents did attempt a reply. This might suggest that assemblies are still on the sidelines as claimed by Hull (1969, 1971, 1975) and not fully integrated into the school curriculum. Both Gent (1989) and Webster (1995) stressed the need for assemblies to be planned in a similar way to other curriculum subjects if they were to be considered intentional learning experiences.

Whereas Mr. Q took for granted the spiritual objectives lying at the heart of everything his school did, including assemblies, Mr B made no overt attempt to address spiritual objectives. Both Ms. H and Mr. P claimed to build in "opportunities for awe and wonder" into their assemblies, the former in relation to *"God and Jesus"* as befitted her religious perspective, the latter in terms of the natural environment and community membership in accordance with his secular perspective. Unfortunately the segments contained in both their assemblies were not strongly represented in category E (opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder).

Ms. S, rather than planning activities *"because it's good for spiritual development"* looked to provide *"time for the children to reflect"* and indeed her assembly did include three segments categorised under A (time for quiet reflection). Ms. X agreed that the makers of the tape, listed spiritual objectives in the accompanying teachers' notes, but in reality what each assembly lacked was a clearly defined spiritual focus delivered with expertise and confidence by the assembly takers. This is hardly surprising if assembly takers lack both appropriate training and sufficient time to plan their assemblies. It might be argued therefore, that assemblies largely made up of practices which lack clear spiritual objectives are unlikely to be potent vehicles for pupils' spiritual development except by chance.

Having considered the perspectual and practical factors which may militate against the successful development of pupils' spiritual development in primary school assemblies, the subject of assembly content needs now to be addressed.

Assembly Content

It is important at this point to distinguish between what is meant by the theme of an assembly and its content. The theme is the topic or subject matter providing the focus for the activities during the assembly. In the observed assemblies the themes included, "Light", "Risk Takers", "Hands", "Questions", "Challenge" and "Families". It is not the contention of this researcher that choice of theme is of little significance when assessing the ability of assemblies to develop pupils spiritually, rather that theme is of secondary importance to the treatment it receives during the assembly experience.

In other words, whilst certain themes might provide greater opportunities for developing pupils spiritually, the same theme can be handled in a variety of ways, some of which may be more conducive to spiritual development than others, hence the emphasis on assembly content. Priestley (1985) referred to this as the "style and manner" which excites the human spirit. The content of an assembly consists of those elements or activities which communicate the ideas and concepts associated with the theme and can be influenced by personal choices or the guidance of others. The attribute matrices (Tables 4.3 - 4.5, 6.1 - 6.3 and 7.1 - 7.3) represent an attempt to describe and codify the content of each target assembly according to the type of activity which OFSTED inspectors claim promotes spirituality.

The justification for using the OFSTED inspectors' criteria in the present research lies in the fact that spiritual development in schools is assessed according to their criteria. The selection matrices (see Tables 4.2, 6.4 - 6.6 and 7.4 - 7.6) codify the sources of the content. But as the literature review made clear, there are competing views about how spirituality might be developed and therefore the content of the observed assemblies deserve to be considered in the light of these competing views.

Several writers on the spiritual (Darby, 1996; Erricker, 1998; King, 1985; McCreery, 1996; Myers, 1997; Rodger, 1996;) maintain that spiritual development should initially focus on the individual child, by using their questions as a starting point, by listening to their narratives or exploring their families, cultures or traditions and thereby encourage each child to gain a sense of their own value

and worth and begin to understand the nature of their relationship with the rest of society and the universe as a whole. Such approaches would be categorised under B (addressing pupils' own questions or needs) and (e) something initiated by the children themselves.

In the focus assemblies, only two of the six contained any significant number of segments which addressed pupils' own concerns, and two contained single instances of pupil initiated activity, one of which (at School V) was a child's narrative. At School W, the respondent categorised the three instances of dramatic demonstration as something initiated by the children themselves but he admitted this was only indirectly because he had adapted them from real life situations he had observed around the school.

Whilst the respondent at School B only categorised two segments as addressing pupils' own questions or needs, B and none as something initiated by the children themselves (e), she did explain that the observed assembly was the second of a series of four, and had data been collected two days later, the matrix would have shown a different configuration with many segments assigned to both categories B and (e).

> Ms. S: *For the one that I did I had about ten children responded by bringing in photos or pictures of members of their family. Some of them were quite poignant little remarks and comments on them. One from a little girl whose dad works in South Africa and how special he is with being away.*

The vast majority of segments in all the focus assemblies however, were not directly related to the pupils' own questions or needs. It may have been that the observed assemblies were uncharacteristically low in instances of this kind, but a possibility is that the practice of gathering comparatively large numbers of pupils together in one place does not provide the most suitable setting for focusing on individual concerns, or listening to children's narratives, assuming they had the confidence to articulate their thoughts to what could be an audience of over four hundred of their peers.

