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# **Motivation in Secondary Religious Education**

by

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## **Declaration**

Material from my MA dissertation has been incorporated into chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis and this is clearly indicated in the text. I have also indicated clearly where material in the thesis has been included in articles I have published. I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.



## **Abstract**

I show how my previous MA research indicated useful data regarding motivation in secondary Religious Education (RE) but needed augmented theoretical and empirical substance to inform a general pedagogy (chapter 1): to this end I address issues of adolescent agency and identity (chapter 2) and creativity (chapter 3). Draft recommendations for an active, creative, existential and hermeneutical RE pedagogy result from these augmentations (chapter 2, revised in chapter 3). The heart of the thesis is a classroom-based empirical study designed to apply and assess my recommendations for RE practice. I argue action research and ethnographic strategies fit for my field study purposes (chapter 4). I then present and analyse my field study data, identifying categories of student motivation in RE, namely dialogue with difference, existential or ethical interest and personal significance. These categories are seen to be highly compatible with my earlier draft recommendations for RE practice (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). Next I integrate my data into a critique of Andrew Wright's religious literacy pedagogy, arguing that Wright's oppositions of language to experience and intrinsic to pragmatic value are misleading, but conceding that his fundamental principles are sound and that his recent theory overcomes some earlier difficulties. This includes consideration of Ninian Smart's phenomenological Religious Studies and John Dewey's educational philosophy. I go on to re-affirm that dialogue with difference, existential or ethical interest and personal significance are basic to what motivates RE pupils. Therefore, effective RE requires hermeneutical learning, including attention to the development of pupils' own ideas and values over time; action research indicates ways for teachers to handle this requirement (chapter 9). Finally, each chapter is revisited reflectively, and I reshape my professional recommendations, emphasising my key findings, the importance of action research and Wright's virtues of honesty, receptivity, wisdom and truthfulness (chapter 10).

## **Introduction**

In this thesis I account for the experiences of Religious Education (RE) of a group of adolescents in Sheffield, England, making these experiences the basis for recommendations to RE professionals. What I say may also interest others concerned more broadly with education, educational research or the early teenage years, especially the ways in which adolescent identities, beliefs and values are formed. The heart of the thesis is a report and analysis of field research carried out from September 2003 until December 2004 (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). For the field study, I was the researcher and my site was a large comprehensive (11-18 years) school. My respondents were a form group of thirty-one pupils. I was their tutor and RE teacher, and the research concerned the RE lessons that I taught to them over its duration. I aimed to discover their views of those RE lessons, and what factors motivated them to engage and to learn. The field study began at the commencement of their year eight (12-13 years), concluding part way through their year nine (13-14 years).

Any thesis represents a progression from initial idea through investigation to conclusion; or, from pre-conception through conception to post-conception (LeCompte and Preissle 1993, 32). This thesis has a three-phase structure with distinct movements and themes within each phase. As the project progressed I built layers of meaning. What was established in one movement gave signs to direct the next movement, for example the literature review on adolescence called for a subsequent one on creativity (chapters 2 and 3). Thus, there is a cumulative aspect to the writing. At the end of every chapter there is a review of



how its findings develop the overall stance of the thesis so far (regarding RE practice, or in the case of chapter 4 research methodology).

My argument develops as follows. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 are the pre-conception phase, illustrating contexts for my field study. I begin from the premise that my own previous MA research indicates useful data regarding motivation in RE, but needs theoretical and empirical augmentation before it can inform a general pedagogy (chapter 1). In this connection I argue that secondary RE must address issues of adolescent agency and identity. This argument is set in a review of the social historical, sociological and social psychological literature on adolescence (e.g. Bennett 2000, Coleman and Hendry 1990, Côté and Allahaar 1995, Davis 1990, Erikson 1950, 1968, Garratt, Roche and Tucker 1997, Mitterauer 1992, Malvano 1997, White 1993), together with complementary works from the RE field (e.g. Hookway 2002, Skeie 1995, Meijer 1991, 1995) and other fields including citizenship and post-modernity (e.g. Burkinsher 2002a, 2002b, Hargreaves 1994) (chapter 2). I then show how a focus on creativity is a necessary complement to ends of adolescent agency and identity. Again, my method is to review psychological sources on creativity (e.g. Bailin 1994, Collins and Amabile 1999, Csiksentmihalyi 1999, Fontana 1995, Petrowski 2000) and to integrate these with RE literature (e.g. Lealman 1993, 1996). Through subsequent discussions of the pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1974a; 1974b; 1994) and the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) emerges the theme of RE as hermeneutical understanding (chapter 3). On the basis of these preliminary investigations, provisional recommendations for professional practice in RE are given at the end of chapter 2 and revised at the end of chapter 3. These draft

recommendations summarise my enquiries into adolescence and creativity: I recommend that an active, dialogical, creative RE should be developed so that teachers can collaborate with their pupils in a search for personal identity.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 are the conception phase, illustrating how my empirical data were gathered, why they were gathered in that way, what my data mean and how their meanings were analysed and integrated into the broader literature on RE. Through methodological and epistemological discussions (e.g. Altrichter 1993, Davies 1999, Elliott 1997, Hammersley 2004, Le Compte and Preissle 1993, Stenhouse 1983), I argue strategies based on action research and ethnography to be fit for the field study purposes (chapter 4). From the report and analysis of my data I identify basic categories of pupil motivation in RE, namely dialogue with difference, existential or ethical interest and personal significance, and I suggest that these categories are highly compatible with my earlier draft recommendations for RE practice (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). The data are integrated into contemporary debates over RE pedagogy, with particular attention to the work of Andrew Wright (1993; 1996; 1997; 2000; 2003; 2004). Wright's position is seen to rest on misleading polarisations, of language to experience and of intrinsic value to pragmatic value. During these discussions I make reference to Ninian Smart's phenomenological Religious Studies (1968; 1996) and John Dewey's educational philosophy (1961). Wright's pedagogy is also seen to be in need of more rigorous classroom testing, though its basic principles are supported by and lend support to the findings of my field study. Furthermore, Wright's recent theory helps move RE closer to a positive consensus around the hermeneutical nature of learning in the subject (chapter 9).



Chapter 10 is the post-conception phase, containing reflection on what my research has established and what follow-up activities are needed. There is a review of the thesis before the conclusion and final recommendations for professional practice in RE are made. In essence, my conclusion is that my central data categories of dialogue with difference, existential or ethical interest and personal significance are basic to what motivates pupils to learn in RE. Two related considerations are that a turn towards hermeneutical learning in RE is very welcome and that action research indicates ways for teachers to handle the consequences of this. (The consequences of hermeneutical learning are that knowledge and understanding take unforeseen directions; teachers who are action researchers know how to follow these directions). I consider that my field study and subsequent critique of Wright have left intact the fundamental sense of my earlier recommendations for RE practice, but I reshape those recommendations in order to emphasise my central data categories, to take account of the underlined importance of action research (calling for further classroom-based studies of RE in the future) and to reflect more fully Wright's four virtues of honesty, receptivity, wisdom and truthfulness (Wright 2004, 223).

As I have indicated above, my MA research provided the study's original basis. In Chapter 1, which follows now, I give a background account of my MA study and a systematic anticipation of the advances to be gained through my PhD study.



## **Chapter 1 Origins**

The introduction has set the scene for the thesis proper. In this first chapter I locate the origins of the thesis in my previous MA research (O'Grady 2002; O'Grady 2003). My MA work emerged from a cross-fertilisation of professional and academic matters and in this chapter's first section I describe how this fusion took shape. In the second section, I summarise the content of my MA dissertation. In the third section I point out a problem raised by my MA research and describe how the formation of this problem stimulated the first ideas for my PhD study.

### **Professional and Academic Contexts**

In September 2000 I became Head of RE in a comprehensive (11-16) school in Sheffield. My membership of the school eventually formed the *professional* context for my MA research. The Sheffield local education authority was already concerned about academic underachievement and poor pupil behaviour in the school. I joined the school following nine years as Head of RE and Sociology in one of the city's most successful comprehensives, also one of its most culturally diverse (my new school was almost entirely 'white'). The contrast between the two schools was very striking. The widespread disaffection of pupils, and the frequent occasions of disorder, violence and racism at my new school made a strong impression on me.

I tried to build a counter-culture around RE, insisting on considerate and thoughtful behaviour, planning classroom tasks to build the interest and confidence of the pupils and displaying the results proudly on the walls. I had

some success, especially with the year seven (entry year, 11-12 years old) classes who could be influenced against assuming the anti-school attitudes prevalent in large sections of the pupil body. Of these classes, I had most rapport with my own tutor group, together with whom I organised demonstrations against the dangerous and depressing situation in the school, sometimes by presenting material from RE in assemblies. The overall state of the school deteriorated swiftly and six months after my arrival an Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspection placed the school in Serious Weaknesses, one step away from failing the school outright. Yet RE received a very good departmental report, and the inspectors spoke highly of my efforts at culture transformation.

These first six months in the school coincided more or less with the commencement of my MA in Religious Education studies. As I worked through the MA's units of study, I found ways to address what I learned to situations arising from my daily practice, especially when considering matters such as what constitutes effective teaching in RE or what pedagogical models are most appropriate, and to a lesser extent when investigating the nature and presentation of religious traditions including Christianity and Hinduism. But sometimes the connections between my MA studies and my work as a teacher were incidental. The nature and presentation of religious traditions is a vital issue: yet my particularised experience, as a teacher of RE in a school with many disengaged pupils, forced me to confront issues of *pupil motivation*. We will see later how issues of pupil motivation indeed flow outwards into questions of how to present religious traditions for maximal pupil engagement, but the problem of pupil motivation was necessarily my beginning point. I found that my MA studies



changed - from an interesting academic pursuit, with some professional relevance, to a method for transforming my daily practice - when the problem of pupil motivation became established as the focal point for my activities.

The motivation focus was first gained through discussions with Professor Robert Jackson, my PhD supervisor and one of my MA tutors. Jackson sensed that the issue of motivation underlay my interest in effective teaching and knew that motivation was a problem in my school. Jackson's *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach* (1997) has been a fundamental point of reference throughout my research; in many ways, my work constitutes an attempt to apply Jackson's theoretical position to my changing professional circumstances. Jackson's position is revisited at several points in the thesis but its main elements may be usefully summarised as follows:

- In RE, religious traditions must be presented not as bounded systems but in ways that recognise the uniqueness of each member and the fact that each member is subject to many influences.
- In studying religious traditions pupils should not be expected to set aside their own presuppositions, but should compare their own concepts with those of others: 'the student's own perspective is an essential part of the learning process' (Jackson 2004, 88).
- Through their studies of religious traditions, pupils should re-assess their own personal ways of life; they should be constructively critical of the material they study; and they should maintain an awareness of the

development of the interpretive process, reflecting on the nature of their learning.

Jackson also directed me to three publications which, in different ways, specifically highlight pupil motivation as a central concern for RE. Together with *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach*, these publications formed the early *academic* context for my MA research.

Harold Loukes' 1961 book *Teenage Religion* is often seen as a turning point in RE's development (see e.g. Copley 1997). Loukes reports research undertaken in secondary modern schools where discussions in Religious Instruction lessons, as they were then called, were audiotaped and school pupils interviewed about their content. A high level of negativity towards Religious Instruction was evidenced. Many pupils accused teachers of marginalizing their own experiences and ideas, interpreting lessons as Christian indoctrination. Loukes' response is to recommend a problem-centred syllabus focused on relationships, responsibilities, and other issues of approaching adulthood. Notions of personal and social relevance are stressed. My reading of *Teenage Religion* suggested that my pupils' motivation might be increased, if I could place their own experiences and ideas at the centre of their lessons. This related to Jackson's principle that pupils' perspectives must be essential to the learning process. There was evident resistance to RE in my school, fuelled by residual suspicions of indoctrinatory intentions or, at best, a perceived lack of relevance to those of no religious persuasion. I was also intrigued by Loukes' practice of taking into account pupils' views when designing the RE curriculum.



Linda Rudge's 1998 article 'I am Nothing. Does it Matter? A Critique of Current Religious Education Policy and Practice on behalf of the Silent Majority' reverberates with the seminal work of Loukes. Rudge charts the development, through the 1990s, of RE syllabuses that assume the study of six religions but fail to acknowledge that a majority of British people claim allegiance to no religion. These syllabuses therefore 'perpetuate inequality and discrimination' (Rudge 1998, 155). They take no account of the generalised spirituality of the silent majority, and given their closed, compartmentalised definition of religion, they can hardly do so. Rudge takes encouragement that some syllabuses have, however, accepted RE's need for a genuine exploration of beliefs and values. She argues that RE must make the need to respond to, or learn from, religion, more obvious: RE must take as its central role the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all. School pupils' own beliefs, values and commitments must not be missed. RE must not become a depersonalised Cultural Studies. My reading of Rudge helped me to see that there was little point in asking secularised teenagers to study religion for its own sake. For motivation to be established, bridges must be built from religion to their own worlds of meaning. Here, again, was reinforcement of Jackson's principle, that pupils' perspectives should be essential to the learning process.

Keijo Eriksson's 2000 article 'In Search of the Meaning of Life: A Study of the Ideas of Senior Compulsory School Pupils on Life and its Meaning in an Experiential Learning Context' indicated a methodology to apply the insights of Jackson, Loukes and Rudge. Eriksson, concerned to investigate the practical applications of Jackson's interpretive approach, writes about his own research in



Sweden, suggesting that school pupils' own points of view on existential questions can be a starting point for RE. He asked secondary school pupils to investigate their own personal philosophies through extended summary writing. In this way, their rational and reflective capacities were developed, and later, once the pupils had been personally engaged by their own life-questions, their thoughts could be related to material from religious traditions. Eriksson speculates that RE has 'much to gain with regard to motivation and involvement' when pupils' own personal concerns are put first (Eriksson 2000, 123). Like Loukes' investigation, Eriksson's project brought forward the idea of asking pupils for practical assistance in the planning of their RE programme. As we will now see, I adapted this method to my own circumstances.

### **An Investigation into Motivation in Religious Education, with reference to the Year Eight Dip and Citizenship Education**

Following on from my realisation that the ideas of Jackson, Loukes, Rudge and Eriksson connected with my situation in school, I began to plan a research project designed to monitor the effects on pupil motivation of interventions of the kind recommended by these writers, to be written up as my MA dissertation. I would study one class's RE lessons over one school term. I would ask the pupils to help me to design the topic beforehand, on the basis of their own interests and enthusiasms, and then find ways to monitor and record their levels of motivation as the lessons progressed; they would also have further opportunities to influence the course of the topic. I chose my own tutor group to be co-learners (Taber (2002) prefers this term to 'co-researchers' on the grounds that school pupils will probably not be involved in all research activities – for example, they are rarely

if ever involved in writing-up). The members of this group were already well motivated, so the investigation would not be about establishing so much as increasing motivation; but it would certainly be possible to identify *factors* in motivation. In the school's RE course, topic one in year eight was Islam, and we needed to attend to the Sheffield Agreed RE Syllabus's prescribed content for Islam; therefore there would be constraints on the pupils' scope to design the topic as such.

I would also have chances to address issues of Citizenship Education. At the time I was preparing for the introduction of Citizenship Education into the school's curriculum from August 2002. Citizenship Education concerns itself with '(enabling) pupils to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding to become informed, active and responsible members of local, national, and global communities' (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 2001, 3).

Through my project, the pupils would be taking responsibility for their own learning, and would be studying the plural nature of society. A further theme to be considered was the 'year eight dip'. Teachers often report a dip in pupil engagement during year eight, and the phenomenon has also been the subject of research (Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools 2001); but through our project, the pupils and I would be finding ways to increase their motivation over year eight.

The nature of the intended study echoed two forms of research practice, namely action research and ethnography. Action research was known to me as a way of generating data on social situations so as to guide improvements in professional



practice (McIsaac 1996); though my knowledge base on action research was small, this idea was very close to my hopes for my project. Ethnography was well known to me through Warwick studies of young people's religious nurture, and the implications of these for classroom practice (e.g. Jackson and Nesbitt 1992; Bauer 1997; Woodward 1993). Yet ethnographic studies of school pupils' experiences of RE were very few (Loukes 1961; Ipgrave 1998). Because I sought to uncover my pupils' interpretations of their RE lessons, I might help to fill a gap in the literature.

At the outset, the pupils read the Islam topic outline and wrote diary entries on the questions they would like to address and the activities they would like to use. At two future points in the study, they wrote further diary entries reviewing their learning. In response, I modified the teaching plan, so as to take into account the pupils' expressed interests and preferences. For example, I decided to begin the topic with a lesson about traditional Islamic dress, because many of the pupils had expressed curiosity about it (O'Grady 2003, 218). I kept a log of my own participant observation notes or 'analytic memos' (Elliott 1991, 83, 86).

Interviews with the pupils were audiotaped as the topic progressed. As the pupil diaries, teacher participant observation and interviews built up data on pupil motivation, I made further curricular modifications.

I found that the pupils were most motivated to learn in RE when they had 'fun'. 'Fun' is close to what teachers call engagement. Pupils were engaged when they could work collaboratively with others. They preferred a varied set of tasks and were especially glad to avoid teacher-directed written work. They appreciated the

power of drama tasks to place them in authentic life-situations. I reflected on the pupils' views and argued that *contra* Cooling (2000), the core of RE should be pupils' own questions and experiences, although it was also clear that a study of Islam can certainly promote such self-awareness. This was a form of experiential RE preferable to that of Hay (2000) for being less intrusive and theologically loaded (O'Grady 2003, 221-2). I also found that helping to plan their lessons boosted the pupils' motivation. I was able to show how a successful RE topic could flow from two sources, namely a syllabus and the pupils' own questions and concerns. Through a study of Islam, young people (none of whom were Muslims) reflected on their own questions and concerns. A third finding was that when deep and personalised learning arose, either pupils' questions or religious material could be its starting point. This challenged Grimmitt's assertion that reflection on personal experience should always come first (Grimmitt 2000, 216-22), but supported Jackson's view that interpretation can begin from any position on the hermeneutic circle (Jackson 2000, 145). Fourthly, increased pupil choice and personal depth avoided a year eight dip. I speculated that this may have reflected adolescent developmental needs and argued that the issue needed further attention (O'Grady 2002, 40). Fifthly, in relation to Citizenship Education, I found that RE could certainly build the skills of democratic participation. This referred partly to generic qualities of democratic education, but a more specific RE contribution was that interpretive studies of Islam improved the pupils' understanding of cultural plurality and challenged their prejudices. Finally, action research and ethnography had proved to be excellent theoretical and methodological paradigms for the investigation of RE pedagogy: action research for enabling the pupils to be collaborative researchers, and



ethnography for bringing forward their own accounts of RE (O'Grady 2003, 224).

My PhD thesis addresses motivation in RE. Still, the focus on early adolescent pupils remains and citizenship-related ideas appear frequently (pupils are found to be motivated by chances to engage with cultural plurality, for example).

Several initial MA discussions are expanded in the PhD. In chapter 2 I consider adolescence much more fully. The power of drama as a pedagogical tool in RE was also noted in the MA, and in chapter 3 I follow this up with a broader consideration of creativity. Chapter 4 gives substantial development of my position that action research and ethnography are excellent theoretical and methodological paradigms for work on RE pedagogy. Subsequent chapters include a much greater volume of classroom data and a much fuller integration of data into present debates on RE pedagogy.

### **The problem of general applicability and the need for a follow-up study**

As soon as I concluded my MA research, the need for a follow-up study was clear. RE teachers cannot make a collaborative investigation of every topic with every one of their classes. The methodology of my study was of limited use and I had to translate its insights, however valuable, into a more general pedagogy (O'Grady 2003, 224). In the PhD study there has been increased time and space to gather and present material. I hope that what results is a more comprehensive and challenging set of recommendations. I consider that this thesis offers the following advances from my MA work:



- My MA research shows how, if pupils can be involved in the planning of their own work, their motivation will increase. Even if this is a one-off or infrequent activity, it should sensitise the teacher and enhance his or her confidence in the classroom. My PhD study illustrates motivating RE practice where pupils are not involved in planning (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8), although the emphasis on the pupil voice remains in place (chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). I am able to present a more general-use pedagogy, based on much more theory and a longer field study. There is explicit consideration of how the findings of an action research study may be generalised (chapters 4 and 10). I offer more detailed, substantiated recommendations to RE professionals (chapter 10).
- My MA study shows how RE can be good for the ‘I am nothing’ generation. My PhD study extends the investigation of how RE can relate to adolescents in general (chapters 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8).
- My MA study demonstrates ‘positive pluralism’ (Cush 1999, 9) in practice: cultural plurality becomes a positive educational opportunity, rather than a series of exotic artefacts. My PhD study addresses the same theme more fully, and in the different setting of a multicultural class and school (chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9).
- My MA study shows the power of creative arts work in the RE classroom. My PhD study develops the same theme more fully; there is substantial consideration of literature on creativity (chapter 3) and also more detailed classroom data, often on the use of creative tasks (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8).

- My MA study began to illustrate the value of action research and ethnography in shaping RE pedagogy. Again, my PhD study develops the point more fully. There is detailed consideration of research methods and especially epistemology (chapter 4) and also more empirical evidence on the impact of my research activity on my pupils' progress (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). A conclusion of the thesis is that action research has the potential to help teachers handle hermeneutical learning in RE. This conclusion is reached through an original critique of Andrew Wright's pedagogy, embracing material from Ninian Smart's phenomenological Religious Studies and John Dewey's educational philosophy (chapter 9).

Whilst anticipating the contribution to RE of this thesis, I should also circumscribe its limits. Doubtless there are issues of relevance to motivation in RE which are not considered in these pages. For example, there is no attempt to cover the impact of teacher personality on pupils' willingness to engage and to learn, even though it seems highly reasonable to postulate some relationship between the two (see e.g. Atkinson 2000; Smith 1995). It is not that I seek to downplay this or other important issues; rather that they are outside the scope of this present work. Similarly, there are parallels between my action research approach and that strand in pedagogical thought currently known as *assessment for learning* (Black, William *et al* 2002; 2003). Assessment for learning also relies on pupil feedback to shape classroom content and methods, and also aims to boost pupils' motivation by increasing their involvement in and ownership of their learning. Nigel Fancourt offers the view that, although my approach is consistent with assessment for learning, it begins from a different place - the



specifics of RE, rather than a general assessment agenda (personal correspondence). I note an emphasis within much assessment for learning practice on predetermined learning targets, and question whether this is compatible with the action research principle that the curriculum emerges dynamically through the pupils' responses (Elliott 1991, 11). Though problems with objectives-driven curricula are discussed in chapter 4, and the relationship between the dynamic curriculum and hermeneutical learning in RE is discussed in chapters 9 and 10, I would need a separate essay to consider my data fully in relation to assessment for learning. Furthermore, I make no attempt in these pages to assess the impact of formal assessment (marks, grades or written teacher comments) on my pupils' motivation. There may well be such impact, but here I concentrate on the details of motivating tasks and motivating content (towards the end of the field study there was a discernible shift towards matters of content, as will be seen through chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8).

However, before deciding what tasks and content were to be presented to the pupils during the first cycle of the field study, I undertook literature reviews on adolescence and creativity and considered the significance of these themes to motivation in RE. The following chapter concerns adolescence. Here, I take up the questions of the nature of adolescence, the educational needs of adolescent pupils and the contribution of RE to the fulfilment of those needs.