In addition, the ability to conduct an assembly around individual pupils' concerns requires a degree of intimate knowledge of the pupils and their concerns, a privilege which except in the very smallest of schools is probably reserved for the classroom teacher. And since the data shows that assemblies are often conducted by adults other than a particular child's class teacher, this route to the spiritual is possibly best served in other settings or with forms of organisation such as at School B where a culture of participating has been built up.

> Ms. S: *And I don't know if you noticed at the very end of the assembly, a little boy came up to speak to me and he came to say could he read some of the prayer himself when we had it again. So on the Thursday when we did the prayer again..... Jack said the black lines except for the last one when we all joined in together. And the pupils sometimes do that. They know it's alright for them to come and request involvement in that way.*
>
> Ms. S: *We do sometimes have occasions where the children themselves respond quite quickly. You haven't actually asked them to bring things in, but they bring things in and then sometimes we create a focus table from the children's own contributions.*

Some writers claim that the route to the spiritual lies through an engagement of the emotions (McClure, 1996; Priestly, 1985; Rossiter, 1996), the imagination (Ashton, 1993; Hill, 1989; Levine, 1999; McClure, 1996; Minney, 1991), aesthetic sensitivity (King, 1985; Rossiter, 1996; Starkings, 1993) and by promoting a sense of awe and wonder (King, 1985; Lear, 1991; Minney, 1991; White, 1994). These approaches would be categorised under C (active pupil involvement), D (active listening) and E (opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder). Whilst all but one of the observed assemblies contained several instances where it was hoped active pupil involvement was taking place, there could be no certainty that the pupils were engaging their emotions, imagination or aesthetic sensitivities.

All but one of the respondents assumed there were occasions for D (active listening) in their assemblies, but the distinction between active listening and that which is merely passive lies in the requirement to respond in some way subsequent to the act of listening. Of the twenty two segments allocated to D (active listening), less than half (eight) lacked any associated requirement to respond and should perhaps have been designated passive listening.

Three of the respondents also claimed that their assemblies contained opportunities for experiencing a sense of awe and wonder. But once again, apart from one instance at School V recorded in the field notes when many of the children gasped on hearing that visually impaired Steve McDonald intended to walk across Australia, no evidence was collected concerning the experiencing of either awe or wonder.

The data suggests that the active participatory element that many writers on the spiritual deem is required for individual spiritual development, is largely absent from the observed assemblies, although it has to be recognised that some aspects of it might have been made more evident with dedicated data gathering in this sphere. The respondents themselves demonstrated that the distinction between passive and active participation was not clearly understood and insofar as passive participation might be the hallmark of assemblies in general, this might also explain why they are not contributing effectively to spiritual development.

Both King (1985) and McClure (1996) share the OFSTED inspectors' opinion that periods of quiet for inner reflection are a prerequisite for spiritual development. All six assemblies provided some time for quiet reflection, A although, only four of the twenty two allocated to category A were not also allocated to another category. And one of those, at School J, was a period of silence after the conclusion of the assembly when the staff were awaited to take the pupils back to their classrooms. The respondent admitted that whilst it presented an opportunity to reflect on the assembly, there was normally taped music during this period and there was no formal expectation of inner reflection. Clearly the provision of opportunities for silent reflection cannot guarantee that individual

pupils are engaged in this way and any attempt to investigate is fraught with difficulty.

Summary of Responses to Research Questions
Elements characterising school assemblies

The experiences provided by current assembly practices, as revealed in both the pilot and main research, are varied, and include listening to stories, poems, music and exposition about assembly themes. They also provide opportunities for discussion, singing, reflection and prayer and some opportunity for involvement in dramatic demonstration of themes. At three of the target assemblies the children were also set challenges to which responses were expected, and at two assemblies they experienced liturgical elements distinctive of specific denominations. Apart from these last elements, the targeted assemblies are largely composed of *naturalistic, i.e. classroom methods.*

Extent of inclusion of elements deemed conducive to pupils' spiritual development

Each targeted assembly contained most if not all of the elements deemed by OFSTED inspectors to be conducive to pupils' spiritual development, although certain elements such as items addressing pupils' own questions or needs or opportunities for experiencing awe and wonder were not well represented. There was also doubt about the true extent of active participation and even where opportunities for reflection and worship were provided, there could be no certainty that it was taking place.

Perspectives which shape the assembly experience

Those delivering the assembly experience held a variety of perspectives on the spiritual ranging from the religious to the secular, including one respondent who claimed to avoid consideration of the spiritual at all in his assemblies. There was a significant degree of uncertainty amongst assembly takers about the nature of things spiritual and how to develop it in pupils, and this, it was suggested, was largely a consequence of lack of professional training in the matter. It was also acknowledged by respondents that pupils' own backgrounds and attitudes towards things spiritual impacted upon what was possible in the assembly

context irrespective of the perspectives held by the assembly takers themselves.

Factors affecting the choice of assembly elements

Tradition played a significant part in the choice of assembly activities, but there was little formal planning of spiritual objectives and most assemblies lacked a clearly defined spiritual focus. Most targeted assemblies were not consciously orientated towards developing individual pupils' spirituality, thereby appearing to justify OFSTED's concern regarding the relationship between assemblies and pupils' spiritual development.

Perceived needs of assembly leaders in respect of improving the spiritual role of school assemblies

Adequate training and sufficient time for the planning, preparation and delivery of spiritually focused assemblies were mentioned by all but one of the respondents as desirable conditions for easing their task. Forums or banks for the sharing of ideas and resources were also suggested, whilst prescriptive guidelines were definitely not welcomed.

The above analysis suggests that the perspectives, practices and content which currently shape the assembly experience are likely to need certain transformations if pupils' spirituality is to be developed effectively through this medium. This is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 9

Towards the Spiritual Assembly: Some Implications of the Present Research

This research has sought to highlight some of the issues concerning primary school assemblies and their contribution to pupils' spirituality. Schools have a legal duty to develop pupils spiritually (ERA, 1988) and yet there are competing views about what spirituality is and how best to develop it, not just amongst academics and theologians (see Chapter 2), but also amongst teachers whose duty it is to develop the pupils spiritually (see Chapters 6 and 7) and those charged with inspecting the teachers in that task (see Chapter 2).

Not only are there competing views, but there is also confusion and uncertainty amongst teachers, a situation which must in part be attributable to lack of training about spirituality and its development at both the initial and in-service stages. In addition, the spiritual component of the curriculum is considered difficult to assess (see Chapter 2) and so in the current situation schools find themselves in the unenviable position of having the untrained inspected on the unquantifiable by people who themselves cannot agree!

Clearly professional educators cannot be content with this state of affairs. There are some actions which schools and individual teachers can take for themselves. Others are more likely to result from changes in policy at governmental agency level, both national and local, and from academics in education.

The Nature of Spirituality

This current research initially identified a diversity of understandings in the literature pertaining to spirituality (see Chapter 2) and this was reflected by the respondents in this present research. No claims are being made here about having unearthed any clearer understanding about the nature of spirituality, but it would seem sensible to suggest that unless and until those charged with the

responsibility for developing pupils spiritually have a more secure knowledge base in relation to spirituality, effective pupil progress in this field is unlikely.

Researching the spiritual therefore, needs to gather momentum and the findings need to be incorporated into the training programmes of colleges and departments of education as well as Local Education Authorities and government agencies for INSET purposes. A difficulty here however, is that the total number of hours currently allocated on PGCE courses for training in non-core subjects can be as low as eight, (2000) and with so many other subjects competing for this time it seems unlikely that spiritual development will be given the attention it obviously needs unless there is a campaign to reallocate course time for it. There may however, be scope for the subject to be included in INSET programmes and schools and individual teachers could create a demand for such courses.

Spiritual contexts

The literature review raised questions about the most appropriate context in which to promote spirituality. The respondents in this research were also divided about the suitability of the school assembly for developing the spiritual. The value of regularly gathering all the pupils of a school together is not disputed. What is debatable is the purpose for which such an organisational form is of value. The 1994 HMSO report claimed that assemblies contribute strongly to school ethos and this function was mentioned by two respondents in the present research.

> Mr. P: *I think our assemblies address ethos very*
> *well. I was very confident, that in terms of assembly*
> *we had a real strength in terms of ethos for what*
> *we were doing.*

> Mr. B: *Assemblies..... that's the chance for the*
> *school to guide pupils..... on..... the sort of values*
> *that are positive.*

The question is however, whether spiritual development is best served by gathering large numbers of pupils together, especially when as many as seven years may separate the youngest from the oldest.

It was suggested in the previous chapter that for some teachers, pupils and their parents, the overtly religious aspects of some assemblies are problematic. Gent (1989), Holm (1975), King (1985) and McCreery (1993) all acknowledge that assemblies need not involve an act of worship and could and should be organised and developed as inclusive, curricular and educational experiences with spiritual objectives, *if that is what legislators truly intend.*

It is suspected however, that what masquerades as "spiritual development" is in fact "religious nurture" in the minds of many educational legislators either because they are unaware of the distinction or because they are determined to promote the Christian religion in the personally held belief that the route to spiritual fulfilment lies in Christianity. Why else should there be an insistence on a daily act of worship which was "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" (ERA, 1988, 7(1)) which was to "play a major part in promoting the spiritual and moral dimension in schools," (DfE, 1992)? *There would appear to be no logical reason* why schools shouldn't engage in religious nurture if parents require it and teachers are willing and able to provide it, but this ought not to be seen as synonymous with developing pupils spiritually.

Schools have the option to utilise assembly time, however it is organised, for specifically developing pupils spiritually. Assembly takers will of course need time to plan, prepare and resource their assemblies with spiritual objectives uppermost. Schools may then wish to conduct their own research into the effects of targeting spiritual objectives within the assembly framework.