## Chapter 2 Adolescence and Religious Education

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed how my MA research suggested a series of follow-up questions. Amongst these was whether a greater awareness of adolescent developmental needs might lead to improved understanding of motivation in RE. In this chapter I investigate literature on adolescence and consider its relevance to RE practice. I ask, what are the personal and social concerns of adolescents likely to be? Through necessarily selective analyses of the social historical, sociological and social psychological literatures on adolescence, I attempt to identify their challenges to educators. I then turn to the specific contribution of RE in addressing adolescent concerns. At the close, I offer a conclusion on these issues, before making some consequent recommendations for professional practice in RE. I argue that the development of personal identity is the central adolescent concern, but also a lifelong matter. From an educational point of view this is a positive conclusion, in that it may allow adolescent pupils and their teachers to collaborate on identity development. Reflection on matters of post-modernity and plurality confirms my view of the self as reflexive and in continual formation. This raises challenges to educators in relation to *education for citizenship* and *education for identity*. I argue that RE should contribute studies of cultural plurality and the development of a personal philosophy, and I also touch briefly on the point that RE must engage pupils with issues of global justice. I recommend a critical and conversational pedagogy, in which RE's content is placed in the service of adolescents' self-



development and the role of the teacher is to model the required responsiveness and flexibility.

### **Social historical and sociological views of adolescence**

Broadly speaking, social historical and sociological views of adolescence tell us about its place in social epochs and systems. Knowledge of such material is important if we are to ground educational practice in present realities and help young people to prepare for the future. A central theme in the history of adolescence is *social construction*. Several studies focus on the fluid nature of the adolescent condition, illustrating the imaging of youth through the emphases and concerns of particular times and places. Examples of this are Mitterauer (1992), Davis (1990) and Malvano (1997).

Mitterauer provides an illuminating social history of adolescence (Mitterauer 1992). What is significant in his sociological–historical approach is that it ‘admits the possibility of change’ rather than viewing adolescence as ‘anthropological constant’ (Mitterauer 1992, 2). Adolescence is conditioned by social and economic factors: even aspects of adolescence appearing to be physically fixed are found to vary between different times and places. An example is that in some parts of Europe, the average age for menarche has come forward by more than four years since the first half of the nineteenth century (this has probably been caused by changes in workload and nutrition). This example shows that where the nature of adolescence is concerned, the somatic and the social are in a reflexive relationship; changes in one can give rise to changes in the other, and vice versa. For Mitterauer, developmental



psychology has been responsible for generating a static and stereotypical view of adolescence. Stereotypes such as rebellion and introspection cannot be justified in the light of what we know about different cultures and eras. They do not fit the youth of pre-industrial Europe; 'they are abstractions drawn from the experience of the urban middle class' (Mitterauer 1992, 9). Endogenous models locating the course of adolescence within 'human nature' must be replaced by exogenous models which take account of prevailing social and historical factors. Erik Erikson's psychoanalytic model of adolescent development (see below) comes under Mitterauer's close criticism as an example of an overly endogenous view. Drawing on Ruth Benedict's ideas, Mitterauer suggests that adolescent crises need to be seen in relation to social practices. Having trained children to be obedient and subordinate, we then require them to assume authority and responsibility as young adults:

It seems to be a basic problem that we teach our children something which we later expect them to un-learn. (Mitterauer 1992, 12)

It seems also to be the case that in earlier societies there was a much more immediate cut-off point between childhood and adulthood, marked by a test or a ceremony.

Mitterauer offers interesting reflections on the development of European religion and the Eriksonian notion of the identity moratorium. Following the Reformation,

reading and reflection played a far greater role within the new Protestant denominations than they had under Catholicism. These influences may help to explain why introspection has become a characteristic of youth. Further, pluralism in beliefs and values makes it possible to reject the religion of the home, or to abandon faith altogether. Youth has now become a time for re-thinking one's whole world-view. Differentiation in economic activity poses a similar challenge but in the vocational sphere. Mitterauer makes no comment on the post-modern situation, but it seems reasonable to expect that post-modernity will extend the range of philosophical and occupational choices and challenges which face the young. This effect will be considered in more detail later, in relation to the analysis of Hargreaves (1994).

Such an expansion of possibilities might affect adults just as much as it affects adolescents, so Mitterauer questions the assumption that when adolescence is complete, the self is finished. In his view, socialisation is a life-long process of continual revision. This places in doubt elements of the traditional view of youth:

If the formation of personality continues in all stages of life, the boundary which had been drawn between adolescence and adulthood blurs appreciably.

(Mitterauer 1992, 31)

John Davis provides insights into the construction of youth in the United Kingdom by agencies such as the education system and especially the media. He suggests that a 'hyperbolic' presentation of adolescence is widely current, but in reviewing



research literature Davis also notes that a highly conventional, conformist picture of youth emerges (see Davis 1990, 2-11). Therefore, he asks, why are images of adolescent conflict so dominant? Davis's answer to the question is threefold. It is due to the overstated theories of Eriksonian psychologists, to the media's thirst for the spectacular, and to the projection of establishment moral preoccupations (Davis 1990, 11-19). Davis shows how, by the post-Second World War period, the conceptualisation, institutionalisation and universalisation of adolescence as a distinct age-grade were complete. From the same time, there were contradictions in imagery: young people were seen simultaneously as the vanguard of national regeneration and as a threatening social problem. Such contradictions obscured the need to provide opportunities for all (Davis 1990, 216-218). The same contradictions also reflected generalised unease about the direction of British society (Davis 1990, 19).

Malvano offers a contrasting example (1997). In a rich study of the social construction of youth under a highly specialised set of cultural and historical circumstances, Malvano analyses the symbolism of Mussolini's Italy. Here, youth, styled as obedient, heroic and ready to kill or to die, became a touchstone for the fascist ideology. The uniformed young man was the prototypical man (Malvano 1997, 234). Popular imagery of the time depicted adolescent males as the sons of the revolution, brave and fearless.

Turning now to sociological rather than social historical studies, a far less 'hyperbolic' picture is painted by White (1993), who discusses her research into adolescent development in Japan, using material gathered in the United States of America in a comparison groups approach. She reports that Japanese adolescents are primarily concerned with music, clothing, private space and relationships with parents. Her argument is that Japan enjoys more consensual adolescent-parent relations than America, in contrast to which Japanese parent-adolescent relations are normalised. A feature of this normalisation is that adolescent experimentation, for example in the expression of sexuality, is viewed as unproblematic.

Whereas White's analysis is based on consensus, Côté and Allahaar (1995) are concerned with discriminatory social and political structures. Reflecting mainly on the Canadian experience, they argue that between the gaining of physical maturity and the assumption of adult status, young people experience marginalisation and disenfranchisement. They attribute this to extended dependence on parents, and to manipulation by adult corporate or professional interests (for example in the education system). Côté's and Allahaar's is a political economy argument which has six strands:

- 'Adolescence' is not 'natural' but results from industrialisation and the laws needed to stabilise industrial societies; these laws include child labour laws, and the introduction of compulsory education beyond childhood.



- In late capitalism, which is service-based rather than manufacture-based, young people's work is needed less and valued less; therefore, adolescence has been extended further into mature life. Agencies of compliance, such as educational bureaucracies, have been extended in parallel with this.
- Through the construction of 'youth culture' young people have been targeted to be cultural consumers rather than encouraged to be cultural producers; this applies especially to identity industries such as music and fashion.
- Coming of age in the late twentieth century involved allying oneself with one of the images offered by identity industries, or identifying oneself with a certain set of educational credentials.
- The social cohesion that results from cultural consumption is illusory. The identities sold by the identity industries and the educational systems are superficial. Conflict and confusion underlie them, because they disguise rather than address the real needs of the young. Identity crises amongst the young are therefore 'epidemic' (Côté and Allaher 1995, xvii).
- The forces that seek to manufacture the consent of young people have been successful. In Canada, for example, one third of the population is involved in the educational system in some way (Côté and Allaher 1995, 43); through this, jobs are provided for adults and control is established over adolescents. However, these same forces are now losing their effectiveness and manufacturing dissent instead. For example, faith that qualifications will provide a satisfying adulthood seems to be decreasing: in Canada, only 58% of those who register in undergraduate programmes graduate within 5 years,

72% within 13 years. In the USA, only 50% of those who register graduate within 5 years (Côté and Allaher 1995, 42).

However, Côté and Allaher applaud Sweden as an example of a society that has successfully avoided youth disenfranchisement. During the 1980s, the Swedish government guaranteed jobs in the municipal sector to young people who could not find jobs in the private sector, and built up the level of pupil grants available to those between 16 and 20 years of age (Côté and Allaher 1995, 155-6). Over the same period, there were 1,600 youth recreational centres in Sweden, serving one million 16 to 24 year olds; 80 youth organisations directly funded by the government, with 17,000 local branches; 50% of 16-25 year olds belonged to a trade union, 80% of 18-21 year olds voted in the 1988 general election, and in 1988, only 3% of 15 year olds had used drugs (Côté and Allaher 1995, 157).

Côté and Allaher recommend similar system adjustments for other advanced industrial societies. They then go on to conclude their reflections on a different note:

Finally, young people themselves must take more responsibility for their lives and resist the system's attempts to control and subjugate them . . . They can also help themselves by realising that others in their age group are experiencing troubles like their own. It is only by acting collectively to address the social problems that lie at the root of their troubles that they will



be able to improve their situation . . . To ensure that their voice is heard, they should join political youth movements . . . Making these commitments can give them a sense of genuinely belonging to the community. (Côté and Allaher 1995, 163-4)

It would be interesting to hear Côté's and Allaher's views on the development of programmes of citizenship education in England and Wales. Citizenship education is essentially concerned with empowering the young towards social and political participation and responsibility by equipping them with the requisite knowledge, understanding and skills (e.g. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2001; Alexander 2001). Education for citizenship will form a main focus of this chapter in later sections. For now, it is important to note that several sociological studies stress the importance to adolescents of actively shaping their own identities and lifestyles. For example, Coleman and Hendry (1990) advocate the discussion of adolescence within a lifespan developmental paradigm. Lifespan developmental theory stresses the growth of the human person in all stages of development. It emphasises the influence of family and environment on the individual, and vice versa, recognising that adolescents can be actors in their own development. This emphasis on an internal locus of control accords with Coleman's and Hendry's focal theory of adolescence:

If adolescents have to adjust to so much potentially stressful change, and at the same time pass through this stage of their life with relative stability, as

the 'empirical' view indicates, how do they do it? The answer which is suggested by the 'focal' model is that they cope by dealing with one issue at a time . . . Different problems, different relationship issues come into focus and are tackled at different stages, so that the stresses resulting from the need to adapt to new styles of behaviour are rarely concentrated all at one time. (Coleman and Hendry 1990, 207)

Support for the 'internal locus of control' argument put forward by Coleman and Hendry can be found in Bennett (2000), a presentation of PhD research into the role of music in young peoples' identity formation. Bennett's ethnographic study covers bhangra, rap and other musical and cultural styles. He abandons a subcultural analysis in favour of a more flexible 'lifestyle' concept, showing that his respondents do not receive musical and cultural influences passively, but mediate these through local influences, cues and circumstances:

In appropriating forms of popular music, individuals are simultaneously constructing ways of being in the context of their local everyday environments. (Bennett 2000, 98)

Bennett's respondents are mainly in their late teens, but there is no reason why the lifestyle concept cannot be applied to younger subjects. Other, related, studies also make this point clear. Garratt, Roche and Tucker (1997) present a thematic series of interview data, drawn from their work with mid-adolescents. One interviewee



provides insights into the relationship between identity development, peer group formations and musical tastes and alliances:

I started to form my own identity when I was still at school. I'd have been about 13 or 14. The teachers' immediate response was to keep on at me to dress smart, 'cos I'd have multicoloured plaits in my hair , I'd rip my tie an' stuff. . . Then I think their attitude toward me changed a bit. Like they kept telling me I'd never get a proper job. They just seemed to assume I'd gone off the rails and they kicked me out eight weeks before our exams 'cos I'd had my eyebrow pierced.

There was about four of us in the whole school that were dressing similar and listening to the same things. The rest were into Take That. I liked the more political bands like The Levellers and Back to the Planet. But I've always liked the Sex Pistols and stuff like that . . . and Bob Marley 'cos my uncle was really into him.

You don't just wake up one day and think, 'I know! I'll get piercings and dye my hair and look *weird*.' It's just something you want to do. . . y'know, you *identify* with the way other people who look like that *think*. (Garratt, Roche and Tucker eds .1997, 7, original italics)

In the next section, where social psychological material is assessed, adolescent concern with the development of identity will form my main focus.

## **Social psychological views of adolescence**

If it is generally true that social historical and sociological views describe epochs and systems, social psychological views tell us about individual needs within social systems. Educators may benefit from an understanding of social psychological findings on adolescence, if they are to engage with the emotional and developmental concerns of their pupils.

In approaching this field one cannot fail to notice the outstanding influence of Erik Erikson (Erikson 1950, 1968). Erikson's interest is the development of social identity; adolescents, for Erikson, are fundamentally exercised by:

. . . who and what they are in the eyes of a wider circle of significant people as compared with what they themselves have come to feel that they are; and how to connect the dreams, idiosyncrasies, roles and skills cultivated earlier with the occupational and sexual prototypes of the day. (Erikson 1950, 165)

In *Childhood and Society* (1950), Erikson sets out his ideas within a strongly Freudian framework. According to the Freudian view of adolescence, puberty is accompanied by a great upsurge of instinctual energy that can be profoundly unsettling. Erikson quotes Anna Freud, who puts the point graphically:

Aggressive impulses are intensified to the point of complete unruliness, hunger becomes voracity and the naughtiness of the latency period turns into



the criminal behaviour of adolescence. Oral and anal interests, long submerged, come to the surface again. Habits of cleanliness, laboriously acquired during the latency period, give place to pleasure in dirt and disorder, and instead of modesty and sympathy we find exhibitionistic tendencies, brutality and cruelty to animals. (Freud A., quoted in Erikson 1950, 165-6)

For Erikson, adolescents are in danger of role diffusion (an inability to assume a stable and appropriate set of social roles). Identity crises may have to be experienced before the question of adult roles can be solved.

If Erikson seems to present a pathological view of adolescence, it is worth considering his own assertion that the material for his book arose from his clinical treatment of the disturbed (Erikson 1950, 11). He also describes it as a 'subjective book' (Erikson 1950, 13). Erikson's subjective focus on the disturbed may account for some of the striking generalisations in his writing, for example that American adolescent boys are 'anti-intellectual' (Erikson 1950, 278) or that their mothers are 'sexually frigid' (Erikson 1950, 267).

Heaven (2001) presents a critical survey of major positions and writers in the field of adolescent psychology. Of particular usefulness in the present context is his appraisal of Erikson's theory of adolescent identity development. Heaven focuses on Erikson's 1968 book, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. This book seems to represent a more sophisticated and systematic position than is advanced in *Childhood and*

*Society*. In *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Erikson constructs a stage theory which encompasses the entire life span. It has eight stages, adolescence being the fifth. The stages are serial in that one cannot begin to address the tasks of the next stage before completing the tasks of the present stage. Completion of a stage involves the overcoming of a tension and the adolescent tension is between identity resolution and identity confusion.

Because adolescence is an uncertain ground between childhood and adulthood, it is not surprising that teenagers retreat into the peer group to seek identity formation. Peer expectations provide feedback and allow adolescents to assess which roles will fit them. Implicit in this is role experimentation, where teenagers try out different personal styles, convictions, friendship patterns and so on. Sexual relations act as mirrors to reflect one's own growth:

Adolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one's own identity by projecting one's diffused self-image on another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified. (Erikson 1968, 132 quoted in Heaven 2001, 29)

If the resolution of one's identity is not successful, confusion will set in and it will be impossible to move on to the next stage of human development. As Heaven emphasises, personal identity does not arrive 'naturally', like physical maturity does: 'Teenagers need actively to seek out and uncover their identity and come to terms



with their own shortcomings and inadequacies' (Heaven 2001, 29). The development of vocational identity and a personal philosophy are closely linked with this need. The whole process may very well be stressful and taxing for those who undertake it.

In Erikson's terminology, 'crisis' refers to experimentation, 'commitment' to closure (Heaven 2001, 32). According to the elaboration of Erikson's ideas by Marcia (1966, 1980, 1993), patterns vary from individual to individual and there are four possible phases or expressions of crisis and commitment:

- Identity diffusion, where crisis has not yet been experienced.
- Identity foreclosure, where commitment has been made unquestioningly, without a crisis.
- Identity moratorium, where a crisis is in progress and a commitment has not yet been made.
- Identity achievement, where a crisis or crises has been or have been resolved; this marks the achievement of the end of adolescence. This will link future aspirations with past achievements, providing an all-important sense of personal continuity.

It is evident that the development of identity is a crucial task of adolescence; there is no doubt that Erikson's is an influential and a valuable model, even allowing for the debate over whether there is a developmental sequence to adolescent identity

statuses (Bertram-Troost, de Roos and Miedema, in press). Erikson has attracted some criticism, for example, by those who allege that his is an overly middle-class model, pointing out that working-class youth cannot afford the luxury of a lengthy moratorium. Heaven also offers the point that perhaps adolescents should aim to achieve flexible rather than stable identities. In my view, this may be a point too far, because stability and flexibility are entirely compatible; indeed, reflection suggests that they are mutually necessary. It should also be remembered that Erikson's is a whole-life scheme, and that he does not view the resolution of adolescence as a terminal acceptance of certain values.

Even though Erikson's later work represents a development from *Childhood and Society*, it might still be argued that more recent studies in the social psychology of adolescence benefit from a greater empirical sophistication. A good example of this is Seginer's and Somech's study of 269 Israeli eighth grade pupils and 104 Israeli high school teachers and school counsellors (Seginer and Somech 2000). This study contributes a comparison of the adults' category-based images of adolescents with the target-based self-images of the adolescents themselves. Category-based images are of groups, whereas target-based images are of individuals. For Seginer and Somech, teachers' images of adolescents as a category are of importance in guiding teacher behaviour. Adolescent self-image is 'an important indicator of functioning and psychological well-being, thus providing important information regarding the nature of adolescence as a period of hardships or adjustment' (Seginer and Somech



2000, 141). Further, the growth of the self-image is a vital element in the development of the person during the adolescent years:

As children approach adolescence, their self-knowledge, manifested by their self-image, becomes more abstract, differentiated, and integrated . . . this differentiated self-image is especially important during adolescence because as youth face developmental challenges they can also become aware of their points of strength. (Seginer and Somech 2000, 141)

In discussing their data, Seginer and Somech summarise thirty-five years of research on adolescent development. Even though the literature shows a low prevalence of adjustment problems, it also shows that many adults still perceive adolescence to be a difficult period of life. In examining this point, Seginer and Somech speculate that teachers may feel a need to employ negative adolescent stereotypes, in order to cope with a tension between their own lowered status and the growing challenges posed by their pupils. Seginer and Somech conclude that adolescent self-images are more favourable than the category-based images of school staff. This could be because adolescents are experiencing the phenomenon of positive illusion, the tendency to view oneself as better than 'the average person'; or because adults cling to storm and stress stereotypes; or because of both. The study suggests that there is:

A need for adults working with adolescents to distinguish between developmental challenges ensued from the normal processes of adolescence

and psychological difficulties that may be intensified during adolescence.

(Seginer and Somech 2000, 154)

Otherwise, stereotypical thinking may impact badly on adolescent experience, either by projecting problems where there are none, or by disguising the needs of disturbed adolescents.

Whereas Erikson and Seginer and Somech are concerned from their different perspectives with adolescent identity and self-image, Furnham and Stacey (1991) set out to explore in detail how young people come to understand the social world. They consider areas such as the family, work, politics and ethnicity. Of particular relevance to my purposes in this discussion is their analysis of adolescent beliefs and understandings concerning religious and spiritual matters. Furnham and Stacey stress the changes in cognitive functioning that occur during adolescence.

Adolescents become able to think logically about abstract concepts, and to examine alternative positions on issues. Furnham and Stacey reiterate Elkind's definition of the adolescent state of mind as a 'search for comprehension' (Furnham and Stacey 1991, 124). They make the very significant point that adolescents who seek to achieve comprehension unaided are likely to become disheartened. Adolescence is associated with examination of life-issues and sometimes with conversion. In carrying out this examination, adolescents are impressionable. Contact with schoolteachers or youth workers may be influential; peer group influences may well be transient. Females have been found to be more open than males to religious issues



and material. However, Furnham and Stacey also offer the contention that adolescents may react against excessive socialisation in religious and spiritual matters, and may often strive for personal exploration and discovery (Furnham and Stacey 1991, 128). In conclusion, it is suggested that adolescent attitudes to religion are also conditioned by a personal search:

Adolescents' attempts to clarify and internalise their own value systems frequently affect their assessment of religious beliefs. (Furnham and Stacey 1991, 132)

Further, it is unlikely that the end of adolescence will fulfill the search:

Adults working with young people may serve an important role by helping adolescents realise that adults are also dealing with refinement and clarification of their own values and beliefs. (Furnham and Stacey 1991, 132)

Perhaps especially for RE teachers, the implications of this claim are personally and professionally challenging. It might be useful to pause momentarily and note that the practice of collaboration, raised earlier in the summary of the previous section, can be subject to degree. We might resist the idea that we are developing our life-stances as we teach in the classroom; it may be easier to accept that we must be flexible and open-minded in our handling of religious material and young peoples' responses. Perhaps a distinction should be made between personal and professional identity.

Yet through professional practice, many RE teachers seem to gain heightened personal sensitivities to the implications of religion and the needs of the young. Clearly these matters require more discussion than can take place in this chapter. However, the concept of collaboration between pupils and teachers on the development of personal identity will still help to form provisional conclusions in later sections on the contribution of RE to the adolescent curriculum, and recommendations for professional practice. For the moment, I will take what appears to be a moderate position: the teacher might model responsiveness, creativity and critical awareness. These qualities are desirable in teachers and pupils.

Returning now to the social psychology of adolescence, two further studies are of particular interest. Both Cotterell (1996) and Head (1997) share my aim to extract educational principles from social psychological data. Cotterell's study of adolescent social networks and influences 'represents the prospecting activities of an educator interested in young people's social development' (Cotterell 1996, 1). The approach is ecological and draws together strands from different disciplines, but within this there is a strong social psychological emphasis:

What is of interest for this book is how social relations are worked out in the different social settings and institutional contexts which comprise the adolescent's social world, and the implications of these social experiences for individual development. (Cotterell 1996, 2)



For Cotterell, relations within the peer group are 'primary'; relations with adults such as teachers are significant but 'secondary' (Cotterell 1996, 2). The proper emphasis is relational, seeking properties in social relations rather than attributes of actors; he recommends a 'motivational' perspective which views social relations in terms of a person's needs. This places less importance on stages of individual development than would be found in much psychology of adolescence, and instead focuses more sharply on culture and socialisation (Cotterell 1996, 3). In this focus, concepts of social identity and attachment are prominent (Cotterell 1996, 4-5).