Accessing the Spiritual

It was recorded in the literature that certain activities were considered conducive to spiritual development. Along with Priestley's (1985) "style and manner", King's (1985) "exploratory steps", Hill's (1989) 7 objectives and McClure's (1996) characteristics of learning, the OFSTED inspectorate also deemed certain activities (codified in the attribute cards described in Chapter 5 above) as conducive to spiritual development. Each target assembly in this current research contained some of these desirable attributes but unless these activities are harnessed towards that which what lies at the core of spirituality, the

engagement of the individual with the essence of things, there is no guarantee that by themselves they will help to develop pupils spiritually.

If primary school assemblies are to be credible and effective forums for the spiritual development of pupils, then teachers need to understand the complex nature of spirituality and how pupils' spirituality can best be developed, and this will require suitable training. Assemblies will need to have clear spiritual objectives; be provided in appropriate accommodation, with suitable practices and content. It may be the case that assemblies, however thoughtfully organised, conducted or resourced do not provide the best setting for pupils' spiritual development. It may be that individual pupil's spiritual capacity cannot be developed by formal intervention on the part of the school.

Several reasons for varying the organisational format of assemblies were offered by the respondents in the present study, but one of possible greater significance than all the others is that small groups, especially those based on class units or Key Stages, can have the assembly experience tailored to their needs. Research is needed into the best organisational form for enabling pupils to pose questions, present narratives and explore their families, cultures and traditions.

An allied issue concerns assembly timetabling. One of the target schools, in concentrating on the in-depth development of an assembly theme, deployed one teacher over a four-day period (known as blocking) to provide the pupils with a comprehensive assembly package. This was in contrast to the other target schools where assembly duties were spread amongst different staff in a variety of formats throughout the week (known as the medley approach). Future research could explore whether such "blocking" provided advantages for spiritual development over the "medley approach".

It is also customary for assemblies to take place in the school hall, where these exist, except when classrooms are used for smaller than whole school gatherings. These halls are often required to accommodate a variety of curriculum activities, such as PE, music

or ICT and often double as a dining area. As a consequence of this multi-purpose function, equipment, furniture or decoration found in these halls is rarely exclusively designed for assembly use and probably therefore not contributing to spiritual development in a positive way.

The provision of dedicated assembly accommodation is probably unrealistic, but research might be undertaken into whether the curtaining of present accommodation to hide non-relevant resources and the provision of spiritual foci can make a positive contribution to spiritual development. Similar research could be undertaken into the effect of more comfortable seating arrangements, such as carpeting, cushions or soft chairs.

The Nature of Teacher Intervention

It could be argued that at the core of this present research has been an examination of the nature of teacher intervention in relation to pupils' spiritual development through the medium of the school assembly. And because an avenue of investigation has been the teachers' own perspectives around assemblies it seems appropriate to consider how they themselves view the nature of their intervention.

All respondents in this present research, irrespective of their particular spiritual stance, recognised the limited impact their intervention could have on the pupils' spiritual development. For two of the respondents, intervention took the form primarily of demonstrating the relevance of the Christian message to the children's own lives despite the difficulties this approach could engender. For the others intervention consisted of providing opportunities around everyday situations for reflection, developing a questioning attitude and/or experiencing awe and wonder. They recognised however, that there was no guarantee that these opportunities would bring about spiritual development, since the forum in which these interventions occurred was in fact only one of many competing influences upon pupils.

Perhaps there is tacit agreement amongst the respondents with Hull (1969, 1971, 1975) that to be more effective, assemblies need to be fully integrated into the school curriculum, contributing to the

educational work of the school and reflecting and extending the values and understandings promoted during the rest of the school day. In this way, if spiritual matters are addressed through the wider curriculum then the school assembly could provide both reinforcement of and/or stimulus towards the planned topics and themes that comprise it. Integrating assembly themes into the whole curriculum (and not just the R.E. component) is a course of action open to individual schools.

Assessing and Inspecting the Spiritual

The earlier recognition (see Chapter 2) of the difficulties associated with attempts to assess individual spiritual development or progress was reiterated by the respondents in this present research. Whilst no recommendations can be made regarding assessment of the spiritual on the basis of the present findings, there appears nevertheless to be a need for clarity amongst OFSTED inspectors as to their criteria for inspection of the spiritual in order to avoid the kind of misunderstanding that arose at School B (see Chapter 7).

In the interests of fairness and professional integrity there ought to be an agreed language pertaining to the spiritual in the curriculum (and by implication its inspection) and this might be achieved by creating INSET opportunities involving the OFSTED inspectorate.

Summary of Possible Action by Individual Teachers and their Schools

On the basis of the findings of this present research it is suggested that primary school teachers might seek to:

a)   create a demand at local level for INSET around issues relating to pupils' spiritual development;

b)   undertake school-based action research around the planning, preparation and resourcing of assemblies with definite spiritual objectives;

c)   consider the 'blocking' option when timetabling assemblies;

d)   design and establish assembly environments more conducive to spiritual development;

e)   more fully integrate assembly topics and themes with the whole school curriculum.

Summary of Possible Action by Academics in Education

On the basis of the above findings it is suggested that academic research needs to continue into the nature of the spiritual, and specific investigations should be made into:

f)   how organisational forms impact upon pupils' spiritual development in the primary school context;

g)   whether assembly timetabling considerations such as 'blocking' or the 'medley' approach impact upon the effectiveness of developing pupils spiritually;

h)   how far sympathetic assembly accommodation can impact positively on pupils' spiritual development;

i)   how far having clear spiritual objectives impacts positively upon pupils' spiritual development.

It is also suggested that the academic community should make a case for the inclusion of a spiritual issues component in the initial training of teachers as well as helping to resource associated INSET courses.

Summary of Possible Action by Government and its Agencies

On the basis of the findings in this present research it is suggested that:

j)   the current schools' legislation pertaining to daily acts of worship and the broadly Christian character of that worship be made optional;

k)   a spiritual issues component be made a compulsory part of initial teacher training;

l)   a common language and consistent approach is adopted to the inspection of the spiritual in schools;

m)   a programme of INSET on spiritual issues is put in place aimed at both teachers and OFSTED inspectors.

The results of such actions and research may well provide a deeper understanding into the relationship between primary school assemblies and pupils' spirituality. But whatever light is shed on these issues by future actions and research, the present research has sought to indicate the ways in which primary school pupils' spiritual development is currently being affected by teachers' perspectives and practices. Clearly, as indicated above, there is much further research to be done.

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Appendix 1

Transcript of Interview at School M
November '97

I = interviewer   Ms L= respondent

..... = indistinct vocal or pause

I: Can you tell me a little about how assemblies are organised within the school?

Ms L: *Every Monday we have a whole-school assembly which is taken in turns by the Headmaster, by the vicar of the local church, his curate or his two curates as well take part and also Mr S who's from the Gospel Hall. He or him and his wife also take part and those assemblies are planned on a termly basis. They all get together and decide who's going to do what and when they're going to do it. And then they all have a very different flavour because obviously Mr S has a different outlook on things than perhaps than Mr F who's the village rector. So that's the whole-school assembly on Monday. On Tuesday we have worship through song, which is really hymn practice with a bit of worship included. We try to make, you know, it a nice not a "come on you must sing louder" or "get the words right", we try to make it a nice worshipping singing time. Wednesdays we all have our own base or class assemblies so that's a smaller group in the classrooms; usually two classes together, but as I'm the only one in this base it's me on my own this term. And Thursdays we have class assemblies which are taken by..... each class takes a turn in performing for the school and mine was actually last Thursday. We did a thing, because our school topic is colour and light this term, it was all about Elmer the Elephant and colours, but linking to that we had about it's all right to be different and God looks after everybody. So we bring in the religious*

136

theme as well as the fun thing. You know we try and link everything; I mean I had maths in there as well. And we each take a turn each term when each class does a class assembly when the parents are invited to that as well so it's performing for an audience as well which is quite good fun. And then on Friday we have our Blue Book assembly. Blue Book is the book where good work gets..... they go to the Headmaster, get stickers for their work and they're rewarded in assembly and usually we have a sort of story..... leading up to Christmas now that's gonna be Christmas type stories but it's not necessarily a religious story but obviously we always end with a prayer and a silent time. So that's how the assemblies are organised in the school.

I: Why do you think they are organised like this? Is there a thinking behind the different formats?

Ms L: I think part of it is to comply with regulations. Obviously we have to have some sort of worshipping each day in the school. I think it's arranged so that the Monday one obviously, that gives us our good links with the community and links with other churches, and it's the children's chance to see other peoples' viewpoints. I suppose I mean, this week Mr F did an assembly on Advent which was probably very different than how anyone in the school would have done it, but it's interesting that the children see somebody else as well. The worship through song obviously is organised because we need to practice our songs, and also because I think singing is a nice way to praise God; and most of the children enjoy that. I think the base assemblies are arranged so that you've got a more intimate, closer surroundings and quite often if you get a discussion going in a base assembly, children will speak up and say things that could be important that they won't when everybody, three hundred

children are in. And the Thursday one is again to give a link with the community because the parents are invited; it also gives the children a chance to perform and it gives a chance for the teachers to have a minor breakdown each term worrying about doing it! But that's another story, and it's just a nice way to show the parents and the other classes what work we've been doing in each class and to (I don't know) so that the other children can see performing as well. And then the Friday one is sort of a round up of the week. We usually have football match results and things like that go on in that and any notices that have to be..... everybody needs to know. I think that is a celebration more of good things that have happened in the week. We try not to have any nags on that assembly day. There's no "you will not do this" or "you will not do that". It's to try to make it a positive sort of get together.

(Referring to "How many minutes to lunchtime?)
I: Why did you start off with that particular question?

> Ms L: *That was sort of pre-assembly if you know what I mean. In a way it wasn't part of the assembly and it's because we'd been doing "Time" and it was just..... assembly sort of started after that..... they was just trying to fit in things and make them realise that time, which is what we've been doing in Maths this week.....*

I: How did this theme of "Friendship" come about?