For Cotterell, whatever the individual's circumstances or background, social identity is crucial. It may, for example, hamper educational development, as in the case of ethnic minority youth who may be in opposition to a perceived racist school regime. They may seek to preserve their own marginalisation, because of the importance of group identity, even in a negative form. 'Social networks' are ties of attachment, friendship and acquaintance. In adolescence, extension of one's network is a necessary task, in preparation for adult life. In the 'convoy model', as a person moves through the life-cycle, his or her network changes over time and context, but it always remains personal and unique. Cotterell suggests that this model is helpful to those who work with adolescents, showing us that our role is to maintain supportive environments for them, especially with attention to group relational structures and settings (Cotterell 1996, 18).

Cotterell devotes considerable space to the notion of the school as a motivational environment. In considering adolescent alienation, he posits that ‘resistance and disaffection in classrooms at secondary school may be a logical response by some pupils, frustrated by the overwhelming concern with tasks at the expense of fostering social meaning in classroom relationships’ (Cotterell 1996,113). Presumably his contention would be that if the tasks fostered social meaning, then the pupils would engage, but he recommends no such tasks. Cotterell’s argument, that ‘successful identification depends upon whether the conventional classroom group, with the concurrence of the teacher, allows the adolescent enough breathing space for exploring identity so that commitment to the goals of the school becomes possible’ (1996, 115), gives a rather passive role to the teacher! A more useful motivational idea is that of ‘the possible self’ (Cotterell 1996, 116). Adolescents can be helped to focus on the adults they wish to become (and, I would add, classroom tasks can surely be planned around that concern). Cotterell refers to ‘motivational’ as opposed to ‘resistant’ classrooms, where there is less of a gap between teachers and taught, and more room is made for pupils’ own views and experiences:

Motivation is not simply an individual attribute; it is a product of social interaction. (Cotterell 1996, 127)

Cotterell goes on from this to underline some vital questions of pedagogy:



How do lessons, or phases within lessons, relate to the social and personal concerns of adolescent pupils? And if they do not do so at present, how can they be altered so that they do? (Cotterell 1996, 128)

In Cotterell's view, the school is a social system, networked to the family, the workplace and the community (and, he might well have added, to the possible self). To make it a supportive environment, its staff must establish structures and programmes which link pupils to the organisation of the school, to various adults with various roles within the school, and to groups of fellow pupils. The philosophy of support must pervade everything that happens in school; pupils must experience membership, influence, and shared emotional connection (Cotterell 1996, 206). Teachers must learn to respond positively and encouragingly to resistance and disaffection, viewing these as phases in pupil independence (Cotterell 1996, 212).

Informal adolescent peer group settings are often vibrant. Schools, argues Cotterell, must recognise their legitimacy, stop seeing them as subversive, and respect friendship interaction as a valid educational aim (Cotterell 1996, 214). This does not necessarily relate to classroom motivation, but attempts nevertheless should be made to make classroom life more compatible with the social identities of adolescents (Cotterell 1996, 215).

John Head's study examines the construction of personal identity in several settings of adolescent life (Head 1997). His remarks on beliefs and values, and on the

schooling of adolescents, are of especial relevance to my purposes in this chapter. In adolescence, issues of personal beliefs and values come to the fore; and this is why, reflects Head, political and pressure groups often target teenagers (Head 1997, 86). Adolescents are 'labile', switching from cynicism to commitment and back, before taking stances (Head 1997, 86). Head makes use of Erikson's concept of ideology. Although critical of the concept, he agrees with Erikson that

. . . a sure identity could only be developed if the adolescent recognised and respected the cultural traditions, so that the personal dynamic worked symbiotically with the social dynamic. (Head 1997, 87)

Head gives an important discussion of adolescent ideological development, and its dialectical phases of exploration and commitment. Exploration is usually unproblematic; teachers, for example, are used to setting up debates on controversial issues. Commitment is less simple. How should a teacher encourage commitment without being accused of indoctrination, perhaps rightly? Although there seems to be no easy answer to this question, it does seem essential to minimise foreclosure – meaning, that young people should be helped to avoid immature positions which are based on partial or unconsidered views. Otherwise, the resulting mental rigidity will make them unable to cope when new situations need to be assessed and new ideas need to be internalised. Those who gain their identity through foreclosure are vulnerable indeed. What is needed is a mature and therefore flexible commitment to a coherent set of beliefs and values (Head 1997, 96-7).



The 'potency of the school culture in shaping the young' has long been recognised, whether optimistically or pessimistically (Head 1997, 99). Head summarises the work of Illich and Holt, who have described how institutionalised education can be personally damaging. He also considers a study by Rutter which illustrates the great importance of school ethos and atmosphere to positive personality development in pupils. He reiterates the widely accepted truth that adolescents thrive on fairness and consistency (Head 1997, 102).

If the social dimension is significant, so is the intellectual dimension. Head doubts the relevance of Piaget's concept of formal operational thinking, because in adolescence, 'recognition of the possibilities of the wider world may be the more important cognitive resource' (Head 1997, 104). He goes on to argue that

Whatever the explanation, we can recognise the widening of interests, the concern with adult issues, which allows the teaching process to move more towards a discussion among equals, and less of a simple transmission of knowledge. In turn, this brings a change in the social relationship between teacher and pupil, as roles become redefined. (Head 1997, 104)

Head concludes by advocating a curriculum for identity enhancement. He argues that such a curriculum must have four qualities, promoting: pupil exploration and choice, intergenerational understanding so adolescents can explore adult

possibilities, self-acceptance and positive feedback, and understanding of time. This latter quality is intriguing. Understanding of time not only includes academic questions such as: how does the past relate to the present? It also includes existential questions such as: what does the idea of a lifetime mean to me personally?

In reviewing the social psychological literature, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the formation of an adult identity is the key concern of adolescence. Another good example of this is a study by Frydenberg (1997), who examines the strategies used by adolescents to cope with their new experiences and responsibilities. She concludes that a community needs to provide structured paths for young people to develop social skills and life skills, and stable environments where they can try out new and adult behaviours, moving beyond coping to flourishing. In her recommendations, pleas for opportunity and support for teenagers are prominent (Frydenberg 1997, 203). Earlier in her study, Frydenberg reports her own research into the personal concerns of 653 secondary school pupils in Melbourne, Australia. She found that the pupils' responses could easily be categorised into three dominant types of concern: achievement, relationships and altruism. Within these three, concern over achievement far exceeded concern over the other two (Frydenberg 1997, 12). Achievement included the finding of a good career and a suitable partner. Frydenberg's findings therefore seem to support the view that the most pressing task of adolescence is to forge an adult identity. By contrast, in a quantitative study of the personal, social, religious and political concerns of young people, Francis and Kay find that environmental pollution is the issue that most concerns adolescents (Francis



and Kay 1995, 69-70). However, their methodology seems to be flawed, because respondents were asked to indicate their concerns from a limited menu of only six items. The young people did not have the chance to suggest that the achievement of personal identity is their greatest concern, or even a concern.

### **Challenges for educators**

It seems very clear that social historical, sociological and social psychological perspectives on adolescence pose fundamental challenges to secondary educators. It should also be borne in mind that because of the socially constructed nature of adolescence (e.g. Mitterauer 1992) and the significance of adolescent aspiration regarding adulthood (Cotterell 1996), childhood antecedents and future hopes form parts of the search for identity. Still, the purpose of this section is to discuss challenges to secondary educators. In attempting to do so, I use two broad categories, education for citizenship, and education for identity. It will be clear that these two categories are not mutually exclusive, but admit of considerable overlap. In my reflections on education for citizenship, I draw on ideas from Burkinsher (2002a, 2002b); in those on education for identity, from Hargreaves (1994).

Education for citizenship has already been mentioned as a possible response to the concerns of Côté and Allaher regarding adolescent marginalisation and disempowerment. At the time of writing, many teachers and schools in England and Wales are exercised by the statutory introduction of citizenship as a national curriculum subject from August 2002. Citizenship includes studies in democratic

participation and personal and community responsibility. As well as a discrete subject, citizenship is intended to be a style of education that can permeate the whole of school life, embracing such pupil qualities as autonomy and self-awareness. For pupils to develop such qualities in relation to their schoolwork will necessitate a shift from the traditional, transmissive model of teacher-pupil relations in favour of more egalitarian styles. A shift of this kind might help to answer the concerns of Furnham and Stacey over excessive adult socialisation of adolescents, or Coleman and Hendry over the adolescent need for an internal locus of control.

In two closely related articles, Burkinsher describes how the aim of enhanced pupil responsibility might be met. In the first, he shows the evolution of views of social education over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, through illustrative quotations. He begins with Birkbeck School's 1848 prospectus, which emphasised poor children's understanding of their own position in society and their duties towards it, without mention of rights. He continues by citing Dewey's insistence that the aims of education cannot properly be imposed from outside the pupil. He concludes by stating the recommendation of United Kingdom Schools Council programme three, that in personal and social education, pupils should 'have a sense of themselves as unique individuals, whose feelings and opinions matter and who have something positive to contribute to society' (Burkinsher 2002a, 5). In Burkinsher's second article, he emphasises that the school is the first institution where young people can practice the skills of democratic participation in preparation for local, national and international life; the promotion of skills of participation is synonymous with good educational practice. In order to exemplify this principle,



Burkinsher cites Robert Stradling's ten components of democratic participation in the classroom. These are:

- Pupils have equal opportunities to learn.
- Teachers behave equally towards all pupils.
- Pupils have opportunities to work together.
- Pupils feel free to express their opinions.
- Pupils are credited for willingness to participate, not just academic achievement.
- Pupils are encouraged to help each other.
- Pupils are consulted about behaviour guidelines.
- Pupils are consulted about classroom topics and issues.
- Pupils and teachers negotiate learning targets.
- Pupils evaluate lessons and courses.

The above may be an aspirational list, but as Burkinsher argues, it can serve as a useful measure of progress towards a democratic classroom in which young peoples' qualities of citizenship grow. In this way it is an excellent series of principles, reverberating closely with a growing and influential literature on what is now known as *pupil voice* (Hamill and Boyd 2002; Fielding 2001; Rudduck and Flutter 2000, 2003; Rudduck, Chaplain, and Wallace 1996; Quicke 2003; Rafferty 1996; McCallum, Hargreaves and Gipps 2000). For example, for Rudduck and Flutter (2000), school improvement means dealing with the deep structures of school and

the values they embody; this should include an engagement with pupils' perspectives on school, and it is strange that it usually does not. We should accept that pupils are not in a position to argue curricular issues, but that they can make valuable comments about particular lessons. Pupils tend to talk about forms of teaching and learning that they find challenging or limiting, and if encouraged to do so they will become more confident and proficient in this. For Fielding, the danger is that the pupil voice movement is subsumed to 'performativity', so that its demands are fitted into safe notions of good practice: to produce a transforming model of pupil-teacher dialogue will mean that we get away from the 'discourse of delivery . . . the clutter of criteria. . . the tyranny of targets.' (Fielding 2001, 108).

Fielding's remarks are reminiscent of John Elliott's action research approach to the curriculum. Elliott also worries about the reduction of teachers to functionaries and the sterility of predetermined learning targets (see chapter 4 of this thesis). Yet it needs to be emphasised that the skills described by advocates of democratic education and pupil voice - though highly desirable - are not in themselves sufficient for the kind of local, national and global responsibility Burkinsher wishes young people to assume, nor for adolescents to develop an internal locus of control, for which an information base must be required. Naturally, knowledge and understanding of local and national society, and of global geopolitical issues, are also very necessary to those ends. This point will be developed later in the chapter, when the generic and specific contributions of RE to citizenship are discussed, and the distinction between personal qualities and specific subject content is underlined.



Before leaving behind the theme of citizenship for the time being, some attention should also be drawn to the findings of Deakin Crick *et al* (2004, 2005) who, following an in-depth review of studies of the impact of citizenship education, offer recommendations that reverberate closely with those of Burkinsher. There should be dialogical learning, concerned with human values and rights, planned to empower pupils and to relate strongly to their life experiences and teachers may well have to change in order to adjust to this power shift (Deakin Crick *et al* 2004, 2-3; 2005, 3-4). As was noted in the introduction (above), this thesis builds towards a set of recommendations for professional practice in RE (a first provisional draft of which concludes this chapter). As we shall see at the conclusion to the thesis, there is remarkable similarity between my recommendations and those of Deakin Crick and her colleagues.

Like education for citizenship, education for identity is concerned with the development of adult autonomy. However, it may be the case that education for identity presents even more complex challenges. This is because of conditions of post-modernity and plurality which are not anticipated in the writings of Erikson, nor fully assessed in the more recent analyses of educators such as Cotterell or Head. There is a link between post-modernity, plurality and Head's concern that adolescents should be helped to avoid foreclosure; but I will argue that post-modernity and plurality multiply the associated questions beyond those so far discussed.

A widely read study of post-modernity and schooling is Hargreaves (1994). At the heart of post-modernity, Hargreaves argues, is globalisation. The consequences of globalisation are often perverse; for example, it often leads to ethnocentrism.

Although post-modernity and globalisation have many dimensions, Hargreaves identifies seven having particular consequences for teachers. These are flexible economies, the paradox of globalisation, dead certainties, the moving mosaic, the boundless self, safe simulation and the compression of time and space. A summary of Hargreaves' seven dimensions follows.

Flexible economies reflect the breakdown of traditional manufacture. Within rapid market fluctuations, production patterns need to be continually adjusted. There are needs to achieve flexible schooling arrangements to teach adaptability, and to resist the potential for simply mirroring corporate dominance and the resulting social injustice. The paradox of globalisation is that national and cultural identities are ever more fragile, but often this leads to attempts to reassert reified versions of these; these attempts are inflexible and therefore doomed. 'Dead certainties' refers to post-modern cultures of uncertainty in which knowledge does not last long and belief systems frequently collide; the world changes rapidly because our 'knowledge' of it also changes rapidly, and the overall consequence is that modernistic views of education for knowledge and progress are obsolete. Organisations that thrive are like moving mosaics of continual self-evaluation and re-adjustment, in which individuals assume different roles and forms of leadership. The boundless self is a self which draws from an infinite constellation of sources: a 'continuous reflexive project . . .



constantly and consciously remade and reaffirmed' (Hargreaves 1994, 71).

Depending on one's attitude, this heightened orientation to the self can be creative or threatening, satisfying or merely self-indulgent. Regarding safe simulation, a virtual culture may evade moral depth; teachers must use new technology in innovative ways, but also guard against its trivialising effects. The compression of time and space associated with new technology may increase opportunity, but also increase pressure.

Of greatest significance in the present context are Hargreaves' concepts of the paradox of globalisation, dead certainties and the boundless self. This is because these concepts reflect issues directly affecting adolescents' searches for adult identities. They do so by problematising those searches in novel ways. In my review of selected social historical sources (above), I have described studies by Davis and Malvano which show the social construction of adolescence to fit national identities in Europe in different parts of the twentieth century. It is indeed difficult to imagine such close fits in a globalised, post-modern, plural context; a context in which it is impossible, or at least very difficult, for adolescents to take for granted their 'native' belief systems. Indeed, Ghuman (1998, 54) and Anwar (1999, 119-20) illustrate this clearly in relation to British Asian adolescents. There can be complexities of local and national identity: Østberg, writing about her Norwegian-Pakistani adolescent respondents, analyses their transcultural citizenship, even though they are doubtful about the concept of citizenship *per se* (2003, 101-2). She sees an important role for RE in providing an inter-cultural recognition of diversity as the foundation of a

meaningful citizenship for all (2003, 107). In post-modernity there is a consequent, and ongoing, need to re-describe the self. Later in this chapter I trace the ideas of Skeie (1995) and Meijer (1991, 1995) to draw out in more detail the contribution of RE pedagogy. For the present, what seems clear is that educators must take seriously the needs to address issues of plurality and to facilitate their pupils' ongoing searches for identity. Further, as Hargreaves rightly cautions, teachers should be aware of the social justice dimensions of globalisation, and of the dangers inherent in reified national or cultural identities.

### **The contribution of RE**

#### *Education for citizenship*

In my MA dissertation, I proposed two ways in which RE can contribute to education for citizenship (O'Grady 2002, 38-9). These are democratic participation in the classroom, and awareness of cultural plurality in society. The first has more to do with the learning and social skills with which RE - and for that matter any subject - can equip pupils, the second has more to do with the distinctive knowledge and understanding to be gained through RE.

The importance of the distinction between RE's two contributions can be appreciated through a critical appraisal of publications on citizenship. These often include an attempt at a cross-curricular audit, defining the particular contribution subject areas can make in terms of content. Occasionally, confusion becomes evident between generic personal qualities and specific subject content. For



example, Arthur and Wright define the contribution of RE in terms of pupils' understanding of the ideas of duty and responsibility, and developing positive relationships (2001, 29). Yet these are matters for the whole of school life rather than distinctive contributions of RE. Here, because I am aiming to state RE's specific contribution, I will focus on cultural plurality. This in no sense suggests that democratic participation in the classroom is less significant, just that I am narrowing my focus. I will also comment on the contribution RE can make to pupils' awareness of global issues of justice, helping to build the 'information base' referred to earlier as a prerequisite of responsible citizenship.

My MA work showed how pupils mature in relation to cultural plurality by making distinct intellectual gains in relation to Islam and to their own identities. Once engaged with the complications and contradictions, and encouraged to suggest ways through these, the pupils' views become less simplistic. There are instances of real removal of prejudice, in relation to clothes, and to family life (O'Grady 2002, 28-9). This is reminiscent of Burkinsher's insistence on the role of citizenship education in preparing young people for responsible local, national and international life (Burkinsher 2002, 5), and has the advantage of grounding these skills in subject content.

An illustrative example from my MA study is a lesson in which year 8 pupils investigated family values. The class was divided into five groups of five or six. Groups 2 - 5 prepared drama sketches about what is important in family life, taking

ideas from a brainstorm noted on the board. Group 1 researched Islamic beliefs about family life from a variety of texts, noting five key factors on a poster for display. We saw and discussed each sketch, making points of contact with the research poster. There was a discussion about extended families: there are some traditional working class patterns of extended families in the local area, and the pupils often expressed attitudes of care for the elderly. This was a good way to deconstruct some of their earlier comments about Muslims ‘sticking together in large groups in one area’. Muslims became less exotic, through the experience of cultural comparison (O’Grady 2002, 23).

My own pedagogical approach was influenced by that of Jackson (1997). In a more recent book chapter, Jackson shows how sophisticated analyses of religion, in relation to concepts such as ethnicity and nationality, have a great deal to offer citizenship education (Jackson 2003). Jackson makes full use of the concept of ‘differentiated identity’. Echoing and at times drawing on the insights of Østberg (see above), he shows how identity is often developed situationally, in forms which may sometimes be transcultural or transnational. He argues for the vital importance of the common school as a forum for dialogue and understanding. Within such dialogue, a critical and reflective study of religion should be included, in which religious material provides not a source of authority but material to stimulate the clarification of pupils’ own stances. In three further chapters of the same book, which focus on developments in England, Norway and Germany respectively, Iprgrave (2003), Leganger-Krogstad (2003) and Weisse (2003) report their shared



practice of enabling direct *dialogue* between young people of different cultural backgrounds during RE lessons.

Turning briefly to RE and global justice, Liam Gearon is to some extent correct in his claim that this is an area of neglect: 'religious education in the United Kingdom remains almost entirely unengaged politically' (Gearon 2002, 143). Amongst his suggestions is that RE should include a study of the place of religious traditions in fostering dystopian political realities (Gearon 2002, 149). Whilst I agree with Gearon that this can be an important area for future development, highlighting a relationship between RE and global citizenship, I find his analysis to be pessimistic; in respect of RE's political engagement, we have strong existing theory and practice. John Hull has written extensively and influentially on spiritual education and the money culture (e.g. Hull 2002; Hull 1998, 63-67). Most GCSE Religious Studies specifications include courses on global wealth and poverty and associated religious responses. More recently, Gearon has given detailed recommendations and strategies to secondary RE teachers wishing to address issues of citizenship (Gearon 2004).

#### *Education for identity*

My reflections on RE, citizenship and cultural plurality anticipate the insights of Skeie (1995) and Meijer (1991; 1995) on RE and identity formation. Both Skeie and Meijer pursue the theme of the redescription of the self. In some general respects, Skeie and Meijer echo Hargreaves (above), though Hargreaves is not concerned with RE as such. Skeie (1995) reflects on two modes of plurality (traditional and modern)

and the challenges these put before RE professionals. Traditional plurality comprises competing worldviews, e.g. religious traditions. Modern plurality includes competing rationalities, which intensify and compress the self as it moves between them:

These rationalities are no longer contradictions between agents on the societal level, such as structures, power concentrations, groups and systems. They manifest themselves as contradictions within the individual. . . . The continual increase in the distribution of media carrying all kinds of information to us means that we are more or less constantly exposed to a plurality of ideas, values, ideals, models and alternative choices for action . . . . We are impelled to question our identity and self-understanding over and over again. (Skeie 1995, 87)

The self evolves as plurality evolves. We cannot resist this evolution, but the role of RE is ‘to make us become increasingly conscious participants in this process’ (Skeie 1995, 90). RE, Skeie argues, must acknowledge the epistemological, ethical, and educational challenges posed by traditional and modern pluralities. The epistemological challenge is to analyse competing worldviews. The ethical challenge is to include competing worldviews in a just society. The educational challenge is to include representatives of competing worldviews in a just school; to do so, schools must ‘intensify their work with such issues . . . (to give) young people competence in moving between the different arenas and perspectives of religious and modern



plurality' (Skeie 1995, 90). In this way, Skeie shows an understanding of plurality, or pluralities, to be synonymous with the development of identity.

Meijer's (1995) analysis is comparable to that of Skeie. She draws on Ricoeur's and Rorty's hermeneutics of the self in order to develop a dynamic model of self-awareness in which the self is not a fixed point to discover, but is evolving and historical; self-awareness is a matter of interpretation, of telling a coherent life-story. This self is always open to revision, meaning that self-aware people must live with ambiguity. The relevance to RE pedagogy of this view of the self is waiting to be drawn out, but a conversational process is implied in which pupils continually interpret and reinterpret their own orientations in the light of their studies. This is very close to Robert Jackson's position (1997; 2000). Previously Meijer had argued that identity formation cannot be a concern of RE, given RE's attention to a plurality of belief systems (Meijer 1991, 93). It is the concept of the reflexive self which allows Meijer to reverse her earlier view. Thus, her notion of spiritual development is that it is an ongoing, dialogical quest for personal identity: 'This quest for identity never comes to an end as long as one lives' (Meijer 1995, 92).

In the contexts of plurality and post-modernity, both Skeie and Meijer point to the need for RE to assist young people in avoiding a partial resolution of identity issues. Their aims echo Head's discussion, summarised earlier, of the vulnerability of those adolescents who gain their identity through foreclosure. The question is raised: how will these aims work out in classroom practice? In an interesting attempt to respond

to it, Hookway (2002) presents a summary of her MA research on RE for the millennial generation. She attempts to undermine what she sees as post-modernity's commodification of knowledge, by emphasising a conversational, process-oriented pedagogy of RE. Her pedagogy has three stages, the mirror, the window and the conversation. In the mirror stage, it is asked: what life questions do the pupils and their teachers identify, and what answers to these questions do the pupils and contemporary culture suggest? In the window stage, the focus is on the answers given by competing world-views including religious traditions, universal religiosity, secular atheism and post-modern relativism. In the conversation stage, the pupils evaluate the mirrors and windows, and reassess their own positions. The three-stage process embodies a 'hermeneutic of resistance' so as to enable critical engagement with contemporary culture, and also a 'hermeneutic of transformation' so as to present possibilities for personal and social improvement (Hookway 2002, 109).

## **Conclusion**

In reviewing social historical, sociological and social psychological literature on adolescence, I have identified key themes. These key themes are the social construction of youth (Mitterauer 1992; Davis 1990; Malvano 1997); the centrality of the search for identity and the lifelong nature of this search (Erikson 1950, 1968; Heaven 2001); the possibility for adolescents and adults to work collaboratively on identity formation, the need to balance adult influence with peer influence in identity formation, the vital role of the school in this work, and the importance of school ethos and atmosphere (Cotterell 1996; Head 1997); and the adolescent need for an



internal locus of control (Coleman and Hendry 1990). I have argued that these key themes pose particular challenges to secondary educators, including the provision of education for citizenship (Burkinsher 2002a; 2002b) and education for identity (Hargreaves 1994). Regarding education for citizenship, teachers will need to rethink traditional models of their practice, in order to give greater control and responsibility to adolescents. For education for citizenship effectively to give adolescents an internal locus of control, teachers must also help them to develop knowledge and understanding of their local and national societies and of geopolitical issues. Regarding education for identity, adolescents should be encouraged to avoid foreclosure. Foreclosure is understood as an immature adoption of a personal identity, perhaps based on a partial appreciation of post-modern cultural plurality (Skeie 1995). Therefore, adolescents should be exposed to a wide variety of beliefs, values and stances. The indefinite extent of cultural plurality reaffirms that identity formation continues as long as one lives (Meijer 1991; 1995). This further emphasises the possibility for a teacher and his or her pupils to undertake identity formation in a collaborative fashion, although as has been suggested, such collaboration admits of degree.

Finally I have suggested that RE has distinctive contributions to make to education for citizenship and education for identity. These are its potentials to build pupils' understanding of cultural plurality, and to contribute to their search for identity by assisting the clarification of personal beliefs and values (Hookway 2002). In RE practice, an overlap is likely between building understanding of cultural plurality

and contributing to the search for identity. More research into classroom practice is needed to orientate RE teachers in an area of growing complexity, but some recommendations for professional practice may still be offered on the basis of the foregoing material, and these form the chapter's final section.

### **Recommendations for Professional Practice in RE**

- RE should develop pedagogies of active enquiry, which enable adolescents to develop qualities of responsibility and participation. Methodologically, a balance should be sought between interaction with the teacher and interaction with peers.
- RE's distinctive content should be: beliefs and values in the context of cultural plurality, and the social and geopolitical issues of justice reflected by those beliefs and values.
- RE should aim to assist pupils in a lifelong search for personal identity. Though there is consensus that the search may begin in adolescence, adolescence itself is a variable construct. This search for identity has childhood antecedents and includes aspirations for future adult life. Material from religious traditions should be used in the service of the search, and opened to interpretation, criticism and response. In this way, pupils may be helped to develop their own flexible and reasoned beliefs and values.
- The role of the RE teacher should be to collaborate with his or her pupils in the search for identity. The nature and extent of such collaboration is as yet



undetermined, but the teacher might model the responsiveness, creativity and criticism of the mature enquirer.

My MA study also indicated that I should look closely at the reasons why creative work seems to motivate RE pupils. My review of adolescence has added to my awareness of the significance of creativity, because it has brought forth the issue of pupil *agency*: to what extent should – indeed, can – young people create knowledge and understanding of their own? I turn to this question, and other questions concerning RE and creativity, in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3 Creativity and Religious Education

### Introduction

At the end of the previous chapter I described how attention to *creativity* was a logical development of my study of adolescence. I therefore now begin an examination of creativity, broadened to include material from critical pedagogy and hermeneutics. The sequence and the argument of the chapter are as follows. I evaluate theories of creativity for educational validity, distilling pedagogical principles from the psychological content. I go on to affirm the potential of arts-based learning to develop creativity in young people but I reject the idea that the arts have a monopoly on creative learning; concerns for criticism are continuous with those for creativity, because the need for creativity is so that pupils should be empowered to develop autonomy. Influenced by Paulo Freire (e.g. 1974a; 1974b; 1996), I argue tentatively that for pupils to engage in personal *knowledge-creation* is a principle prior to teaching methodology. It is applicable through various methods, including but not exhausted by the arts. Next I link my discussion of creativity and criticism to my earlier work on adolescence, showing that knowledge-creation may be an internal locus of control for pupils as they form their own identities. I then discuss RE's contribution to knowledge-creation and adolescent identity formation, with reference to an essay by John Hull (1996). I show how my reading of Hans-Georg Gadamer (e.g. 1975) raises questions about knowledge-creation and leads to my modification of the concept, bringing forward the term *hermeneutical understanding* as an alternative focus for RE. Finally I draft lesson plans and revised recommendations for professional practice as a prelude to my field study.



## **What is creativity?**

David Fontana asks: Is creativity a special kind of thinking? Is it a gift only to some, or can it be taught? He cites Guilford, who related creativity to divergent thinking, calling it ‘the ability to generate a range of possible solutions to a given problem, in particular to a problem to which there is no single right answer’ (Fontana 1995, 127). Later Fontana provides his own definition of creativity, as ‘the ability to generate fluent and novel ways of tackling problems and of organising material’ (1995, 129). This means novel to the actor. If a child invents an already existent product, but one new to himself or herself, he or she is being creative.

Fontana goes on to posit four stages of the creative act:

- Preparation, the recognition of the worth of a theme.
- Incubation, allowing ideas on the theme to arise.
- Inspiration, as the plans or solutions come.
- Verification, in which the plans or solutions are tested.

Incubation can be short or very long. Teachers are always teachers of creativity, positively or negatively; if we encourage only convergent thinking, we can dull creativity. We must also have regard for accuracy, especially in the verification stage, intervening to ensure that pupils’ ideas have value.

Fontana remarks that artists have always spoken of a need for discipline and he doubts that creativity always flourishes in an informal classroom. The necessary

condition is encouragement for children to test their ideas and ask questions. Teachers must ask speculative questions and allow pupils to ruminate. From creativity Fontana moves to motivation. Tasks should begin from what pupils already know and experience and help them to build a clear and coherent philosophy, counting as preparation for adult life and generating intrinsic motivation (Fontana 1995, 150).

Fontana has little to say about the overall field of creativity research. Petrowski (2000) gives a broader overview. Creativity research has contributed little regarding practical strategies for teaching and learning. There are several approaches to creativity and she tries to identify the pedagogical implications of each. Psychometrists assume that creativity is a measurable mental trait and then set up tests on divergent thinking. Experimentalists try to gain insight into the generation and exploration of creative ideas, again at the individual level. By contrast, in contextual approaches, creativity must be understood in a systems model, as a process linking the individual to the field and to the domain.

Biographical approaches focus on geniuses, in order to analyse their special ways of thinking. Biological approaches focus on brain activity. These different emphases have yet to be articulated as recommendations for classroom practice.

But Petrowski suggests general guidelines, according to which teachers should:

- Provide opportunities for choice and self-discovery.
- Emphasise mastery, not reward.
- Promote supportable beliefs about creativity.
- Teach strategies for creativity.



She then asserts associated educational principles:

- Everything in life is in a creative, renewing process, so humans are hardwired for creativity.
- Failure and mess can be seen as a way to get to a creative outcome.
- Creativity is anti-perfectionist, because there are many solutions to any problem.
- New experiences create creativity and are created by it.

Following Grimmit (2000, 18) it might be pointed out that pedagogical principles must be stated before pedagogical strategies. Also it seems that some approaches to creativity have more built-in pedagogical potential than others. Psychometric approaches may not prove useful to pedagogic practice, except as background information or perhaps as assessment aids (but even then, see Collins and Amabile 2000, 304 – also discussed below); in teaching, we wish to develop, not just measure, creativity. Biographical approaches are perhaps of limited value to us, because we wish to encourage creativity in all our pupils, instead of understanding it as the preserve of the gifted; if we can generalise from the genius, we may see this differently. Biological approaches focus on elements of human experience which teaching arguably cannot affect; we might rather concentrate on social and psychological processes, because we can structure these in the classroom. In this way, contextual approaches have considerable educational potential, in that they allow us to analyse classroom conditions and how to make these optimal for creativity. Equally, it might be remarked that

through a *cognitive* approach, we can understand the development of creativity in human beings, not just the gifted, and we can link this understanding to issues such as motivation. For example, in the cognitive analysis of Gardner (1982, 101-2), the fluctuation of artistic temperament in childhood is linked to the quality of classroom interventions and school culture. Thus, it is also worth noting that cognitive approaches do not need to be isolated from contextual approaches.

Contextual and cognitive discussions of creativity can be related to certain educational ideas in the social psychology of adolescence highlighted in the previous chapter. The idea of a motivational context for creativity is reminiscent of John Cotterell's analysis of adolescent identity development and the effect on this of school (Cotterell 1996, 127). John Head powerfully advocates the idea of the school as a supportive system for pupil exploration and choice (Head 1997, 107). These connections will be taken up more fully in a later section. In the meantime I will give more detailed consideration to the contextual analysis of Csiksentmihalyi (1999) and to what might be termed the cognitive-contextual position of Collins and Amabile (1999).

Csiksentmihalyi introduces his systems perspective on creativity as follows:

Psychologists tend to see creativity exclusively as a mental process . . . such an approach cannot do justice to the phenomenon of creativity, which is just as much a cultural and social as it is a psychological event (1999, 313).



He brings forth an example from his earlier studies to illustrate the point. In a longitudinal study of artists, at the outset, the women showed as much potential as the men, but after twenty years, although several of the men had achieved recognition, this was so for none of the women.

Because creativity cannot be assessed with reference to subjective experience, but only on reception by others, Csikszentmihalyi rejects the idea that the process of creativity is more important than its outcome. Although freshness of perception and divergent thinking are desirable they do not constitute creativity. Thus, a person who unknowingly reinvents Einstein's formula for relativity is not acting creatively.

Creativity is an interactive phenomenon, the product of a social system that makes judgments about products. Activity and judgment cannot be separated:

For if you cannot persuade the world that you had a creative idea, how do we know that you actually had it? (Csikszentmihalyi 1999, 314)

Csikszentmihalyi describes the creative environment including the domain (content, tradition, or subject); the field (individuals controlling the flow of ideas in and out of the domain); and the individual who seeks to contribute to the domain. Original thought can only make sense when it attaches to established ideas, or, as Csikszentmihalyi puts it, 'new is meaningful only in relation to old' (1999, 314-5).

Human creativity is analogous to biological evolution. A creative product must be capable of being passed forward in time. The conditions for maximal creativity are:

- Availability of energy, surplus to survival tasks.
- Valuing and encouragement of creativity.
- Openness to change.
- Mobility and even conflict, which seem to bring out new ideas.
- Complexity of systems, which seems to present more creative possibilities.

Individuals with developed domain skills and the ability to break away from accepted norms should thrive creatively. However, creative people are characterised essentially by flexibility. The creative system should become internal to the person. Csikszentmihalyi concludes by recommending that we consider the community ‘which makes creativity manifest’, not the individual (1999, 333).

In reviewing Petrowski (2000), I have already argued that a contextual or systems model of creativity relates well to questions of pedagogy, because of my view of the classroom as a social and psychological environment. However, I will criticise Csikszentmihalyi’s position on both logical and educational grounds.

Csikszentmihalyi’s analysis rests on the inseparability of activity from judgment, if the same activity is to be truly creative. Logically, however, we *must* separate



activity from judgment. Van Gogh's genius was not recognised during his lifetime but few dispute it now. Did his work only become creative years later through others' recognition? That would be true to Csiksentmihalyi's position but it is deeply counter-intuitive. Sternberg *et al* (2002) raise a related question: when we speak of a creative contribution, do we mean a contribution of novelty to the domain, or the gaining of a new personal insight? They resolve the problem by holding both forms as valid: as a youth the Indian mathematician Ramanujan regenerated earlier discoveries independently, because he had no access to the domain at that point in his career.

Educators may be inclined to see creativity as the gaining of new insights within their pupils rather than within domains, agreeing with Fontana, who defines creativity as the production of ideas novel to the actor (1995, 129 – see above). Fontana writes as an *educational* psychologist. But this raises a further problem: how do we distinguish between being creative and simply learning? Perhaps the answer is that when pupils are creative they are learning in unpredictable ways. If we teach pupils to know the names of the five pillars of Islam, there are agreed correct responses. If we ask them to investigate the meaning of sacrifice through story writing, or to express their view of suffering through art, successful outcomes are less predictable. The outcome of the open task will be unique (assuming that pupils do not copy others).

Csiksenmihalyi's model can be revised in the light of my criticisms. Illustrations can again be made from RE teaching. The domain might be redefined as RE in the class's ongoing experience, the field would then be the teacher and the

pupils, and the individual would be the pupil. Csikszentmihalyi's insistence on recognition would be acceptable not in its original epistemological sense but pragmatically, to show the importance of responding to each pupil's work, valuing and encouraging creativity.

Like Csikszentmihalyi, Collins and Amabile address the components of the creative process, and emphasise its situated, contextual nature (1999). They agree that creative production requires motivation, but ask: what kind of motivation? They argue that although there can be a complex interplay of forces, love of the work is vital, or, at least, there should be intense personal involvement in the work. Collins and Amabile reflect that their use of the terms 'extrinsic motivation' and 'intrinsic motivation' has been a key feature of their discussions of creativity. They identify three components in the creative process: domain expertise, intrinsic motivation, and conditions conducive to novel production. They reiterate Amabile's original 'two-pronged hypothesis' on motivation and creativity:

The intrinsically motivated state is conducive to creativity, whereas the extrinsically motivated state is detrimental. (Collins and Amabile 1999, 299)

This hypothesis can be explained as follows. Extrinsic motivation must be directed to extra-task goals rather than novelty *per se*, for example where the aim is to score highly on a test requiring right rather than original answers. By contrast, intrinsic motivation can be so strong that even thinking about the



reasons for performing tasks can produce new insights. Similarly, creative people often distance themselves so as to minimise the effect on their work of others' judgements.

However attractive this intrinsic motivation hypothesis may be, Collins and Amabile give reasons to criticise it. There is evidence, for example, that if it is made clear that work will be evaluated for creativity, children respond positively to the prospect of extrinsic reward. Further, Collins and Amabile offer the point that Darwin and Newton combined intrinsic motivation with the extrinsic aim of revolutionising the world's thinking. Collins and Amabile take account of these qualifications by offering a revised hypothesis, based on the recognition of two types of extrinsic motivation, controlling and useful. There can be 'synergistic extrinsic motivators' which provide information to enhance creative performance, or 'nonsynergistic extrinsic motivators' which reduce creativity by making the person feel overly controlled. Thus:

Intrinsic motivation is conducive to creativity; controlling extrinsic motivation is detrimental to creativity, but informational or enabling extrinsic motivation can be conducive, particularly if initial levels of intrinsic motivation are high. (Collins and Amabile 1999, 304)

Commendably, Collins and Amabile conclude their discussion with remarks on its applicability in the classroom. These can be itemised as follows, as recommendations for pedagogical practice:

- Encourage pupils to seek tasks through intrinsic motivation.
- Provoke learning on the positive nature of learning itself.
- Provide an environment for the free exchange of ideas.
- Assess less, and practice informational assessment. Reinterpret assessment. Make it an occasional guide to enhanced performance. It should be work-focused, not person-focused. Avoid assessment for control and competition.

Collins and Amabile recommend that teachers should aim for the greatest intersection between the domain, intrinsic interest and creative enquiry; this should allow pupils to see where their interests lie. Incidentally, it is also an excellent model for RE. The domain is beliefs and values, intrinsic interest is the point of contact between beliefs and values and pupils' own concerns and questions, and creative enquiry is the classroom task designed to promote domain skill and develop intrinsic interest.

So far, my discussion of various positions on creativity has focused on the nature of novel production and the conditions likely to stimulate it. However, the relation between creativity and novel production may not be as direct as first appears. Sharon Bailin assesses the 'contemporary view' on creativity (Bailin 1994, 2). She believes that this view has five components:

- Creativity is concerned with what is novel and breaks from the past.
- The value of creative products cannot be objectively determined.
- Therefore process not product is central to creativity.



- This process should be unconstrained by the rules of disciplines.
- Therefore creativity involves something more than skill, which is transcendent and inexplicable.

Each of Bailin's five chapters is a refutation of one component of the 'contemporary view'. Her argument can be summarised thus:

- Originality can only be understood in relation to the past.
- Past traditions give criteria to evaluate creative products in terms of the significance of these products.
- Creativity concerns the production of significant products.
- The role of the discipline is crucial to the production of significant products.
- Skill and imagination are intimately connected.

Problems with Bailin's styling of the contemporary view will be noted. For example, there is no consensus that creativity breaks with the past (as we have seen, Csikszentmihalyi bases his systems model on precisely the opposite claim). Yet Bailin's concept of significance is a vital contribution. She illustrates it with examples from arts history. Works can be significant because they embody or perfect established values (Raphael), or because they innovate from these and pose new problems (Stravinsky) (Bailin 1994, 38-9). Innovative works have significance because they 'provide a new and valuable direction in which the art can grow' (Bailin 1994, 45); they are grounded in the discipline but represent future possibilities.

Bailin's point has appeal for educators who resist innovation for its own sake. Some creative products are better than others. Does the product present possibilities for the future development of the pupil, or the future lessons of the class? I can illustrate the difference by referring to two of my own teaching attempts recent at the time of writing the first draft of this chapter, before my field study had commenced. I asked year 9 pupils to rewrite a Hindu creation myth, substituting classmates, celebrities or items of modern technology for the gods. Novel figurations were made but the planned increases in understanding were not as significant as hoped: the aim had been to make the pupils consider what is involved in creation, preservation and destruction, in a concrete way, but their scope to do this proved too limited. But when year 7 pupils were asked to consider ways in which the resurrection story might work as a metaphor for somebody's hopes and dreams, they referred to many examples of deep human experience and they gained in interpretive imagination. They were learning to understand religious material in non-literal ways, a skill of considerable value to their future progress in RE. The cases are relevant to Bailin's assertion that we should aim for significant innovations that enable future possibilities, both academic and personal; such achievement represents true creativity, in contrast to mere novelty.

In this section I have selectively reviewed the field of creativity research. I have highlighted several of its debates, including creativity and novel production, links between creativity and motivation, and creativity and significance. Although I have avoided a rigid definition of creativity, there appear to be five key interrelated principles to take forward. The first is owed to Fontana and is that



creativity cannot be left to chance; teachers must plan appropriate tasks for their pupils. The second and third arise from my discussion of Csiksentmihalyi; these are the vital importance of the motivational environment and the opportunity for pupils to create unique work. The fourth is influenced by Collins and Amabile and is the need for intrinsic motivation, even when taking account of their 'revised model'. The fifth is derived from Bailin's concept of significance and is the condition that truly creative outcomes build the pupil and the person.

### **Creativity, creative arts and criticism**

By the close of the previous section I had identified five key principles of creative classroom practice. These can be summarised as planning creative tasks, ensuring a motivational environment, providing opportunities for the creation of the unique, developing intrinsic motivation and building significance. In this section I firstly discuss the various ways in which creative arts tasks may fulfil my five principles. I go on to examine Freirean notions of creativity in which creative acts are aligned with criticism, in a pedagogy stressing the production of authentic knowledge. The Freirean problematic provides broader and deeper epistemological and moral contexts for my analyses of creativity and creative arts, through its elucidation both of human nature and contemporary education systems.

My MA work included evidence of the utility of drama tasks in engaging pupils and encouraging independent, experiential learning (O'Grady 2003, 216-17). The possibility for pupils to use visual art and story writing to generate unique and significant responses has also been mentioned in the previous section. Through

analysis of selected literature on creative arts teaching, I will now develop those themes in more depth.

Turning firstly to drama education, for Helen Nicholson, its special quality is its multi-modality; she writes of ‘the languages of drama’ (2000, 3). There seem to be four of these, visual, verbal, aural and kinaesthetic. Through their use, mind and body, and cognitive and affective, can be interrelated. This resembles descriptions of differential learning styles, and offers a view of drama as a powerful synthesis in which skills, whether verbal, intellectual, emotional or physical, can be pooled. All of these skills are necessary, and therefore pupils of different inclinations can participate. Thus, drama’s multi-modality leads to experiential learning, which is seen not as a method of drama but as intrinsic to drama. Drama absolutely relies on collaboration, criticism, and group work:

Developing a culture of participation in drama, where pupils are actively engaged in their own learning, is one way to challenge the kind of passivity which is sometimes associated with a consumer culture. As teachers, it also enables us to demonstrate to pupils that their ideas matter. In this context, drama education provides a public forum for dialogue, discussion, debate and dissent; it is a place where difference, and the limits of difference, might be negotiated and explored. In drama, however, pupils can explore ideas in sound, negotiate in movement, and debate in visual images; an active culture of participation in the drama classroom invites pupils to communicate with their bodies as well as in words. (Nicholson 2000, 9)



Because these processes are interactive, meanings are not passively consumed but are actively interrogated and created. The knowledge that results is authentic rather than second-hand. Nicholson's analysis of the strengths of drama education is reminiscent of Paulo Freire's pedagogical view (see below). Her emphasis on multi-modality recalls discussions of the 'whole child' in literature on spiritual education, for example the work of Brenda Lealman (also see below). She provides a rationale for drama as motivational, significant and able to generate uniqueness.

As an example of the practice envisaged by Nicholson we can consider Wooding (2000). He reports a drama project undertaken with 15 year-old girls in inner London, in which he enabled them to explore issues of their own identity. Through improvisation, reflective dialogue, scripting and performance they analysed social themes in their local area and confronted questions such as the construction of their senses of self. The project was then adapted to work with girls of similar ages, but in a private drama school in a more affluent area. For Wooding, the success of the work was in promoting depth in the pupils: 'pupils found ways to bring their realities to their drama – a useful skill for any writer or performer' (Wooding 2000, 99). We might add that this would be a useful skill for any pupil wishing to learn creatively and experientially. Moreover, Wooding's concentration on identity issues relates very closely to the principles for a curriculum to motivate adolescents, identified at the close of chapter 2 (above).

I move now to the ideas of Lealman. In her essay 'The Whole Vision of the Child' (1996), her concerns are with spirituality and creativity, and she presents a model for holistic, spiritual education, based on transpersonal psychology.

Lealman's insights are of particular relevance to my purposes, because she has a special interest in RE (see Miller [2003], for discussion of the significance to curriculum development in RE and the visual arts of Lealman, and associated writers). She addresses the transpersonal category of consciousness, which she understands to be:

. . . the area of mystical experience; of wonder, transcendence of self, cosmic awareness, glimpses of something more. It is perhaps the child's glimpse of real self, of higher self, of Self as in Jung; of potential for wholeness.

(Lealman 1996, 23).