> Ms L: *It's part of our RE policy in Base 3. Part of our curriculum is Jesus and his friends and then we go on to talk about qualities of friends and things like that, so it's following our RE syllabus, our RE policy. It was following up the work we have been doing. We've been thinking about friends 'cause part of our class assembly which we were performing later in the week which was about Elmer the Elephant being good friends with other people. We've been*

> *talking about that, but it's really because I try and*
> *follow the RE policy as much as possible.*

(Referring to the Morning Prayer)

I: Is this a prayer that is used throughout the school and how do the children come to know it?

> Ms L: *It's used throughout the school and they learn*
> *it in Reception, they start to learn it..... so yes it's*
> *used throughout the school.*

I: Would this prayer be said at every assembly?

> Ms L: *No, not necessarily.*

I: Why than did you include it in your assembly?

> Ms L: *Because as you were saying, you realise that*
> *mine had come back from swimming. Half had*
> *come back from swimming and I wanted to bring*
> *them all back together and that's something that*
> *they all know and it would be a way of getting*
> *them back as one body because as you know very*
> *well, when they've been apart, then you've got*
> *that..... You've got to make them be one again. So*
> *it's just because it's something they all know and*
> *they all take part in and feel part of I suppose. But I*
> *don't always use it. It was a way to bring them*
> *back because quite often I don't do my assembly*
> *at that time. I'll do it first thing in the afternoon; so it*
> *was a little bit out of the ordinary and I wanted to*
> *try and get them gelled back together again.*

(Referring to the Christmas card showing)

I: Where did that idea come from?

> Ms L: *It came from out of here* (pointing to head) *it*
> *came out of my own head.*

I: I'm trying to categorise the various elements as being either:

a) traditional,

b) spontaneously arising,

c) suggested by the theme itself,

d) suggested by an author of an assembly guideline and

e) something that the children themselves come up with.

Ms L: *I suppose it came out spontaneously. I only had the Christmas card given to me that morning. It was the very first one that I had. It was given to me by a little boy who is having problems at home and needs lots of TLC and lots of being made to feel special. So it just worked in that I'll reward him if you like. It was either that or the evening before he'd given it to me so, lots of times I plan to do wonderful things in all subjects, and then all of a sudden I think, oh no that'll be better. And I'm a bit like that you know. When you're sitting at home planning you think, oh that will be a good idea, that will work, but when you get in here it doesn't, that doesn't feel right. So that was just something to make him feel special. He needs to be made to feel special as well so it was a bit of public relations as well as the fact that it did link with what I wanted to say.*

(Referring to choosing friends and tying them with string)
I: Where did that idea come from?

Ms L: *That came from one of the, I don't know what it's called now, "Primary Assembly", that came from a set assembly.*

I: What would you think the intention was with that activity? What were you aiming at? What was the purpose of it?

Ms L: *To show that they're all linked by friendship but they needn't necessarily. They're not obviously tied by a bit of string all the time, but there's a link there all the time however how far away we go, however much time or whatever separates them, there will always be a link there.*

I: You asked then who Jesus' special friends were, presumably that was a link between the RE?

Ms L: *Yes because we have been doing about the disciples and who He chose for his special friends.*

I: You then read a poem "The Golden Thread of Friendship". Where did that come from?

> Ms L: *From the set assembly. I have used that before in another context and I think it's a lovely poem.*

I: And then you read the story of Naomi and Ruth. Why was that? How did that arise?

> Ms L: *It arose because I wanted to do a Bible story and New Testament stories, lots of them, they are very familiar with and I knew that they hadn't heard that story before and again it was mentioned in the set assembly. But it was something that I had thought about anyway because a lot of the new Testament stories they are familiar with. The Old Testament they tend not to be (you know apart from your Noah's Ark). I wanted something a bit different.*

I: You then set them a challenge. "Can you think of ten things that make a good friend?" Do you often set challenges like that?

> Ms L: *Yes. I do it in other subjects as well, in other contexts as well.*

I: When you set these challenges, do you get much response from the children or is it something that gets thrown out but doesn't seem to come back?

> Ms L: *Usually it does. Actually I'm very lucky, these are a very responsive lot of children and they'll think up ideas, relevant ideas very readily. So yes, I do get responses. You know how you can get one group of children that sit there like lemons and are frightened to say anything? But these actually are a very good lot where that is concerned. You know they're quite surprising really. I mean, sometimes they come up with answers that they've obviously thought so hard about that they're so complicated, but they do, they're good like that.*

I: Is singing the Lord's Prayer something that is common throughout the school?

> Ms L: *We sometimes sing it in assembly as the whole school. I don't know if other people do it in their base assemblies. I did it because I'm not terribly musical myself and I feel that there should be a bit of singing in an assembly. And I don't mind singing when there's no other adult in here but as you were here I thought I'll do something that is singing but it doesn't matter quite so much if I'm not in tune. But we do sing it as a whole school and quite often we'll say the Lord's Prayer and in the middle they get a little bit lost but when they sing it seems to flow much more readily. But part of it was because I don't like singing in front of..... I don't mind singing in front of the children when there's other people there but if I'm the leading voice I think oooh!*

I: What followed appeared to be an impromptu discussion. Had you planned that, or was it something that came from the children themselves?