For Lealman, there are three 'movements' that 'open on to the transpersonal' (Lealman 1996, 24). These are creating, healing and transcending. Firstly, she analyses creating. Artistic creativity affirms the child's experience. It communicates not facts but dynamic, living experience. It brings an encounter with symbols, and these are part of the transpersonal realm. It engages the intuition, and embodies a more open approach to life. Secondly, Lealman discusses healing or 'wholing' processes emphasising the holistic nature of learning. She stresses the importance of participatory methods that relate to life today. She suggests that modules of work should always be presented 'whole' before going on to study their parts. She pleads that RE should avoid the reinforcement of tribalism. Thirdly, and this perhaps serves as a good summary



of her overall approach, Lealman deals with the notion of transcendence by saying that children should have learning experiences which point them beyond themselves and beyond the present, in the direction of growth: ‘of the whole that is not yet, but is still to be’ (Lealman 1996, 28: cf. Cotterell’s concept of the ‘possible self’ (Cotterell 1996, 116 and chapter 2, above).

Thus far Lealman has articulated profound creative principles that strongly satisfy Bailin’s requirement for significance, but without indicating ways for teachers to put these principles into practice. For such indications, we must turn to her earlier essay ‘Drum, Whalebone and Dominant X: A Model for Creativity’ (1993). This is an unusual piece beginning with vivid images of Inuit nature spirituality and art; brutal landscapes of ice combine with sculptures of whalebone and stone, worked to reveal the meanings that are dormant inside them awaiting the creative hand. The motivation to create is the desire to transform the world out of its incomplete and unsatisfying state. At the same time, artistic creation signifies a unity between the artist and the world. The sculptor asks the material ‘what do you want to become?’ (Lealman 1993, 57).

Lealman insists that what she desires is a quality of education, rather than time set apart for art (1993, 59). Her priority is resistance to dominant consumerist values, and a connection with the elemental, the mysterious, and the possible. Nevertheless, one consequence of this is a rationale for the use of the material arts in the classroom: ‘. . . there has to be connection with the materials of the artistic process; with silence, words, body, movement, stillness, sound, wood, clay, flesh, line, paint . . .’ (Lealman 1993, 60).

In other words, the use of poetry, dance, music, sculpture and painting may engage pupils at levels deeper than the cognitive. These forms of learning can engage the intuition and can connect the person to the elements of nature. Pupils and materials can ‘combine’ in the production of unique artefacts the shapes of which are unknown until they are born. Work of this kind is demanding (or even ‘painful’) but it subverts the easy trivialisations of the consumer culture (Lealman 1993, 63). Teachers could never be provided with a straightforward method for the actualisation of Lealman’s vision, yet there are at least intimations of the practices that might result (cf. Evans 2003; Sadler 2003).

Nicholson’s insights concerning the power of drama and Lealman’s vision of creative spirituality reverberate with my five principles for creativity, but they also share political implications. Both involve pedagogy of resistance to official knowledge and dominant values. We might reflect that any true creativity is impossible without such resistance. This seems an appropriate point to introduce the ideas of Paulo Freire.

It is well known that Freire was a twentieth-century educator who invented a method for bringing literacy to peasants in North-East Brazil (see e.g. Bellett 1998; Gadotti and Torres 2003; Gastaldo and de Figueiredo-Cowen 1996). Freire is also associated with the concept of pedagogy, through the title of his classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1996). But Freire did not understand ‘pedagogy’ to mean a method of teaching. In fact writers on Freire bemoan the sometime reduction of his pedagogy to a method (see e.g. McLaren and Leonard 1993, 3). In Freire’s usage ‘pedagogy’ refers to a philosophy of education



grounded in a diagnosis of the human condition. The central concepts are those of *humanisation*, *conscientisation* and *praxis*. If fully humanised, people become subjects able to perceive and take action against social and political contradictions, and are no longer uncritical and passive objects. Conscientisation is the process through which such subject-awareness is developed. Praxis is the dialectical relationship between reflection and action. Reflection is necessary to undermine the psychological effects of oppression, and action is necessary to remove its outer expressions in social and political circumstances. At the very beginning of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire states that humanisation is ‘humankind’s central problem’ (1996, 1). Dehumanisation is a ‘distortion’ of our vocation, so that it inevitably leads to a struggle (Freire 1996, 2). Yet in liberating themselves, the oppressed also liberate the oppressors; only the oppressed have the power to liberate, because the power to do so resides in their weakness:

True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. (Freire 1996, 3)

Freire acknowledges influences from Marxist and Christian thought (1996, 19). He also makes use of Erich Fromm’s psychoanalytic theory, most notably when suggesting that the oppressed have internalised the image of the oppressor and ‘are fearful of freedom’ (1996, 29). Perhaps the defining characteristic of Freire’s thought is its existential optimism:

This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade. The central problem is this: How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? (Freire 1996, 30)

This should be enough to warn us against mistaking Freire's pedagogy as a mere teaching style. However, it does not mean that Freire is unconcerned with methodology. In chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he draws a strong contrast between 'banking' and 'problem-posing' styles of education. Briefly, 'banking' is the dehumanising process of depositing knowledge into a pupil, whereas 'problem-posing' is the open and critical investigation of an issue by the teacher and the pupil on equal terms where both are learners (Freire 1996, 52-67). In the book's next chapter Freire traces the significance of dialogue in educational practice, arguing the need for educators to identify generative themes in the experiences of their pupils and to investigate these in language which is meaningful to the pupils (Freire 1996, 68-105).

In a later essay, 'Education as the Practice of Freedom' (1974a), Freire refines the epistemological basis of his pedagogy. Here, he is concerned with the distinctive way in which human beings know the world. For Freire, the essence of the human condition is our potential for critical relationship with the world:



To be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world. It is to experience that world as an objective reality, independent of oneself, capable of being known. Animals, submerged within reality, cannot relate to it; they are creatures of mere *contacts*. But man's separateness from and openness to the world distinguishes him as a being of *relationships*. Men, unlike animals, are not only *in* the world but *with* the world. (Freire 1974a, 3; original italics).

A key concept in Freire's analysis is that of 'historicity' (Freire 1974a, 3).

Humans have a differentiated awareness of the world, allowing for reflection on the past and action for the future. This historical sensibility allows access into a creative dimension in which humans can respond to their context, and transcend the present moment by making critical choices for the future. Freire uses the term 'integration' to describe the interactive relationship between humans and the world, contrasting integration with the 'adaptation' characteristic of animals (Freire 1974a, 4). Tragically, in modern societies, argues Freire, people are too often reduced to spectators by the power of myths generated by ideologies or by advertising. Elites present the tasks of the times in the form of prescriptions, and when we try to follow these prescriptions, we become anonymous, domesticated and adaptive. To struggle against conditions of anonymity, domestication and adaptation requires a 'critical educational effort'; such a struggle 'will not appear as a natural byproduct of even major economic changes' (Freire 1974a, 19). In a related essay, Freire analyses the opposed concepts of extension and communication (Freire 1974b). Extension - the transfer of knowledge and technical capacity from one region to another, for example in agricultural

improvement - is viewed by Freire as adaptive and culturally invasive. The true task of human beings is communication, meaning intersubjective dialogue for the transformation of the world, synonymous with the idea of conscientisation (Freire 1974b, 110).

What seems significant to my purposes in this chapter is the understanding of creativity articulated by Freire in these works. For Freire, creativity is a mark of humanisation. It allows us to respond to the present and to create the future. It involves dialogue, but it means that we criticise the issues of our times in order to create our own knowledge of the world, instead of merely adapting to the ideas of others. We have to discern the dominant ideologies and question whose interests they serve. Otherwise, 'schools are set up as delivery systems to market official ideas', probably those of capitalism and consumerism (Freire and Shor 1987, 8). When teachers and pupils become truly critical, both become more like researchers. Moreover, when the focus of learning shifts towards their immediate experience, what Freire calls unsupervised or unofficial knowledge can result, expressed in the pupils' authentic voices. For Freire, the passive, official curriculum is in the interests of the dominant authorities in society, but the critical curriculum empowers pupils. In one way or another, education cannot but be a political act.

The essential question posed by Freire to RE teachers is whether the subject's pupils are oppressed. This depends on the subject's aims and methodology.

There seems no reason why we should not have a critical orientation such that pupils are placed at the centre. If this means that official curriculum agencies or



even religious traditions are styled as Freire's 'dominant authorities', then the discussion relates closely to complaints concerning RE syllabuses that often ignore generalised, religiously unaffiliated spirituality (Rudge 1998). More recent statements that good RE practice must involve gains in pupils' critical skills are welcome (Ofsted 2005, 4). Later in the chapter, I will consider these issues more fully, with reference to Hull (1996).

Freire's place as a major influence on progressive educational thought is undoubted (see e.g. Kincheloe and Steinberg 1998, 20; Smith 2002). He has generated a tradition of critical pedagogy that has stable features, even though Freire invited criticism of his own ideas as they were reworked in different contexts. Ivor Goodson writes of the inadequacy of transmissive methods, and insists that what happens interactively in the classroom must take precedence over what might be 'planned' by the teacher alone; the teacher must be ready to enable the pupils to create their own knowledge (1998, 27-36). McLaren and da Silva advocate a critical practice aiming to destabilise dominant patterns of power and knowledge, allowing a radical democracy to take root (1993, 48-9). On the basis of my emphasis on adolescent agency (chapter 2 above), I can identify with the aim of *knowledge-creation*, but this identification is subject to refinement through my reading of Gadamer (see below).

Further, I can unify my understanding of the creative arts work of Nicholson, Wooding and Lealman by locating it within the contours of the Freirean scheme, where artistic creativity will be seen as one expression of humanisation. This is in accord with the primary status of pedagogical principles as distinct from

pedagogical strategies (and with Lealman's claim that what she seeks is a quality of education). Artistic creativity is a powerful form of creativity, but there are others; indeed, Freire's analysis casts light on my earlier finding that discussion tasks also aid pupils to shape their own understandings (O'Grady 2003, 216).

### **Creativity and adolescence**

In the course of the last section I demonstrated that the ideas of Freire give a sharp edge to educational concepts of creativity. This is because Freire sets creativity within his pedagogical programme for humanisation. What is essential is that pupils should be liberated to create knowledge of their own. This requires that pupils and their teachers should problematise dominant social and political ideologies. I argued that creative arts approaches could be a very useful strand in a humanising programme, though they clearly have no exclusive claim on creativity thus defined. This can still mean that the five principles for creativity decided earlier in this chapter – planned tasks, a motivational environment, unique outcomes, intrinsic motivation and significance – hold good; in fact the background of humanisation ought to make these principles clearer. In this section I relate my findings on creativity to my previous review of adolescence. The argument is that the model of creativity developed in this essay will help teachers to address the needs of adolescent pupils. In chapter 2 (above), I argued that in relation to adolescence:

- The search for identity is the central task.
- The internal locus of control is the central need.



These general factors of adolescence resulted in two challenges to secondary educators, namely the provision of education for citizenship and of education for identity. Thus, I further argued that:

- Regarding education for citizenship, teachers need to rethink traditional models of their practice, in order to give greater control and responsibility to adolescents. Teachers must also help adolescents to develop knowledge and understanding of their local and national societies and of geopolitical issues.
- Regarding education for identity, adolescents should be encouraged to avoid foreclosure (an immature adoption of a personal identity, perhaps based on a partial appreciation of post-modern cultural plurality).

Additionally, I suggested that RE has a particular contribution to make to adolescent development. I will revisit this issue in the next section, where I am concerned more directly with RE. For now I will reassess my general conclusions on the adolescent curriculum in the light of my discussions of creativity. Though my concerns for education for citizenship and education for identity are linked, I will address them separately.

As was suggested in chapter 2, education for citizenship can be seen as a response to the adolescent disengagement and marginalisation lamented by commentators (e.g. Côté and Allaher 1995, xvii). Citizenship emphasises democratic participation and personal and community responsibility. It is a subject but also an ethos for school life, building autonomy and self-awareness. It

favours independent, egalitarian styles. In chapter 2 I also described how citizenship might help to answer concerns over excessive adult socialisation of adolescents (e.g. Furnham and Stacey 1991, 128), or over the adolescent need for an internal locus of control (Coleman and Hendry 1990, 207). I also criticised Burkinsher's view of citizenship education as the adoption of democratic classroom principles on the grounds that citizenship needs an information base and not just skills. I claimed that desirable though democratic traits are, they must be combined with social and political understanding.

The question now arises, how does my discussion of creativity affect my position on citizenship? There appear to be two aspects to the answer. The first is to assert that the personal autonomy strand of citizenship is strengthened by the concepts that are brought out by the creativity debate (including uniqueness, significance and knowledge-creation). In my view the assertion is justified. The second is to imagine Freire's response to citizenship education or to cast him as the citizenship educator *par excellence*. Freire would echo my criticism of Burkinsher but in terms of praxis. He would ensure that democratic acts were thoroughly underpinned by reflection. Freire would seek to ask with pupils: what are the generative social and political themes to investigate? What are the dominant perspectives on these themes, and whose interests are served by those perspectives? Once the official knowledge had been demystified through such questioning, the way would be clear for the authentic response of the person. Seen in this way, the creativity and citizenship agendas are mutually enriching.



In chapter 2 I commented that education for identity is a potentially more complex matter than education for citizenship. This was because of conditions of late modernity or post-modernity which result in Hargreaves' image of the boundless self, drawn from an infinite constellation of sources: a 'continuous reflexive project . . . constantly and consciously remade and reaffirmed' (Hargreaves 1994, 71). I maintain this view of the complexity of identity even though I now recognise that citizenship can also work in the same reflexive way (see Østberg 2003, 102-3). I suggested that the achievement of adult identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a more differentiated process than was so for much of the twentieth, as far as advanced industrial economies are concerned (see e.g. Davis 1990, 5-11). I also adopted Head's view that adolescents who resolve identity crises partially, through some form of foreclosure, become vulnerable (Head 1997, 96-97). Head argues for a curriculum for identity enhancement, based on the flexible and reasonable development of values worked out in collaboration between pupils and teachers as equal co-learners. In this regard, I found useful Meijer's description of the self as not a fixed point to discover, but as evolving and historical; self-awareness is a matter of interpretation, of telling a coherent life-story (Meijer 1995, 92). For Meijer, pupils continually interpret and reinterpret their own orientations in the light of their studies.

How then does my discussion of creativity affect my position on identity?

Basically it does so by helping to characterise identity formation as a creative process. I have used Bailin's concept of significance to show how a truly creative outcome builds the person, rather than generating mere novelty. My critique of

Csiksentmihalyi's position has underlined the importance to creativity of the motivational environment in which pupil contributions are recognised; this seems close to Head's model of identity enhancement through classroom collaboration. Finally, we might again imagine Freire's response. No doubt Freire would view the achievement of authentic identity as akin to humanisation. It is tempting to read the 'reflexive self' of Hargreaves and Meijer as a form of praxis. Identity can be seen as a series of dialogical events through which ideologies are interrogated, and knowledge-creation and simultaneously person-creation take place. For Meijer, 'This quest for identity never comes to an end as long as one lives' (1995, 92); in Freire's words, 'Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis' (1996, 65). Once more, when seen in a Freirean perspective, apparently separate educational concerns - those for identity and those for creativity - can be co-substantial.

### **The contribution of RE (1)**

Over the previous section I addressed my investigation of creativity, which sets material from the psychology of creativity and from the creative arts into a Freirean framework, to the question of the adolescent curriculum. I retained my concerns for education for citizenship and education for identity, which were strengthened by creativity concepts such as significance and uniqueness; it was also demonstrated that Freirean pedagogy brings a sharper critical edge to those concerns. Both education for citizenship and education for identity should promote the creation of authentic knowledge, which was viewed as coterminous with the creation of the authentic person. In this section, I begin to reassess the contribution of RE to education for citizenship and education for identity in the



light of my view of creativity thus far, but also with regard to further material relevant to its central concept of knowledge-creation.

In chapter 2 I offered the following conclusions regarding RE and adolescence:

I have suggested that RE has distinctive contributions to make to education for citizenship and education for identity. These are its potentials to build pupils' understanding of cultural plurality, and to contribute to their search for identity by assisting the clarification of personal beliefs and values. In RE practice, an overlap is likely between building understanding of cultural plurality and contributing to the search for identity.

As a result of my investigation into creativity I certainly retain these remarks but I am now intrigued by the possibility that we can do more than they say we can, and equip young people to gain unique and significant knowledge of their own. As I move towards some revised conclusions and recommendations for professional practice in RE, I will consider an essay by John Hull (1996).

Hull sets out his key concepts of alienated authority, dialecticity and non-dialecticity and reification before relating these concepts to the nature of RE. Alienation is the situation in which 'that which we ourselves have produced is estranged from us' (Hull 1996, 97). The three main contemporary forms of alienation are our relationships with the commodity, the media, and religion. We have produced these, yet they stand over us, as alienated authorities. In the case

of religion, the objectivisation of its authority is 'self-defined' through the idea of revelation (Hull 1996, 98). In contrast, dialectical thinking allows self-criticism and enquiry: no authority is unqualified or fixed. The fixed authority concepts of non-dialectical thinking are 'mirror-images of its own projections', including racism and tribalism (Hull 1996, 99). Hull goes on to suggest that 'reification is the cognitive result of projection', in which an idea takes on a false life of its own (Hull 1996, 99); when this process becomes obsessive, something akin to a fetish results, as in pornography where women and men are worshipped non-dialectically, that is, without relationship, or in religion, whenever God is worshipped 'apart from the kingdom of God' (Hull 1996, 101). Authentic authority is always dialectical, or mediated. Religion and education can be mediating factors, amongst others, even when alienated forms of authority are usually taken for granted. In order to mediate authentic authority, Hull argues, RE must move dialectical relationships into the place of non-dialectical forms of thinking. Sacred texts must not be objectified into extrinsic authorities, or reification, fetish and tribalisation will result. RE must continue to be multicultural, and to encourage pupils to reflect on and take account of what they learn.

Hull's points seem amenable to Freirean renderings. Religions could perhaps assume the status of official ideologies. If pupils are expected to see religions as objective authorities, a form of oppression can result. For liberation to take place, pupils must be in dialectical relationships with religions. In practice, this will mean that they are encouraged to investigate religious material in a critical way, including questions about whose interests are served and whose are denied as



consequences of religious beliefs or practices. Such a critical approach might go some way towards addressing Liam Gearon's misgivings that RE neglects issues of human rights (Gearon 2002, 149).

To call for pupils of RE to be encouraged to be critical is not simply to call for more 'learning from religion' (e.g. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 2000, 3); it is to insist on clarity over what 'learning from religion' is intended to mean. Perhaps there is a danger that both 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion' can be done uncritically, especially if it is assumed that 'learning from' has a degree of normative content; that is, if it is expected that pupils might simply derive values from religions. In practice pupils may be highly motivated against such expectations (see Freire and Shor 1987, 6 – also above). In the face of such concerns it may be that a liberal inter-faith pluralism does not go far enough (e.g. O'Grady 1996): it may be that pupils have to create knowledge of their own, through sharper critical engagement. This latter point may meet the concerns of Rudge, who wishes RE to become a genuine study of beliefs and values for all, including the unaffiliated majority (Rudge 1998).

Perhaps RE has not yet engaged with Paulo Freire. Eileen Bellett, commendably, encourages teachers to engage with the thematic worlds of their pupils (1998). However, her attempt to relate Freire to RE does not encompass the full extent of his pedagogy.

Alternatively, it may be that we need to think more clearly about what is involved when pupils of RE encounter material from religious traditions and then reflect on their own beliefs and values, or vice versa. It seems to me that a useful

framework for such thinking may be found in the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, to which I now turn.

### **Gadamer, hermeneutics and knowledge-creation**

In reconstructing Gadamer's overall scheme, I have referred to his *magnum opus*, *Truth and Method* (1975), and also made use of the summaries of his position found in Linge (1976) and Nicholson (1991). For Gadamer, understanding in human sciences is not divorced from understanding in human life. His hermeneutical concern is not methodological but ontological; what are the conditions under which understanding arises? Hermeneutics is an encounter with the strange other (e.g. artwork, religious text) that resists assimilation into the horizons of our world. Our horizons are our unconscious participation in traditions; traditions are not objects but conditions of our understanding. Therefore understanding is an event over which the interpreter does not preside. Our prejudices open up the past: our enclosure within our horizons, and the gulf separating us from our object, are the grounds of our understanding. This is Gadamer's sense of the hermeneutical situation, in which understanding is not reconstruction but mediation. The past is no passive object of investigation, but an inexhaustible source of possibilities; texts speak differently as their meanings find concretisations in new hermeneutical situations. In the interpretation of a text, one should be concerned not to recover the author's personality or circumstances but the text's fundamental question – and to question further in the direction it indicates. One is then questioned by the text. Text and interpreter are both led by the question. Texts elicit many interpretations not incidentally, but as part of their ontological possibility, because they stand in traditions.



Paradoxically, for what the text says to stay the same, it must continue to be said differently by its successive interpreters.

For Blacker (1993), Gadamer's primary contribution to educational thought is his elucidation of how understanding (*Bildung*) is constituted, because it clarifies the true meaning of education. Understanding has the buoyancy of a game. It has no goal outside itself, is self-forming, dialogical and ongoing. In Gadamer's own words:

Like nature, *Bildung* has no goals outside itself. . . In *Bildung*, that by which and through which one is formed becomes completely one's own. (Gadamer 1975, 12)

As a consequence of his debate with Habermas (see Misgeld 1991; Nicholson 1991), Gadamer accepted that understanding need not be completely self-fulfilling and that social and political progress could be a legitimate aim. Gadamer nonetheless resisted overly teleological positions, as indeed did Freire, who was consequently offered the misplaced criticism that 'liberation' is unspecific (Taylor 1996, 149). Gadamer preferred to see tradition as the ground of continual future transformations. Although critical theorists criticised him as oriented to the past and therefore socially conservative, there is in fact no need why Gadamer should not include awareness of issues of power and modernity in *Bildung*. If this claim is accepted it should be possible to identify pedagogical principles acceptable to both sides. I would suggest the following four principles:

- Pedagogy takes place in a climate of debate and dialogue. There are ideals of open-ended questioning and personal and social improvement.
- Pedagogy is a historical process, oriented toward given experience. Cultural texts and artefacts are analysed for the questions they raise about life, and the same questions are then asked of present learners.
- Understanding involves the application of historical questions to learners' life experiences (and it is therefore a life-long process). Questions concerning power and justice should be prominent in this regard.
- Understanding can be mediated in encounters with the unfamiliar, resulting in a progressive widening of the learner's horizons.

Thus, given the influence of Habermas, a pedagogy derived largely from Gadamer can be seen as amenable to Freirean concerns for social criticism and emancipation. It is compatible with Hull's insistence that young people must not be subject to a one-sided authority of religious material. It will also connect with the ideas on creativity of writers including Bailin and Csikszentmihalyi. Clearly Bailin's *significance* has much in common with Gadamer's *Bildung*. Both involve a horizon-opening relationship with tradition, in which tradition is viewed as the condition of innovation. Both are careful to avoid extremes of historicism (where cultural materials have meaning but only within their original contexts) and nihilism (where the same materials may be viewed as outcomes of oppressive power relations). Both envisage a dialectical process of self-development and tradition-development. *Bildung* is also comparable to Csikszentmihalyi's creative process integrating the domain (content, tradition, or subject); the field (individuals controlling the flow of ideas in and out of the



domain); and the individual who seeks to contribute to the domain. As we saw earlier, for Csikszentmihalyi, original thought is intelligible only when attached to established ideas.

Gadamer shows how knowledge cannot be created *ex nihilo*. Young people stand in tradition and without tradition creative agency is unthinkable. Given this, we might better style knowledge-creation as a *hermeneutical understanding* where knowledge of tradition integrates with knowledge of the self and brings the future into view. What is significant is the understanding of tradition as ongoing and inexhaustible possibility. In the next section I shall return to my consideration of RE, a field where the influence of hermeneutics is already evident.

### **The Contribution of RE (2)**

Attempts to relate hermeneutics to RE are not new (see Meijer 1991; 1995). More recently Meijer (2004) has utilised ideas from Gadamer and Ricoeur to criticise Jackson's interpretive approach to RE (1997). She argues that Jackson's three-level categorisation of religions as formed by individuals, membership groups and wider traditions gives insufficient attention to the notion of tradition and she suggests that the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur offer ways to rectify this difficulty. From Gadamer, Meijer takes the point that when we encounter the unfamiliar, our preconceptions are put at play; and in subsequent reflection upon these, we can realise something about the tradition which has formed us and which we form. Jackson replies to Meijer that this idea of self-

knowledge through an encounter with the unfamiliar is close to what he describes as *edification* (Jackson 2004, 93).

From my perspective, it is not always clear whether Meijer intends ‘one’s own tradition’ to mean ancestral religious tradition, or tradition in the wider sense of background personal and social experience. This tension is complicated by the ambiguous and complex status of religious traditions in modernity, because of which tracing their impact on our lives is an inexact science (Pecora 2003). It seems wisest to conclude that preconceptions can and do arise from the sum total of background experience, and to understand tradition in this latter sense. The sociologist Colin Campbell (1996) argues persuasively for the presence of what he calls ‘habit’ in much everyday interaction. This appears to be close to a Gadamerian background, within which it may be difficult to separate the influences of one’s ancestral religious tradition from wider social and cultural stimuli; Campbell refers to a constitutive, unconscious stuff of personality.

As for planning RE, we might assume that religious traditions form an *element* of personal and social background influence, given their considerable impact over history. We might use their texts and artefacts, broadly speaking, to identify traditional questions of beliefs and values for pupils to be led by and to investigate. Pupils may encounter new material or see material in new ways: Meijer (2004) speaks of hearing familiar Bach music anew, so as to reveal her preconceptions and expand her horizons.



### **Three lesson plans**

As a result of my review of creativity, critical theory, hermeneutics and RE, I sketched three lesson plans. At this time, I was preparing to begin my fieldwork. The class would study Islam in the first action research cycle of the study (see chapter 5, below). The plans also referred back to my review of adolescence. They were designed to develop several of my theoretical themes:

- (a) To position pupils in relation to the tradition of Islam, after the discussion of Gadamer (e.g. 1975) and hermeneutical meaning-making in this chapter. For example, lesson plan one includes investigation of the life of Muhammad PBUH. (PBUH stands for ‘peace and blessings be upon him’, a prayer said by Muslims to follow the name of Muhammad, in order to show remembrance and very great respect.) Pupils raise their own questions related to the story and present their own views on emergent issues.
- (b) To enable pupils to reflect on their own beliefs, values and identities, after the discussion of Head (1997) in chapter 2 (above). For example, in lesson plan 2 they consider ways in which oneness is important to them personally.
- (c) To invite pupils to work creatively, shaping unique and significant outcomes, after the discussion of Csikszentmihalyi (1999) and Bailin (1994) in this chapter. For example, in lesson plans 2 and 3 they are asked to produce original art and drama pieces that express significant meanings in relation to oneness and generosity.
- (d) To examine issues of social justice, after the discussion of Gearon (2002, 2004) in chapter 2 (above). For example, in lesson plan 3 they investigate wealth and poverty.

I hoped that the act of planning lessons crystallised what I had read during my literature reviews. The three lesson plans now follow.

1. Pupils learn the life-story of Muhammad PBUH. In groups, they list questions they would like to ask Muhammad in an interview and they prioritise their questions. Each group selects one question to present to the class as a whole for discussion of what Muhammad might reply. Then the class discuss their own view of the matter (cf. Baumfield 2003, 181 on the Deweyan ‘community of enquiry’).
2. Pupils discuss Quranic quotations expressing *tawhid* (the oneness of Allah). They ask: what are some possible reasons for the importance of the idea of oneness? Then: what are some ways in which oneness is important to me? (Or, what are examples of the importance of oneness in my life?) They then produce art compositions on the theme of oneness and there is further reflection and comment on the art outcomes.
3. Pupils use a range of resources to study *zakat* (the giving of alms). They then ask: what do we know, and what can we imagine, about why *zakat* began? What questions are raised about relationships between people, or just about the world in general? Questions arising from *zakat* are then displayed or noted on the board. In groups, pupils pick one of the questions to use as a basis for a piece of drama that investigates it. The drama pieces are performed and the following question is discussed: what does each drama piece tell us about the question on which it is based? (i.e. what possible answers are suggested?).



## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have investigated theories of creativity, distilling five educational principles from the psychological discussions. These are that creative tasks must be planned, a motivational environment is required, that unique outcomes must be sought, intrinsic motivation must be gained and truly creative products have significance and not just novelty. I have considered material on the creative arts and on creativity and spirituality, concluding that creativity must be linked to an understanding of the whole person and also to an ethics of resistance to indoctrination. I have addressed Freirean principles to the adolescent curriculum, arguing that praxis and humanisation are essential complements to my existing concerns for education for citizenship and education for identity. I have moved from the idea of knowledge-creation towards a model of hermeneutical understanding, owed largely to Gadamer but compatible with my reading in creativity and critical theory. My primary concern has been with the nature of RE and its contribution to adolescent development through a creative, critical and ultimately hermeneutical pedagogy. I have described three lesson plans representative of the practice that my discussions suggest, and in chapter 5 I will show how those plans were used at the commencement of my field study.

## **Revised Recommendations for Professional Practice in RE**

At the close of chapter 2, I presented recommendations for professional practice in RE. These were as follows:

- RE should develop pedagogies of active enquiry, which enable adolescents to develop qualities of responsibility and participation.

Methodologically, a balance should be sought between interaction with the teacher and interaction with peers.

- RE's distinctive content should be beliefs and values in the context of cultural plurality, and the social and geopolitical issues of justice reflected by those beliefs and values.
- RE should aim to assist pupils in a lifelong search for personal identity. Though there is consensus that the search may begin in adolescence, adolescence itself is a variable construct. This search for identity has childhood antecedents and includes aspirations for future adult life. Material from religious traditions should be used in the service of the search, and opened to interpretation, criticism and response. In this way, pupils may be helped to develop their own flexible and reasoned beliefs and values.
- The role of the RE teacher should be to collaborate with his or her pupils in the search for identity. The nature and extent of such collaboration is as yet undetermined, but the teacher might model the responsiveness, creativity and criticism of the mature enquirer.

The above recommendations were based on thinking about adolescence.

When expanded to account for concerns of creativity, criticism and hermeneutical learning, they now take this revised form:

- RE should develop pedagogies of active enquiry, which enable adolescents to develop qualities of responsibility and participation.



Methodologically, a balance should be sought between interaction with the teacher and interaction with peers.

- RE should develop hermeneutical pedagogies where pupils experience a dialogue with tradition. In such dialogue, the pupils' responses have equal status to material from religious traditions. A dialogue is an equal relationship.
- RE should also develop pedagogies of creativity, through which should be sought unique and significant learning outcomes: a classroom climate of recognition and mutuality is essential to this end.
- RE's distinctive content should be beliefs and values in the context of cultural plurality, and the social and geopolitical issues of justice which are reflected by those beliefs and values.
- RE should aim to assist pupils in a lifelong search for personal identity. Though there is consensus that the search may begin in adolescence, adolescence itself is a variable construct. This search for identity has childhood antecedents and includes aspirations for future adult life. Material from religious traditions should be used in the service of the search, and opened to interpretation, criticism and response. In this way, pupils may be helped to develop their own flexible and reasoned beliefs and values.
- The role of the RE teacher should be to collaborate with his or her pupils in the search for identity. The teacher's responsibility is to model the criticism, creativity and responsiveness of the mature enquirer.

Chapters 2 and 3 can be regarded as preparatory to the teaching element of the field study. The recommendations for professional practice in RE can be viewed as pedagogical principles: the associated pedagogical strategies have been initially sketched in the lesson plans, more detail of strategies following later, in the reports of the classroom-based field study (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). The next chapter, chapter 4, focuses on the element of research methodology. However, as we shall see, the research methodology echoes certain of the recommendations for RE practice shaped through chapters 2 and 3, because the concern for adolescent agency is also prominent in it.



## Chapter 4 Research Methodology

### Introduction

As we have seen, my reviews of adolescence (chapter 2) and creativity (chapter 3) resulted in recommendations for RE practice and in outlines of the first lessons to be taught during my field study. Chapters 2 and 3 have been concerned with preparation for the *teaching* element of the study. Yet as with my previous MA research (chapter 1), the PhD study was intended to be an exercise in simultaneously teaching RE to a class and researching their views of the lessons, especially in terms of the content and learning activities which motivated them most. I intended that my PhD research methodology would be an improved version of my MA research methodology. As was stated in chapter 1, although I found strategies from action research and ethnography to be very useful to my MA work, my theoretical understanding of these paradigms was in need of some development. Once the adolescence and creativity literature reviews were complete, and before embarking on the field study, it was therefore necessary to undertake further reading in the areas of action research and ethnography and to integrate this into the study's design. My research methods literature review coincided with my participation in the Warwick Institute of Education Advanced Research Methods course, and this chapter is based partly on an assignment submitted for the successful completion of that course. Over the chapter I set out to justify the methodologies chosen for the *research* element of my study, aiming in several ways for a recognisable and substantial development from my MA basis:

- I give a more sustained presentation of my commitment to action research.
- I locate my methodology in epistemological debates.
- I make links between research methodology and some of the ‘new’ material I considered in my first and second PhD literature reviews, for example the ideas of Freire and Gadamer (chapter 3).
- I offer more detailed consideration of issues of data analysis, data generalisability and research ethics.

The chapter’s sequence and argument are as follows. There is a discussion of the nature of action research, and why I adopt this term rather than teacher research or critical research. I then go on to say why ethnographic monitoring strategies are best suited to my particular action research framework, to describe the kinds of data that were gathered and how they were analysed. There follows a summary section where I show point-by-point how action research and ethnography were fit for the purposes of my field study. Next I discuss certain theoretical implications, specifically in relation to epistemological debates generated by positivistic views of qualitative research and post-modernist views of action research. I argue that an action research study contributes neither universal facts nor context-trapped anecdotes, but dynamic possibilities for change. This latter claim is the cue for my analysis of how data from a classroom-based action research study can be generalised by the teachers who read it. Finally, there is reflection on the ethically positive nature of my study, based in its *raison d’être*, young peoples’ empowerment (though as we will see, ‘empowerment’ is a contentious term in need of some discussion).



At the outset it is important to realise the presence of an iterative process between reading and writing, and teaching, monitoring and reflecting. This is the reason why care has been taken to explicate the study as a whole in terms of a background in my MA research. But on reflection, my choice of MA topic arose from events over fifteen years of teaching RE, brought to a small crisis by a change of school (see chapter 1). No doubt further regressions could be pinpointed. In an earlier article, I traced my assumptions as a teacher back through my undergraduate interests (O'Grady 1996, 8). The point is clear that iterative processes are biographical. What is less clear is whether the somewhat embodied character of the research counts as strength or weakness. As does Mac an Ghail (1991, 112) I argue it as strength, provided it is made transparent. In fairness to readers, the reasons for a study and the conditions under which its data are produced must be explained as fully as is possible. I hope the reasons why I undertook the study are by now apparent; the next two sections explain my commitments to action research and ethnography.

### **Critical research, teacher research, or action research?**

In this section I describe the action research framework of my study. In debating whether 'critical', 'teacher' or 'action' describes this framework best, certain significant nuances are brought out, but some contextual and logistical considerations should first be made. As was pointed out in the introduction to the thesis, the respondents were my tutor group in the school where I am Head of Religious Education and Citizenship, an 11-18 comprehensive in west Sheffield. The study began at the commencement of their year eight and was concluded part way

through their year nine. There were thirty-one members of the group. During year eight we met twice each day for registration, once each week for Personal and Social Education (PSE) and once each week for RE. However, the RE lesson was timetabled on a half term on, half term off basis. These arrangements changed for year nine, in that another teacher took over the PSE lesson and the on-off RE arrangement was discontinued (we now had one RE lesson a week, every week without interruption). Throughout the period of the study I had many other types of interaction with the pupils, ranging from informal chatter during lunchtimes to more serious conversations following exclusions from school. My very good access to and relationship with the group were very helpful factors: the study took place in an atmosphere of support and enjoyment, as can be detected in the pleasant, sometimes humorous tone of interview exchanges. But the RE lesson was a natural boundary defining the study's limits, the focus of the study and the source of all of its formal data. Another favourable condition was the 'natural boundedness' of the group itself (LeCompte and Preissle 1993, 61; but see also the discussion of Clifford 1997 in the section on ethnography, below). The group was a good representation of the diverse composition of the school, including a majority of 'white' pupils of different heritage backgrounds (e.g. British, Polish, Irish) together with Pakistani and Somali Muslims and other interesting heritage permutations (e.g. Jamaican-Pakistani, Chinese-Jewish).

The school's RE course was already guided by my MA work and to a lesser extent by my more recent reading on adolescence and creativity. My plan was that before



the group's first year eight RE topic, I would have sketched lesson plans to reflect the conclusions of my literature reviews, and three such plans are included towards the close of chapter 3 (above). During the topic I would collect data on the group's perceptions of it, especially the aspects they found motivating and creative. In an action research framework this data gathering serves to *monitor* the effect of interventions (see Elliott 1991, 84-86). In this section I am only concerned with the framework (the monitoring methods will be discussed in the next section). Having analysed the pupils' responses to the first topic, I would then plan the second to fit with their emergent preferences and interests. This practice makes use of Elliott's concept of the dynamic curriculum: '... always in the process of becoming ... developed in and through the pedagogical process' (Elliott 1991, 11). Rather than inducting the pupils into structures of knowledge, the teacher must be alert to pupil responses, modifying content and process in the light of these. In my study there would be a cumulative strengthening of practice, as succeeding topics were planned on the basis of increasing knowledge of pupil motivation. Parallel to this cumulative strengthening of practice would be a cumulative deepening of meaning, as data were gathered and analysed. I was prepared for the possibility that themes other than motivation would become prominent, but as the data were analysed it became clear that motivation should continue to be the main interpretive category: what emerged were differential factors of motivation (see chapters 5-8, below; see also Le Compte and Preissle 1993, 248-249, on 'thematic evolution'). Initially it was intended that six cycles of planning, teaching, monitoring and reflecting would take place, but following the completion of the first cycle, the number was cut to four, my

supervisor and I agreeing that a six-cycle study would have generated an unnecessarily large data set.

Questions over the embodied character of the research were noted above. There should be no doubt that my field study was carried out in a highly specific set of conditions. I am not a detached scholar and the school is not an ivory tower. Though rightly known as one of Sheffield's most successful comprehensives, its atmosphere can sometimes be raucous and my tutor group is known as a talented but volatile one. Teaching sometimes took place in 'difficult' circumstances and interviews were mostly recorded in a classroom during lunchtimes; we would have the classroom to ourselves but there would sometimes be unintended disruption from outside. I was pressured to manage the demands of the study whilst also attending to my considerable responsibilities as a school department head. My data are hard-won and, I hope, benefit from authenticity.

Yet further issues should be addressed regarding the embodied nature of the research. I have stated above that I sought a cumulative strengthening of practice as well as a cumulative deepening of meaning. To paraphrase James Clifford (1997, 66-68; see below) the field was constituted by my own movement in and out of it. My aim was to research the class's RE lessons but also, with the collaboration of the pupils, to transform those lessons. My own interest in the pupils, my enthusiasm for the project and for the subject of RE must certainly have been factors in our success and in the work that is reported in these pages, especially through chapters 5-8. This



point re-emerges with some clarity during chapter 5 when I report that a lesson for which I was absent (using text books to study the Hajj, or Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and other special places) was rated poorly by pupils.

For James, Black and McCormick (2003, 4) research done by teachers or ex-teachers has credibility within schools, but can suffer from a lack of methodological expertise, often relying on the small-scale study and giving scant attention to broader issues. I recognise very well that it is necessary to take on broader issues of epistemology, generalisability and ethics, and later in this chapter I do precisely that. However, in the meantime I retain my insistence that a positive quality of my study is its authorship by a practising teacher, and turn next to some consideration of the kinds of research that are practised in this way.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993, xiii) discuss the paradigmatic and ideological reasons why there are a variety of names for the kinds of research carried out by teachers in their own classrooms. These names include teacher research, critical research and action research. Undoubtedly I planned a form of teacher research in that I intended through my PhD study to develop as a teacher. With Lawrence Stenhouse I say that:

Teachers must be educated to develop their art, not to master it, for the claim to mastery merely signals the abandoning of aspiration. Teaching is not to be regarded as a static accomplishment like riding a bicycle or keeping a lodger:

it is, like all acts of high ambition, a strategy in the face of an impossible task. (Stenhouse 1983, 189)

However, also related to my reading of Stenhouse is my wish is to develop as a democrat and not just as a technician. I did not seek to improve narrow competencies in myself or in my pupils. Here I align myself again to Elliott's position. Elliott bemoans attempts to reduce action research to 'the teacher as functionary'. He finds that such reduction splits the self of the teacher between 'ideal' and 'self in school'. This split is unsurprising because external demands have stripped teachers of generative capacities. Because of it, pupils are once more disaffected and therefore teachers will again need to direct change (Elliott 1997, 26). I must explicate my political commitment - this is crucial to my own and others' interpretation of my work (LeCompte and Preissle 1996, 268) - and my commitment is to collaborate with and empower my pupils (O'Grady 2003, 223-4). 'Teacher research' thus fails to encapsulate important aspects of my commitment.

What, then of 'critical research'? Kincheloe delineates a 'critical social science' for the enhancement of teachers' self-understanding (1991, 2-3). Here, we must attend to the ways ideology shapes social relations. We must investigate and be ready to challenge the assumptions of power underlying our practice. We must determine our educational knowledge for ourselves, in concert with our pupils and their parents (cf. my discussion of *knowledge-creation* in chapter 3, above). Kincheloe's vision is inspiring and in many ways close to my aims, but neither does 'critical research'



fully encapsulate my commitment. Citing Habermas, Kincheloe argues that once self-reflection has taken place, corrective action can follow; but this seems static and linear by comparison to the iterative agendas I have described above, in which teacher biography, teacher planning, pupil responses and teacher reflection build cyclical layers of praxis.

‘Action research’ is the term most closely associated with iterativity. Indeed, in action research, iterativity denotes rigour and is a quality criterion. Altrichter describes how a problem is defined and action strategies for improvement are tried. While this ‘frame experiment’ takes place, the practitioner must be alert to its unforeseen consequences; the situation ‘talks back’ (Altrichter 1993, 44). Epistemological quality is achieved to the extent that reflection and action are interlinked:

The characteristic repetition and progression of action and reflection in several cycles of research which we dub ‘iterativity’ is the main source of ‘rigour’ in action research. (Altrichter 1993, 49)

Action research is also the term closest to my concerns with pupils’ systematic and democratic participation in their own learning. Noffke maps these concerns retrospectively through the American tradition of Dewey and Lewin. She argues that there was always a tension in this tradition between democracy and social engineering and that ‘this contradiction must be addressed by all proponents of

action research' (Noffke 1997, 13). This anticipates an important problem to which I will return later, when discussing action research and post-modernism.

Elliott (1997, 25) sets out the distinguishing features of action research. They are its 'transformative intentions', its aim to make practice more consistent with ideals, its problematising of tacit theories and testing of possibilities for educational change.

Citing Stenhouse, Elliott additionally suggests that humanities subjects should not be regarded as objective knowledge but as resources through which pupils develop their own understandings of life (Elliott 1997, 21). This echoes the recommendations for professional practice in RE that I set out above in the conclusions to chapters 2 and 3. Politically, methodologically and epistemologically speaking, my PhD study is in the tradition of action research. It might in any case be argued that my form of action research subsumes desirable aspects of teacher research and critical research. It is grounded in the daily experience of school; and it aims to alter power relations in the interests of young people by offering pedagogy shaped by their views.

Now that it has been established that action research is the most appropriate term for my research framework, this might be the best point at which to consider a recent and influential critique of action research. I have noted that James, Black and McCormick (2003) have misgivings about research undertaken by teachers or ex-teachers generally, but Hammersley (2004) makes an interesting philosophical case against action research specifically. To summarise Hammersley's case and my response to it will bring out further details of my action research position.



Hammersley states that the core feature of action research is intimacy between research and practical activity, so that inquiry feeds back into practice and vice versa; he says that this is closely associated with an instrumentalist view that research must serve practical goals if it is to be of value. He traces the history of action research up to the emergence of the democratic, qualitative approaches of Stenhouse and Elliott, in which it became an empowering force for teacher professionalism. He rejects a hierarchy rooted in ancient Greek thought where *theoria* is purer and more truthful than *praxis*, for reasons including the present large-scale involvement of science with technology. He accepts that action research is grounded in Deweyan pragmatism but he is unhappy with the idea that research must always be part of practice.

As he develops his argument, Hammersley asks whether action research is a form of action or a form of research. He says that although they are often claimed to be seamless, what happens in practice is an oscillation between the two.

. . . when teachers show children how to do calculations, or when they address the class about the topics to be covered in lessons, inquiry is not the activity in which they are engaged. Nor are the *goals* of teaching the same as those of inquiry. And the kind of inquiry that teachers engage in as part of their work is not the only sort of inquiry there is. (Hammersley 2004, 172; original italics)

Hammersley goes on to list ways in which action research may impede teaching (e.g. it may demonstrate teacher uncertainty to pupils, or it may take time away from other valuable tasks). Thus, attempts to combine activity with practice generate contradictory tendencies. This problem can be dealt with in two ways, he suggests; one can subordinate inquiry to practice, or one can erect boundaries protecting inquiry from the effects of practice. In terms of their strengths and weaknesses the two strategies are mirror images of one another. Where inquiry is subordinated, good practical information will be produced but wider theoretical and contextual factors may be missed. Where inquiry is isolated from practice, the opposite will happen. In general, action researchers subordinate inquiry to practice, but at the same time they want an equal relationship between the two; and because the goals of inquiry and practice are opposed, action research often does become contradictory.

Hammersley's is an incisive argument and should cause action researchers to reflect seriously. Yet he may show misunderstandings of the nature of action research, or at least use significant terms in misleading ways. The best example of this is his tendency to use 'research' or 'inquiry' to mean reflection, whereas in action research the whole cycle is viewed as research or inquiry and reflection is a phase of research or inquiry. Another difficulty arises with Hammersley's suggestion that oscillation between inquiry and practice is a weakness of action research; that unless their relations are seamless, we have a serious problem. In fact inquiry and practice do not have to be seamless but simply to inform one another. Action research is not a form of perfectionism and in my experience it has taken place in conditions whose



unpredictability and naturalness make for less than neat work. But this is not a drawback, provided that those conditions are made clear to the reader of the research report, who can then take account of them in his or her critique of the work.