> Ms L: *That came definitely from the children. I was hoping in my naiveté and wishfulthinkingness we would be able to stop on a really nice note with a prayer ending it off. But then they wanted to put something in so in a way my assembly ended with the prayer in theory. It should have ended with a prayer and then we should have peacefully gone and done something else. But because they wanted to say things, I never like to say right oh oh, you're not gonna talk now, and so that was very much it came from them you know. I couldn't stop it; I didn't want to stop it.*

I: But you did seem to end the assembly with this activity of holding hands and then leaving as a chain. Was that intended or was that something that came on the spur of the moment?

> Ms L: *That came on the spur of the moment. In a way it was linking back to the assembly with the*

string and the tying up. So in a way it wasn't all my idea because I got that idea from somewhere else, but that just happened. I get my best ideas like that.

I: Tell me a little bit about what you think spirituality is all about. And also how you think it can be best developed in the pupils of this age.

> Ms L:*A hard one. I think that it's all about being able to listen to something that's inside you, not necessarily that you can..... you can't see nor touch it obviously but being able to turn in and listen to what's gone on inside you. And I think that for children, young children, it's something that's very difficult to do. I think they need some sort of focus to be able to do it and in the school we use a candle for the whole-school assembly and things like that.....*

I: Did you have a focus this time? I noticed the globe and the cross. Would you call that your focus?

> Ms L:*I would, but I'm not sure it's enough of a focus. I think I'm a bit unsure whether it's best I give them something to focus on or whether they can achieve this sort of quietness and peacefulness better when they've got their eyes shut and their hands together sort of thing. I'm not sure whether that, I'm in a quandary as to whether the best way is to get this sort of inner peace which I think looking inside yourself and feeling what's really inside yourself which I think is what spirituality is about..... I personally find it easier to shut out everything that's gone on around me and shut my eyes, but I think some of them need a focus because I think some of the in a way worry if they've got their eyes shut. They worry what's going on around them and worry that they're missing out on something. So that I'm in a bit of a quandary about that but I feel that they need, some of them need that, some of them need to shut off everyone*

around them in a way I need to shut off everything that goes around because I get distracted. 'Cause I think "yeah, I should be doing this" or "couldn't I do that?" So I need personally to shut out things, but I think some of them worry that when they've got their eyes shut that something's happening and they might miss out on all..... they don't feel comfortable because even at lunchtime when we say grace you know it's "hands together, eyes closed" but some of them still keep an eye open because I think they just, you know, you don't know what's going to happen to you with your eyes shut. But the spirituality thing. I've been worried about this question because in a way I'm not totally clear about it myself. What I've learnt over the years I think is just that you need to be able to find some sort of, you know, peace and quiet and for this age it's very difficult. Hopefully throughout the school we do have these quiet times, these times for reflection. We are getting better as the years go on at encouraging the children to do that.

I: When you were trained initially, did your training prepare you for this kind of activity?

Ms L: No, no not at all! It's a very long time ago but I don't think that assemblies were mentioned in any way to be honest. I don't remember them being mentioned. Nobody ever told me how to take assembly. Well our RE co-ordinator actually she's not. She's been here two years now, her subject was RE at college and she said to me that she was never taught how to do an assembly. So even though her own subject was RE she said "I've never been taught" and I said "come on tell me how to do it" and she said you know "we were never taught". But then I was trained in '74 - 77 and at that time I don't think I was taught to teach anything. I can't remember being taught that this is the way or these are the ways you could teach reading. It was all the discovery time, sit a child in

front of a book and it will find out how to do it. So I don't think it was just RE or just assemblies or worship that I wasn't taught about. I really don't think I was taught how to teach anything. I've never been taught how to do assemblies. All that I've..... we.....it's just watching other people, reading bits.

I: So you've not had any specific INSET then about it?

Ms L: *No not on, for assemblies.*

I: How does that make you feel then? Here you are having to take assemblies, you're having to address developing the spiritual in children because that's what the '88 Act has decreed that we shall do. How does that make you feel?

Ms L: *It makes me feel like I feel about a lot of things..... inadequate. But I think that's just me probably. But if I stop and think about them then I do worry, oh am I doing this right, am I doing the children a mis-service or dis-service by not doing it right. But again I think that that's just the way a lot of teachers feel; that we all knock ourselves and put ourselves down. Yeah at times I think I'm doing it right. I really want somebody to come along and say "oh yes that's the way, very good, well done".*

I: You've talked about spirituality being something that's inside us, it's the ability to be quiet and calm and think about things inwardly. How would you know whether you were in fact developing a child or a pupil spiritually? What would you expect to be the visible signs of success?