Perhaps Hammersley's 'oscillation' also happens in conventional research: the scholar gives a paper to the conference, receives criticism, and redrafts the paper. The difference may be that in action research, the relationship between reflection and action is more immediate; reflection and action are closer in time, and the closeness between them is deliberately sought. It may be responded that some areas of research aim for no practical application, but are only directed to the clarification of intellectual issues, of ancient history for example. But it is untrue that reflection and action have necessarily *opposed* goals. Of course they can and should combine in pursuit of future improved practice and better understanding. This may be especially true of educational or other professional research. Because in an action research paradigm improved practice and better understanding are two sides of a coin, it is not really appropriate to speak of subordination of one to the other. As for inquiry undermining teaching, there seems no reason why the teaching cannot have the dual goals of educating the class in the present and also providing material for reflection later (it could be argued that this is what teachers naturally do, some more rigorously than others). If Hammersley is effectively arguing that the monitoring methods of action research should be unobtrusive, then I would say that this is achievable. Finally, because my experience has been that when pupils are involved in collaborative action research their motivation has increased, I do not worry about

Hammersley's warning against the demonstration of teacher uncertainty. In any case, it may not be fair to describe an action researcher as an uncertain teacher; he or she may feel quite certain that a climate where pupil voice is valued will be conducive to better pedagogy.

### **Ethnography**

Action research is less a method than a value system. For Altrichter (1993, 40), action research is not 'characterised by specific methods, but rather by integrating various methods in a methodologically consistent strategy', aiming to help members of a social situation to improve that situation. Those methods to be deployed are chosen by the researcher to fit the research context. We have seen that methods can be called 'monitoring strategies'. In my study, the monitoring strategies were derived from ethnography.

Stringer (1999, 49) conveys the purpose of ethnography as follows, 'to highlight the diversity and complexity of real life, where simplistic theories no longer apply'. In a similar way, Hornsby-Smith (1988, 1) introduces his ethnographic study of twelve lay Roman Catholics by describing dissonance between individual and official readings of the tradition. To give an account of a series of lessons as the pupils see it is a demanding task, but it was unavoidable given that I sought to uncover factors in their motivation or the lack of it. Moreover, there is a lack of such studies of RE classrooms (see O'Grady 2003, 216 and chapter 1 above). Following Jackson (1997, 44-6), I tried less to empathise with my respondents than to elucidate the concepts



and terms they used to interpret RE lessons and then to interpret those concepts and terms in relation to RE literature. This was a practice that had proved fruitful in my previous MA project (see O'Grady 2003, 219-21, on year eight pupils' use of the term 'fun' to describe engaging RE activities).

Together with this conceptual awareness, ethnographic methods also require especial sensitivity to issues of reflexivity. A fascinating article by Tumminia brings this out very clearly indeed. Tumminia studies a Californian group of alien contactees who quickly come to assume that the aliens have sent her to them. In analysing the sense-making of her respondents, she finds that she must give at least as much attention to her own interpretive categories and their cultural bases in social science (Tumminia 2002, 681-2); 'boundaries' between insider and outsider, researched and researcher thus become indistinct, because both sets of assumptions are under study (Tumminia 2002, 691-2). For Geertz, ethnographers' data 'are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (Geertz 2000, 9): that is, ethnographers' *own* 'background information' can be read in the concepts and words that are used to describe the worlds of those studied (Geertz 2000, 15-16).

James Clifford is known as an ethnographer espousing a radical, post-modernist view of reflexivity. Clifford emphasises the need to think historically, locating oneself in space and time. A location (say, a research field) is therefore 'an itinerary rather than a bounded site – a series of encounters and translations' (Clifford 1997,

11). All concepts are translation terms for specific audiences, so that ethnographic attempts inevitably are mixtures of failure and success. Clifford develops his critique of the concept of the field. It cannot be ontologically stable or given; it must be 'turned into a discrete social space, by embodied practices of interactive travel' (1997, 54). Perhaps, then, it is more difficult than first thought to draw fixed boundaries around my field; my field was my class's views of their RE lessons, but it could be said that their views are formed through all of the influences in their lives. Perhaps the lessons and the research activities are the 'embodied practices of interactive travel' that constitute the field. Clifford goes on to describe how the field is impossible to classify as just 'another place'; metaphors of dwelling ('rapport', 'initiation') should be replaced by metaphors of travel, because the researcher's movement in and out of the field is constitutive of the object of study (1997, 66-8). In an earlier work, during discussion of museums, artefact collections and surrealism, Clifford points to 'the paradoxical nature of ethnographic knowledge': the assumptions which make artefacts 'other' are not on display, but in subtle ways they are everywhere on display (1988, 245).

The above ethnographic considerations underline my study's needs for iterativity and thematic evolution, identified earlier whilst discussing action research: iterativity because there was a continual movement forwards and backwards from my own constructions of meaning to those of my respondents, and thematic evolution because the iterative process continually brought forth new or refined themes. In the action research section, my critique of Hammersley helped to position



my study in relevant debates; so will a critique of Davies' (1999) view of reflexive ethnography now position my study in debates over issues such as reflexivity and thematic evolution.

Davies presents many important issues to consider when attempting ethnographic writing. She first considers the radical reflexivity that reflects post-modern ethnography, where we are likely to find out just as much about our own assumptions as we do about those 'studied'; taken to its most radical this view is that we find out only about ourselves. Davies (1999, 9-12) believes that these points add up to 'a crisis of representation in ethnography'. I take a middle position here.

Undoubtedly my study reveals my teacher background and assumptions, and my general cultural predisposition and aims; I have tried to make these explicit to myself and to my readers. But I also hope to help adolescents to make their own meanings clear. I hope for a Gadamerian fusion of horizons, in which both my own and my respondents' meanings are explicated and expanded in a developmental way (see chapter 3). If the intrusion of my authorial voice results in work akin to fiction, so be it, but this does not mean that the work is just a product of my imagination. It aims to be a collaborative reconstruction of historical events, and of the meanings of those events for those who were there.

Secondly for Davies, 'ethnographic research must be capable of adding value to personal experiences and reports' (Davies 1999, 38). It can do so in two ways, by integrating these with theory, and by methodological validity as it accounts for the

production of its data. Davies discusses levels of theory and finds that middle-level theory is suited to ethnographic practice (1999, 31; cf. LeCompte and Preissle 1993, 142, where substantive theory is preferred). For Davies this seems to be because its potential for generalisation enables research questions to evolve in the field. Davies' remarks resonate with my own model of thematic and methodological evolution, where in an action research framework meaning is built cumulatively over successive cycles of investigation, and methods may if necessary be adapted to emergent conditions.

Thirdly Davies speaks of 'ethnographic interviewing' as a form of group interview in which the respondents are encouraged to interact with each other as well as the researcher (Davies 1999, 95 ff.). Best practice requires a conversational approach that allows interviewer and respondents to build up a shared store of terms and meanings (Davies 1999, 105). For this reason such an approach may best be combined with participant observation. All of this reflects my status amongst my respondents as a familiar and predictable figure. Besides our interviews, they had shared and did share many conversations with me. However, as I have already indicated, I made no attempts to use the general conversation between my pupils and myself as a data source. The study focused only on RE lessons. It should also be said that I could not generate field notes that had 'compelling polyphony' (see Davies 1999, 202-3). I was too busy teaching to record events in this way, and I usually had to record observations of lessons afterwards. This meant that my interview data took



centre stage. As will be seen in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, interviews were indeed often characterised by lively pupil-to-pupil interaction.

My comments on Davies summarise my position regarding ethnography. Now I move to a description of my use of ethnographic methods in the field. Three ethnographic monitoring strategies were used, participant observation, pupil diaries (replaced at an early stage of the study by questionnaires) and semi-structured group interviews. The strategies interwove with one another, but for clarity of presentation here I will discuss each one separately, building in comments on the nature of their triangulation.

It is difficult, even impossible, to demarcate participant observation from the simple fact of researcher presence in the field; it can ‘enmesh with’ and ‘check’ related activities such as interviewing, and can happen at unexpected times and places (LeCompte and Preissle 1993, 196-7). My situation was arguably clearer because I did not aim to record all of my various transactions with my group. Instead I wrote ‘analytic memos’ following each RE lesson I taught to the group, noting the sequence of events and apparent instances and degrees of pupil motivation. These notes built up over time to form a useful record of my own constructions of events in the classroom. In the presentation and analysis of data they are the first source to be summarised for each cycle, and they set the context for the words of the pupils by providing a preliminary picture of the lessons discussed (see chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). The notes were kept in a research diary together with a methodology-in-progress file

containing emergent issues of overall strategy (see Altrichter 1993, 42 on research-on-research). In these ways, the aims of participant observation were to record events, and to plot the development of my own concepts and categories regarding pupil motivation and regarding the progress and direction of the research as a whole.

Initially diaries were used to record the pupils' views of lessons and topics. I planned that towards the end of each topic the pupils would write responses to a short series of questions about which lessons and activities were more or less interesting and enjoyable, the most important things learned over the topic, and the kinds of work they would prefer and find most valuable in the next topic. It was always very clear that certain pupils needed help to write their ideas, and therefore that diaries might best be composed as a pair activity. As a positive early result of 'methodology-in-progress', the pupil diaries were changed to a shorter, sharper questionnaire sheet following reflection on cycle 1. By that time I had come to consider that interviews would form my richest data source – the pupils were far happier to discuss their views in groups together, rather than writing at length – and the questionnaires adopted for the other three cycles had the function of identifying the pupils' constructions in a preliminary way, so as to frame questions for more detailed investigation during the interviews. Therefore the diary or questionnaire data are presented and analysed following participant observation notes in each cycle, as a prelude to the more intensive material from the interviews (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). As can also be seen in chapters 6, 7 and 8, the questionnaires required pupils to mark lessons or tasks out of ten for their interest and enjoyment, and to



give brief reasons in support of their marks (in chapter 5, the diaries had employed a more complex marking scheme). I then calculated average marks in order to plot which activities had been most favourably received, and analysed the statements of reasons to bring out common themes together with any negative or discrepant examples (see LeCompte and Preissle 1993, 234-51). These data were themselves significant, but not as full as those gained through interviews, where more depth of discussion could be achieved. Perhaps the primary function of the diary and questionnaire data was to direct my attention towards good interview questions.

My initial intention was to use interviews slightly differently from their use in my MA study, with an increased emphasis on respondent validation. However, though the interview data certainly could be triangulated with those from other sources, they took on a much more than confirmatory significance because, as has already been said, they turned out to be particularly rich. A process reminiscent of that noticed by Julia Ipgrave (2002) could be discerned, where interview discussions became theological or philosophical dialogues that enhanced the confidence and understanding of the participants. Ipgrave placed her junior school respondents from the Christian, Hindu and Rastafarian traditions into a series of discussions of religious themes. The discussions not only revealed but also helped to create the children's religious understandings (Ipgrave 2002, 1). My interview data contain several examples of such hermeneutical dialogue between pupils (see chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, below; also O'Grady 2005b). In my methodology-in-progress file, I recorded anecdotal evidence that the pupils saw the interviews as continuous with

their RE lessons. On interview days they would ask ‘what time have we got RE?’ Interviews still served to link and to probe constructs evident in teacher and pupil reflections (see LeCompte and Preissle 1996, 247) and in this sense did validate material from participant observation notes and questionnaires. I was not uncritical regarding issues of respondent validation and the charge that the resulting data are additive not confirmatory. I found that the interview data expanded observation and questionnaire data and introduced an increased degree of complexity. But in any case, and as I argue in the section on epistemology (below), neither was I uncritical about the chances of establishing immutable facts. I saw respondent validation as a phase of praxis. There are wider issues concerning truth and lies in interview responses (see Sikes 2000). One possible advantage of an iterative action research framework is that respondents are conditioned by their own influence on the activities that are offered to them in future. They have a vested interest to reflect on and declare their felt preferences.

The interview data were analysed as follows. The interview questions reflected the broad categories of pupil motivation that had emerged through participant observation and diaries or questionnaires. Full transcriptions of the interviews were made and read repeatedly until the pupils’ responses could be placed into finer categories, and again any negative or discrepant cases were noted (again see LeCompte and Preissle 1993, 234-51). Once the finer categories of motivation had been established, their relationships were discussed: were any of the categories reducible to any others? Was it evident that some categories occupied positions of



central significance, others occupying peripheral positions? Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 contain four examples of such category identification and refinement, one for each of the study's cycles. Appendix 1 is a tabular representation of the process of category formation over the four cycles and the relationship between categories of different types.

### **Fitness for purpose**

The notion of fitness for purpose is tacit throughout the chapter so far. This brief section has a synoptic relation with foregoing discussions, summarising and making explicit the fitness of action research and ethnography for the purposes of my PhD study. This summary can be made in a list of key arguments:

- The aim of the study was to assess the impact of pedagogical interventions on pupil motivation over a four-term period. Formative feedback and praxis were vital elements. There was a close fit to emphases on iterativity in action research.
- The study was informed by a need to involve pupils more fully in decisions regarding their own education. There was a close fit to emphases on democracy in action research.
- The study was also informed by the belief that teachers and pupils can collaborate in the production of educational knowledge. There was a close fit to emphases on transformation in action research.

- Methodologically the study's main objective was to document pupil meanings in regard to motivation in RE. There was a close fit to emphases on conceptual interpretation in ethnography.
- Through the interpretation of pupil meanings I would necessarily attend to the development of my own conceptual categories. There was a close fit to emphases on reflexivity in ethnography.
- The emphases on iterativity and reflexivity were linked with a concern for triangulation in data collection and analysis. Participant observation, pupil diaries and interviews were envisaged as a series of interwoven checks and conversations. There was a close fit to emphases on the integration of appropriate methodological strategies in action research (although admittedly not confined to action research).

### **Action research, ethnography and epistemology**

In contrast to the preceding section this one has an analytic function, in that I evaluate some of the epistemological issues arising from my methodological choices. I am particularly interested in challenges posed by positivism and post-modernism and in pragmatic and Freirean responses to these challenges.

Gorard's positivist critique is of qualitative research generally, not action research or ethnography specifically; it is of researchers who do not begin from a quantitative viewpoint (Gorard 2003, 2). He would take issue with my designation of his critique as positivist. At times he argues for a methodological middle way between ignorance



of and rigid adherence to numeric results (e.g. 2003, 1). But perhaps he reveals his true stance by describing the experiment as an ideal template for perfection, where cause and effect are isolated (2003, 2). His sharpest words are reserved for those who do not rigorously engage with quantitative data ('dangerous and foolish'); he charges that they accept or reject findings on an ideological basis (2003, 2). For Gorard, the key difference between 'scientific' and 'other' kinds of social research is that the former can be accepted as true. The claim that social research need not be concerned with truth is a category mistake, usually involving a misguided appeal to relativism.

Gorard's position is a hard one to maintain both in relation to wider RE research and to my study specifically. In the first place, a critical reading of quantitative studies of English and Welsh RE can show how data are *generated* ideologically. In Kay's and Linnet-Smith's statistical study of school pupils' attitudes to religions, questions are framed narrowly to bring out the 'positive' impact of private prayer, and unfounded assumptions are made regarding 'poor thematic teaching' (Kay and Linnet-Smith 2002, 117-18). In a previous study by the same researchers, an arbitrary focus on school pupils' wrongful identification of religious terms is used to promote more systematic teaching of reduced content (Kay and Linnet-Smith 2000, 87-90).

Secondly, Gorard's ideal of the isolation of cause and effect is ill fitted to the purposes of my study or any studies intended for a teacher readership. My aim is to document my own classroom in the full awareness of its particular context, for the benefit of other teachers who are also seeking to motivate their pupils. Because of

teaching's situated nature there can be no recipes. However, I may be able to illustrate *possibilities for change*. My responsibility is to be transparent as to the conditions of their production, and if other teachers find these possibilities for change to be interesting, they may try to adapt them to their own practice. This is perhaps what Woods means by saying that teachers can identify personally with ethnographic investigations (1988, 101): an ethnography makes its context clear, addressing an historically situated site as is recognised by teachers in their transactions with particular groups under particular circumstances. In this respect Gorard is rather essentialist in his grasp of 'truth'. There exist alternative understandings, such as Giarelli's pragmatic notion of principled enquiry into intelligent conduct – a form of commitment rather than relativism (1988, 25). For Freire, it is vital that teachers (and indeed pupils) should not be passive receivers of official knowledge, but should participate in the production of their own knowledge (see Freire and Shor 1987, 7-8, on the 'gnosiological cycle'). The point that teachers cannot simply 'implement' others' findings is developed further in the section on data generalisability (below).

Moving as it were to the opposite pole of the debate, Stronach's and MacLure's (1997, 129) post-modernist objections to action research are on grounds of its alleged utopian nature and its privileging of the 'romantic self' who triumphs over contradictions, for example between values and practice. Ethnographers such as McLaren (1986) come in for the same criticisms, despite their attempts to accommodate to post-modernist insights (Stronach and MacLure 1997, 19). Arguing



the redundancy of 'modernist' concepts such as conscientisation, Stronach and MacLure (1997, 4; 1997, 85) present the case for a methodology of 'disappointment' and 'irredemption'. This case results in recommendations for pedagogy:

Teach kids a subversive anthropology of their rulers' fantasies of tradition and identity. (Stronach and MacLure 1997, 84)

The same case also leads to recommendations for the reporting of research:

Our goal must be to produce accounts which deny the reader the comfort of a shared ground with the author, foreground ambivalence and undermine the authority of their own assertions. (Stronach and MacLure 1997, 57)

Yet the latter research recommendation could be reduced to a statement of good qualitative practice (cf. LeCompte and Preissle 1993, 251 on discrepant-case selection). Alternatively, both recommendations could be deduced from the Freire and Shor passage cited above. Stronach and MacLure appear to have overstated their case; they themselves assert the mutually unbounded quality of post-modernist and structural discourses (Stronach and MacLure 1997, 19). Within action research literature we find no shortage of references to ambiguity. Noffke's point about the central contradiction in action research between democracy and social engineering has already been highlighted. Mayer talks of uncertainty and unpredictability, of the limits and disorders that appear as action researchers go deeper into problems (1997,

117); Goodson sees action research as a reflexive process between contradictory selves (1997). There seems to be no reason why those working within action research and ethnographic paradigms should not benefit from critical possibilities opened up by post-modernist thought. However, some writers committed to a broadly Freirean or emancipatory position adopt a more confrontational stance in relation to post-modernism. Siraj-Blatchford (1994, 49-50) points to the danger of deconstructing principles such as democracy and equality. As a result of their rejection of these allegedly metanarrical concepts, she posits, post-modernists must fail to identify with causes or generations. (A metanarrical concept is one that fits into a metanarrative, or grand explanatory scheme; for postmodernists such as Stronach and Maclure [1997], postmodern complexity makes such schemes redundant.) My case is clear - what is crucial is that the present generation of school pupils should be empowered - but I imagine that this will be an ongoing struggle, not a romantic utopia. I simply hope to indicate some possibilities of improvement to RE teaching, and as I have already said, my data are hard-won.

However, the concern of Goodson (1997) mentioned above - that an action researcher may have contradictory selves – could be pursued further. In the case of my field study, there could be discussion of the apparent limitation of my conducting every aspect of the investigation as a teacher and as an action researcher. It has already been argued that *contra* Hammersley (2004) an action researcher need not establish a seamless relation of teaching and investigation. Still, the question might be raised why co-researchers were not involved in – for example – interviewing my



pupils. In fact there are two answers to this question, one ethical, the other practical. It was felt to be of ethical benefit that interviews took place within the same familiar and professional climate as lessons, taught by myself (see the section on Research Ethics, below); but also, a co-researcher was simply not available (my project had no budget and I was not inclined to increase pressure on my teaching colleagues). During doctoral students' conferences at the university, however, I did take opportunities to share interview data with peers and tutors and was attentive to their interpretations.

### **Generalisability of data**

In my above criticisms of Gorard, I have already anticipated my position on the status of my study's data. However, the question of data generalisability is so important as to merit a section of its own (albeit relatively brief), because it is the test of the study's use to others: why should others study my findings, if these cannot be applied to their own situations? Of course this question conceals complexities, for, as I will show, it opens out into wider debates of teacher development, professionalism and accountability. In the above section on action research, I have alluded to Elliott's concerns over the contemporary reduction of teachers to functionaries. In this section, I draw more fully on his account of a crisis of teacher professionalism and I set my view of the wider applicability of my data in the context of that account.

Elliott's conception of the true teacher role is immanent throughout his authorship but it is articulated with particular clarity in the first two chapters of his 1988 book *The Curriculum Experiment*. Chapter 1 is autobiographical, describing how Elliott's action research stance was formed in his experiences as a secondary teacher, curriculum development project worker and academic: he crystallises his philosophy into the statement that teacher awareness of pupil voice is the only valid driver of curriculum development (Elliott 1988, 16). Chapter 2 brings out the consequences of this claim more fully, within a commentary on British curriculum reform since the Second World War. Here, Elliott's focus is epistemological. He is concerned with the representation of knowledge through the curriculum. He writes about two epistemological tendencies, those of the curriculum reform movement of the 1960s and beyond and those of the 1988 Education Reform Act and subsequent national curriculum. He argues that the two tendencies embody basically opposed views of educational knowledge. The curriculum reform movement saw knowledge as 'structures of ideas, principles and procedures which support creative and imaginative thinking about human experience' (Elliott 1988, 22). Such instrumental use of cultural artefacts reshaped the self-understanding of teachers, who were no longer transmitters of fixed information. This understanding is echoed in one of the conclusions to my MA study, that religious material should be placed in the service of pupils' self-awareness (O'Grady 2003, 221). I noted with great interest that during the 1960s, Elliott was a specialist RE teacher in the tradition of Harold Loukes (see Elliott 1998, 6): in chapter 1 of this thesis, I discussed Loukes' influence on my own MA work. Elliott (1998, 23) describes how for Stenhouse,



teachers should not be trained to serve curricula, but curricula shaped to serve teaching. Knowledge is continually reconstructed through joint teacher-pupil reflection on classroom learning. The classroom is a pedagogical laboratory, not an implementation site. In contrast, the objectives culture of the national curriculum is a 'blindfold' obscuring the true nature of knowledge. When represented by preset objectives, concepts are treated as unambiguous and not open to interpretation. Learning becomes an individualistic attempt to meet targets and ceases to be a shared discursive enquiry. The objectives culture is an exercise in social engineering. It is distrustful of creativity or dissent (Elliott 1998, 26-33).

Elliott calls for the recovery of Stenhouse's vision, as a counter measure to the reduction of teachers to implementers of the objectives culture. Through the practice of collaborative action research, teachers should identify best pedagogical principles and aims. These principles and aims should constitute objects of reflection, but not learning objectives. They should be sufficiently deep to provoke reflection on the meaning of education, but sufficiently broad to give responsibility to teachers and to pupils. Thus, Stenhouse's principles included the teaching of controversial issues and the teacher's responsibility to maintain high critical standards of discussion. His aims included helping pupils to listen to one another and to express their own views (Elliott 1998, 37-8). Elliott (1998, 39) reports how during the Humanities Curriculum Project, teachers had difficulty in achieving good pupil participation in discussions. Rather than prescribing a solution, Stenhouse and he asked the teachers to experiment with and evaluate different action strategies, for example asking

pupils whether they disagreed with ideas instead of asking them whether they agreed.