Ms L: *That's a hard one too. I would expect them to be able to be quiet and still physically, quiet and still so that outwardly they seemed as though they were thinking inwardly, if you see what I mean. And so from what they, what comments they all come up with after that quietness or that stillness, because quite often they'll say things afterwards that "oh I was thinking about when my great auntie Maude who died three hundred years, no died two years ago" or "I was thinking about my mum*

who's not very well" and it usually doesn't come up at an assembly or during the assembly but they'll tell you when they've got a moment to tell you. So you, I think it's their reactions to but not necessarily during assembly, especially not during the whole-school assemblies because obviously there they haven't got the scope for (well they have I suppose). They're not brave enough to say their true feelings. But quite often it comes up in conversation afterwards "I was thinking about" or " I felt" or " I didn't like it when we were being quiet because it made me think about my guinea pig that had died" or something like that, one of the morbid things. Quite often that sort of thing will come up so then I think maybe I'm getting somewhere with them.

Appendix 2

Attribute cards

	Front	Reverse
Card A:	time for quiet reflection	silence, thinking time, inner contemplation
Card B:	addressing pupils' own questions or concerns	everyday experiences, topical matters, pupils' achievements
Card C:	active pupil involvement	discussion, self-expression, contributing own ideas, expressing beliefs and feelings
Card D:	active listening	music, poetry, stories with discussion and/or reflection
Card E:	opportunity for experiencing awe and wonder	natural beauty, mystery, wonders of nature, human achievements
Card F:	worship	reverence for or a veneration of a divine power, celebration of worthiness

Appendix 3

Somerset Schools' OFSTED Reports chosen at random for analysis

ARNOLD, R. (1995) *Rockwell Green C of E VC Primary School*

BRADSHAW, M.J. (1996a) *Nunney First School*

BRADSHAW, M.J. (1996b) *Winsham Primary School*

CAMPLIN, E. (1995) *Timberscombe C of E First School*

CAMPLIN, E.B. (1996) *Cossington County Primary School*

CLEGG, D. (1995) *Axbridge First School*

DAVIS, E. (1996) *Wellsprings Primary School*

DUNN, J. (1995) *Pawlett County Primary School*

GOSSAGE, P. (1996) *Archbishop Cranmer Community Primary School*

HEWLETT, M.J. (1995) *Westonzoyland County Primary School*

HIBBERT, A. (1995) *North Town Primary School*

HIGHFIELD, P. (1997) *Avishayes Primary School*

HILL, D.A. (1996a) *Castle Primary School*

HILL, D.A. (1996b) *Priddy Primary School*

HILL, D.A. (1996c) *Wedmore County First School*

HOLA, W. (1996) *Enmore C of E GM Primary School*

ISAACS, J. (1995) *Milverton County Primary School*

KERLY, M. (1994) *Ashill Community Primary School*

LEWIN, L. (1996) *Stogursey C of E Primary School*

McKECHAN, A. (1997) *Baltonsborough Primary School*

McNALLY, I. (1995) *Hambridge Primary School*

McNALLY, I. (1996) *West Huntspill Primary School*

MURRAY, A.W. (1994) *East Coker County Primary School*

OWEN, G. (1995a) *Knights Templar School*

PALK, J. (1997) *Curry Mallet Primary School*

PRYCE, M.P. (1995) *West Buckland Primary School*

SIMMONDS, K.R. (1995a) *Lovington VC Primary School*

SIMMONDS, K.R. (1995b) *Meare County Primary School*

SIMMONDS, K.R. (1995c) *Vallis First School*

SIMPSON, T. (1997) *Birchfield Primary School*

STOKES, C. (1997) *Beckington C of E First School*

TOWL, D. (1996) *Upton Noble Primary School*

WILLCOCK-BATES, J. (1996) *North Cadbury VC Primary School*

WRIGHT, S.Y. (1996) *Hindhayes Infant School*

ZACHARY, D. (1995) *Charlton Horethorne C of E Primary School*

Birmingham Schools' OFSTED Reports chosen at random for analysis

BATE, G. (1996) *Hall Green Infant School*

COLE, M.H. (1996a) *Maney Hill Primary School*

COLE, M.H. (1996b) *Nelson Mandela Community Primary School*

DAVIES, P.N. (1997) *King David Junior and Infant School*

DOBSON, M.C. (1995) *James Watt Junior School*

DOLLEY, D. (1996) *Fairway Junior and Infant School*

EASTWOOD, M. (1996) *Lea Bank Junior and Infant School*

ISAACS, J. (1996) *Yardley Wood Junior and Infant School*

JAMES, D. (1996) *Tame Valley Junior and Infant School*

O'BRIEN, P. (1997) *Barford Junior and Infant School*

OWEN, G. (1995b) *George Dixon Junior and Infant School*

OWEN, G. (1996a) *Acocks Green Junior School*

OWEN, G. (1996b) *Paget Junior and Infant School*

OWEN, G. (1996c) *Short Heath Junior and Infant School*

OWEN, G. (1996d) *Water Mill Junior and Infant School*

THEADOM, J. (1997) *English Martyrs' Junior and Infant School*

WHEELDON, K.J. (1996) *Cherry Orchard Junior and Infant School*

WHITE, P. (1996) *Oratory RC Primary and Nursery School*