Later in *The Curriculum Experiment*, Elliott takes issue with 'school effectiveness' research. Such work is characterised by broad 'managerial' formulas for the establishment of effective learning environments within schools, e.g. 'professional leadership' and 'shared vision and goals' (Sammons *et al* 1995 quoted in Elliott 1998, 83-84). Elliott finds this platitudinous. 'School effectiveness' research is a control ideology aimed at orderliness and mechanical efficiency. It neglects vital issues of pedagogy, vital because the complex personal transactions between teacher and pupil are the real source of educational quality. A school may be effective without being good, that is, without causing positive social change. And in any case, teachers will resist attempts to change their practices that seem to be inconsistent with their beliefs or experiences. The starting point for change is teachers' understanding of their work in classrooms, not systemic adjustment. Elsewhere it has been shown how multifaceted and contextual are teachers' understandings of their work in classrooms, affected by teachers' individual professional histories and experiences as school-age pupils themselves (Goodson 2000, 18-19).

It is possible that Elliott is too categorical in his presentation of a good point. It is not as if we have to have *either* managerial effectiveness *or* grass roots action. I would be perfectly happy to support the development of effective overall systems whilst simultaneously investigating my practice at the micro-level, especially if such



systems were aimed at enhancing my autonomy. Elliott (1998, ch.5) is dismissive of school effectiveness research but sees similarities between action research and school improvement research, because both value teacher autonomy. Perhaps 'improvement' suggests a more fluid and developmental paradigm than the more static-sounding 'effectiveness'. Certainly examples can be found of school improvement writing which accord with Elliott's collaborative enquiry model whilst striking the balance between micro and macro elements:

Our approach to school improvement involves moving away from relatively isolated, highly targeted innovations intended to solve specific educational problems, and toward a fluid, continuous enquiry to make education better on a day to day basis. The aspiration is to make all schools into learning communities for teachers as well as pupils, making use of the best models of learning for both. To achieve this vision requires significant changes in organisation, some structural and some procedural. (Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins 1999, 9)

Where I fully accept Elliott's analysis is at the point where managerial effectiveness becomes stultifying conformity and where attempts at change take little or no account of my voice (cf. Hargreaves 1994, 248-51 on the need to balance institutional vision with individual voice). I can report anecdotally from a teaching career in five different schools how teachers become alienated, disaffected and subversive as a response to over-management. My anecdote is echoed in the research literature. In a report of his study of science teachers and social and

professional change, J. Myron Atkin (2000) shows how doomed are managers' or administrators' attempts to change teaching that fail to address teachers' self-understanding or teachers' own view of their subject. Christopher Day (2000, 126) reflects on his study of the impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act on teachers in England and urges that in the future, teachers' autonomy and opinions should be better respected by external agencies of educational change. In epistemological terms it can be argued that planning for change in schools should not be reduced to the attempt to identify straightforward cause and effect relationships. Alma Harris (2002, 20) summarises a wealth of school improvement findings and notes that for positive change to be achieved there must be an organic approach, recognising the complexity of the school, challenging the view that power resides at the 'top' and resisting the idea that there is one way to succeed.

There is a clear parallel between Elliott's classroom pedagogy and his teacher development model. In the classroom pupils should not be subject to fixed objectives but should use cultural material actively to help shape their own meanings. This seems to me highly confirmatory of my findings regarding adolescence and creativity (see chapters 2 and 3 above). When working alongside teachers to seek improvements to their practice we should not attempt to offer authoritative solutions to problems, but can collaborate on the identification and testing of possible interventions. There is no problem with drawing on what has been successful elsewhere, but we must respect the responsibility and creativity of the teacher and the particular circumstances of the class. What has been successful



elsewhere suggests what I call a possibility for change, to be offered to the teacher for testing and refinement, through practice and reflection. As Julia Ipgrave puts it:

Progress in education ideally works through trial and evaluation. Practices tried and evaluated as successful in one setting are promoted in other settings, tried and evaluated there. They do not always transfer well from one school to another; a variety of factors, circumstantial and human, affect outcomes and successful pilots do not ensure the unqualified success of a general implementation of the same scheme. Nevertheless something that works well in one setting is worth trying in another . . . though, any conclusions on the generalisability of this pedagogical method would have to wait on the results of its implementation elsewhere. (Ipgrave 2002, 65)

My own notion of a possibility for change is also reminiscent of Gadamer's model of understanding (chapter 3) in which ideas from the past are stimuli to future creativity. A possibility for change is based on the recognition that different teaching situations are comparable. My situation is not remote from that of other RE teachers. But because of the situated nature of our work, we cannot assume the total presence or absence of common factors. The phrase possibility for change has the right balance and is meant to suggest that whilst I have the responsibility to report my study as clearly as I can, those teachers who read it have the responsibility to test out its recommendations in their own ways and in their own situations. In the introduction to the thesis, I have lamented the shortage of classroom-based studies of

RE pedagogy. Should my study provoke others to develop or challenge its findings in studies of their own, the consequent literature might be very helpful to the profession. This would be the best way to generalise my data, to subject them to further scrutiny and refinement in related studies, rather than – say – to try to place my findings in a large-scale quantitative survey. Influenced by the discussion of ethnography (above), I believe that my data depend for their value on their depth and authenticity. They are products of a particular teaching context. Yet they could be useful starting points for the investigation of other teaching contexts, or reference points for the analysis of data resulting from investigations of other teaching contexts.

My preference for freedom from fixed objectives and conclusions echoes the avoidance of teleology that we find in Gadamer and Freire (see chapter 3). I too believe that we must make intelligent use of ideas from the past, but that we should do so in order to respond to changing situations. As teachers and pupils we are involved in a lifelong search for identity (see the discussion of Meijer in chapter 2). It follows that teaching is not sharply distinguished from learning. It is interesting that although Hallam and Ireson introduce their survey of pedagogy in the secondary school by strongly demarcating teaching from learning, by the end of the piece they must concede that teachers will have to become learners after all: they conclude by stating that in the future, teachers will have to become more reflective, needing to analyse practice more fully in terms of the complex nature of contextual and individual pupil demands (Hallam and Ireson 1999, 88). Similarly Watkins and



Mortimore find that as research into pedagogy has developed, its models have had to become more complex. Over the twentieth century, a discourse of authoritarian and permissive teacher style differences was gradually undermined by a recognition that several factors combine to shape pedagogy. These include teacher; local, school and classroom settings; academic content, and teacher and pupil views on the nature of learning (Watkins and Mortimore 1999, 3-8).

### **Research ethics**

Just as my views on data generalisability were implicit in earlier sections, so the ethical grounds of my study underpin much of what I have already said. The correct ethical conventions of research were followed throughout the project. The plan was carefully explained to my pupils, months in advance of its commencement; all participated on a free and voluntary basis. I wrote to their parents explaining my intentions and all were happy to support the work. My colleagues in school were aware of the research and several provided support in various ways and at various times. The headteacher and senior managers of the school were happy that my PhD contributed to my professional development and basically allowed me to get along with it. Confidentiality has been observed in the presentation of key findings, with pupils identified by initials or similar codes. The school's name has been left out of this thesis. There has been no difficulty over beginning research relationships, or establishing closure over these at the project's conclusion. Since the completion of data collection I have simply remained the class's teacher.

However, in my own estimation, the ethical strengths of the project are much more than the correct observance of conventions. My remarks in the data generalisability section demonstrate that my research is based on respect for the autonomy of my colleagues in the teaching profession and on the aim to contribute to our collective work on behalf of young people. Because teachers' work serves the interests of young people, it is those interests that are covered in this thesis. From the outset I have set out my aims to shape practice on pupils' voices and to include pupils as collaborative partners in their own education. Chapter 2 represents my attempt to account for their needs as adolescents and chapter 3 was prompted by my recognition of their developmental needs for creativity. In this chapter I have described how research methods were chosen to elucidate, to record and to analyse the pupils' responses in the most appropriate ways. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 place their actual words centre stage. In describing my intentions on behalf of my pupils, I have several times used the word *empowerment* but as we will now see, the idea of empowerment of pupils by a teacher or researcher is a contentious one.

In my deliberations over empowerment I am again indebted to the analysis of Ipgrave (2002). Her own PhD study does not fit within a partisan framework, nor is it her intention to empower the children who are her respondents. Because of the complexity of power relations, she argues, it is impossible to determine where power lies (Ipgrave 2002, 22). Children can have agency over their context despite their apparently subordinate status. Moreover, if the researcher sets out to empower the respondents, a certain degree of condescension is inevitable. Instead Ipgrave aims to



‘gain knowledge of the children’s understanding and to pass that knowledge on’ (Ipgrave 2002, 24). However, Ipgrave does underline the need for the research process to be enjoyable and valuable to her respondents, and an opportunity for them to exercise some power over their social setting. She again stresses that in the research process, they exercised agency, selecting and adapting their own meanings (Ipgrave 2002, 25).

Ipgrave’s remarks on the complexity of power relations, on the need for respondents to enjoy participation in research and on the use to other practitioners of knowledge of children’s understanding are not problematic. But a basic difference between my study and that of Ipgrave, namely my reliance on an action research framework, is significant. In my study my respondents’ words were interpreted in order to determine the course of their RE lessons, to a considerable degree. As far as I know, this is an unusual arrangement. Thus, it can be argued that my pupils were given a responsibility which is usually denied to school age pupils of RE. There is also a sense in which they assumed that responsibility on behalf of other pupils, whose teachers (including myself) may be influenced by the content of this thesis. Whether they believe that the research process has involved condescension on my part would be an interesting matter for another researcher to take up with them, but I am not aware of it.

Burgess (1984, 194-208) provides a useful analysis of the areas of ethical concern that should be considered by field researchers. My consideration of the *power*

*relations* involved in my project has already been discussed, over the preceding paragraphs. The notion of *privacy invasion* is relatively unproblematic, as the eliciting of the pupils' views on RE and related matters resembled the processes of RE lessons and took place within the same professional climate. In relation to *ethnicity and representation*, Woodward (1993) insists that minority groups should not be exoticised through too strong a focus on the particularity of their beliefs or practices; I hope that my ethnographic interviews have avoided stereotypes or reifications by placing the voices of my Muslim pupils alongside those of others, enabling comparison or contrast across cultural or religious 'boundaries'. Regarding the *open or closed nature of the research*, my intention throughout was to discuss the aims and nature of the study very fully with the pupils. As far as I am aware, they were accepting of the notion that their reports of RE lessons might help me to plan more interesting and enjoyable ones in the future and that I was combining my post in school with work as a research student (through family members, several of the pupils knew what a research student was). In relation to *publication and possible consequences for respondents*, I tried as far as possible to explain that I hoped that the study would prove useful to other RE teachers and that publications might therefore result from it. Again, as far as I know the pupils understood this situation and accepted it. When Burgess (1984, 207) quotes Bronfenbrenner to the effect that researchers only avoid ethical violations by refraining from research altogether, I wonder how far this applies to my study, if at all.



## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented an action research framework including ethnographic monitoring strategies as fit for the purposes of my field study. Aligned with the notion of fitness for purpose were considerations of iterativity, democracy, transformation, conceptual interpretation, reflexivity and the integration of methodologically consistent strategies. The chapter has also established my study's epistemological position. This could be read as a middle ground somewhere between positivistic certainty and post-modernist scepticism. I have rejected Gorard's ideal of the isolation of cause and effect on the grounds that where pedagogical practice is concerned, it is philosophically unsound and professionally misplaced. At the same time, I have resisted the attempts of Stronach and MacLure to overthrow ideals such as conscientisation, on the grounds that social ideals inspire educational struggles for justice, even in contradictory times. In these ways, I have described the epistemological status of my data as illustrations of possibilities for change. I have used Elliott's account of teacher professionalism and accountability to address my concept of possibilities for change to matters concerning the generalisability of my data: my data provide the basis for action hypotheses for future testing and refinement, whether by myself or others. In relation to research ethics, I have focused on consideration of pupil empowerment, partially rejecting Ipgrave's arguments against the term on the grounds that my action research study demonstrably gave power to my pupils; and I have used Burgess' analysis of areas of ethical concern to highlight my study's generally positive ethical quality. Over the next four chapters, where the key findings from my study are presented, I show how

my methodological, epistemological and ethical principles were applied over four cycles of planning, teaching, reflecting on and analysing RE.



## **Chapter 5 Key Findings Cycle 1: Islam, Peace and Surrender**

### **Introduction**

Over the next four chapters, I present the key findings from my classroom-based research. Whereas chapters 2, 3 and 4 trace the evolution of themes through the analysis of theory, chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 show how themes were developed through cycles of praxis. There were four cycles of action research, each one corresponding to a topic of RE:

- Cycle 1: Islam, Peace and Surrender (chapter 5).
- Cycle 2: Interfaith Relations, Peace and Reconciliation (chapter 6).
- Cycle 3: Inspiration: Hajj and Passover (chapter 7).
- Cycle 4: Hinduism and Creation (chapter 8).

As has been noted already, the period of empirical research as a whole began at the commencement of the class's year 8 and was concluded after one term of their year 9. Thus, cycles 1, 2 and 3 represent their three year 8 topics and cycle 4 represents their first term's work of year 9. During the class's year 8, RE was timetabled on a half-term on, half-term off arrangement, and therefore the first three topics were of relatively short duration. By the start of their year 9, this timetable arrangement had been discontinued and the class had a weekly RE lesson on an uninterrupted basis, resulting in a longer fourth topic.

The teaching content was consistent with the school's schemes of work for RE, based on the locally agreed syllabus. However, the point of praxis was to shape the lessons to pupils' emergent interests and preferences, and so to boost their

motivation, channelling the research in the right directions. In this way, the schemes of work continued to give guidelines, but the cumulatively built research data were also applied to the devising of tasks for the classroom. This process was different for cycle 1 compared to the other three cycles; cycle 1, as the first cycle, was not shaped by previous cycles but by the theoretical indications reported in chapters 2, 3 and 4. Of course the theoretical content of chapters 2, 3 and 4 influenced the conduct of the field study as a whole, but cycle 1 was not directly informed by previous empirical work in the same study. Cycle 1 also functioned as a proving ground for the study's methodology, which was consequently slightly adapted for the next three cycles: by the close of cycle 1 it was clear that interview data were the richest source of meaning, repaying the most exhaustive analysis. Therefore it was decided to narrow the uses of participant observation notes and pupil diaries in future cycles. Participant observation notes became a briefer record of my own lesson-by-lesson constructions, helpful in recalling the contexts and flow of events; pupil diaries became shorter and simpler questionnaires, used mostly to construct interview questions.

### **Cycle 1: Islam, Peace and Surrender**

As I have mentioned above, the first topic of the study was planned more by theory, and on the basis of my previous MA research, than as an outcome of teaching and reflection. It was a six-lesson study of Islam, whose content was drawn from a school scheme of work and whose learning tasks were shaped especially by the discussion of Gadamer (e.g. 1975) in the latter part of chapter 3 (where three of those tasks were earlier sketched). As was anticipated in chapter



4, there were two phases of category formation in the presentation and analysis of the data. In the first, through participant observation and pupil diaries, there was a process of identifying broad themes and questions. In the second, through interviews, there was a process of investigating those themes and questions and so revealing the finer detail of pupils' constructions. Once finer categories were identified, their relationships were discussed: I tried to see whether or not the categories were mutually exclusive and whether they had central or satellite significance (see below, p.165). To illustrate the developmental nature of category formation, I will show the application of each method in chronological sequence. Then later, I will analyse which categories were central and which satellite, in terms of the pupils' motivation. I will also show how these categories framed questions for cycle 2. Finally, the emergent categories will be considered in relation to certain themes from my earlier discussions of adolescence and creativity, in order to show how the field study data from cycle 1 help to build the cumulative argument of the thesis as a whole.

### **Participant Observation**

I wrote detailed notes following each of the six lessons, trying to reconstruct events and my impressions of which factors had motivated the pupils. Here, I refer to those notes in providing a résumé of the teaching and learning activities, and a brief summary of my initial constructs regarding the pupils' motivation.

The first lesson, which began the topic on Islam, was an introduction to the life of Muhammad, following the outline given towards the end of chapter 3. I explained the topic and lesson aims and reminded pupils that our study was now to begin. The pupils took turns to read aloud parts of the story from a text-book

(Keene 1996). Then they were tasked in groups to imagine that they could interview Muhammad about his life and to list the questions they would ask. The lists were read aloud and then the whole class discussed those identified as 'best'. The pupils' personal views on the emergent issues were included in the discussion. For example, on the question of how it felt to be rejected and forced from Mecca, a pupil compared this to his own experience of having to leave USA as a small child, saying goodbye to many friends. One group had turned the activity into a drama sketch. I suggested that they interviewed an expert on Islam, not Muhammad himself, and briefly explained why. (The reason is that direct representation of Muhammad is forbidden in Islam, because of the seriousness of the injunction against idolatry and the strong stress on the oneness of Allah [see e.g. Smart 1977, 187]). A mature, thoughtful 'TV chat show' was presented. Afterwards I asked the class why Muslim people would not represent Muhammad. Several pupils already showed a good grasp of Islamic perspectives on idolatry and it was an excellent cue for next week's lesson on the belief in Allah's oneness. For homework the pupils were asked to find out more about the life of Muhammad.

At the beginning of the second lesson we made a review of what had previously been learned about Muhammad. Several pupils had done effective follow-up research that seemed to fasten their grasp on the material. I then introduced some Qur'anic verses on tawhid:

Your God is One God; there is no god but He. (Arberry [trans.]) 20-1)



## God

There is no God but He, the Living, the Everlasting. (Arberry [trans.]) 37)

Discussion between myself and the pupils then established that the verses related to the very important one God idea in Islam. We speculated on the meanings of the words, and pupils made suggestions including God is unique, and alone (one pupil commented on the similarity between ‘alone’ and ‘all one’). The pupils were then asked to plan art pieces that expressed the meanings of these verses and perhaps to relate the words to their own personal circumstances. I explained three art ideas, asking for suggestions about how each might be done:

- Make a composition to express the meaning of the Qur’anic words: remember from last week, no pictures of people or animals. Pupils suggested that this could be done in an abstract style, using patterns like those in the Islamic art we had on display in the classroom.
- Make a composition showing what the idea of oneness means to you personally. Several pupils suggested that the focus could be on what quiet and solitary time means to you – but one pupil objected that oneness means closeness to others rather than time alone, so I suggested that that was an equally good theme and that oneness could be understood in different ways.
- Make a composition on the theme of ‘I am unique’. Ideas included a map of the self, made by surrounding an image of one’s own body with images of one’s own unique personal traits and characteristics – or a composition showing a crowd and how one would ‘stand out in it’.

The pupils then got down to planning their compositions and they worked busily. Many interesting ideas were under development, not all of which had been mentioned in suggestions above – e.g. a ‘jigsaw’ of the self showing how all the parts added up to a whole (Drawing [a], Appendix 2). As a plenary, some first drafts and incomplete plans were held up and described. It was notable that the pupils could move with ease from an Islamic concept to a related question about their personal selves.

I should make some brief discussion of the fact that I describe but only append pupils’ drawings. There has been no principled decision to omit pupils’ art. It is rather that I am aware that the interpretation of young people’s art is a rich field (Dove, Everett and Preece 1999; Falchrov 1990; Rennie and Jarvis 1995):

because of a concern that an enquiry into the ‘how’ of visual interpretation might take up much space, the decision was to focus more on pupils’ words, principally through interview data analysis.

The third lesson began with a sharing in discussion of some art work in progress. We also discussed ideas for improving the work in the second draft – e.g. self-assessing the first draft and noting targets for improvement to the second. The pupils then had most of the time to work on their final drafts. At the end only four pieces of work were complete so most pupils had to take theirs home to complete for next time. I held up and described one finished piece (whose author was too shy to speak on this occasion) and read aloud his explanation, written on the back of the paper. It was a pencil sketch of a single flower with concentric layers of shadow and light around – carefully and sensitively done, with



excellent 'explanation' ideas – the seasonal cycle of flowering is eternal and the concentric layers would also spread out forever (Drawing [b], Appendix 2). This pupil had attempted a straight expression of the Qur'anic verses. He had moved less into the personal realm and more into philosophical thoughts about time and the world.

To begin lesson four I explained that we would investigate zakat and the Islamic principle of looking after the poor. I asked the pupils to do some reading about zakat from a variety of text - books (e.g. Keene 1996, Aylett and O'Donnell 2000) and to note some questions they would like to ask about it. Following the reading they called out their questions for me to list on the board:

- Why should you pay zakat?
- What is it for?
- What is it a test of?
- How will it help?
- How can giving money bring happiness?
- How can you tell if someone is rich enough to give or poor enough to receive?

Then the class were instructed to form groups, to pick one of the questions and to build a story around it, to act out in drama later. Boisterous, lively planning ensued. The class were fully engaged in their rehearsals for about half an hour. Then we looked at a first run of one sketch. In it, 'Yasmin' had a dream that because of her refusal to pay zakat she would go to hell. Allah visited Yasmin in

her dream. As a result of Allah's visit she changed her mind and paid her zakat the next day. The dream sequence was very imaginative and evocative. The class then discussed the play. They raised questions including: what about the rule against picturing Allah? Do Muslims believe that you only see Allah when you die? Is Yasmin's a selfish reason for paying? In response one of the class's Muslim pupils said that some people pay zakat in order to see how poor people feel to have less. This was the first time my class heard a Muslim member describing Islamic principles and their listening seemed especially attentive.

In lesson five we watched and discussed the remaining drama pieces. One play stood out particularly well. Here, a character who was arrogant and mean when asked to contribute to the poor was taken and 'shown' what it would be like to miss out on various goods, e.g. shoes, through a series of brief plays-within-a-play. The moral education was strong: once poverty is experienced from the point of view of the poor, the immorality of allowing others to do without is undeniable. Again, what was shown was how Islam could be a jumping-off point for pupils to investigate and express moral ideas of their own, and how drama could give a methodology for this; the pupils could imagine and speculate freely, but they also had to maintain the disciplines of coherent storytelling and group collaboration.

Lesson six was planned to build on the work on zakat and to extend the focus on values. I wanted the pupils to ask, what are our most important personal values? How might somebody answer that question from an Islamic perspective? How do Islamic values compare to those of the members of our class, or help us to



understand our own values? I introduced the lesson by talking over these issues and saying that I hoped for an opportunity for Muslims and non-Muslims alike to improve their understanding of Islam and of themselves. We had just left an assembly where the head of year had issued a collective telling-off because someone had thrown a lit firework off a bus, hitting a moving car and nearly causing an accident. I reflected on the assembly and asked the class to think of their own most important personal values (explaining values as ‘beliefs about what is important in life’). I wrote ‘safety is very important, because human life is precious’ and asked for more suggestions. Suggestions came and were noted on the board:

- Money is vital for a good life.
- Love is also vital.
- You should live life to the full.
- You should work for your own satisfaction, nobody else’s.
- You should cultivate friendship wherever possible.
- Family members are very precious.
- Make love, not war!

We then moved on to a video about Islam and prayer (British Broadcasting Corporation 2000a), chosen because it gives a good clear statement of values in Islam. The pupils were asked to look for points of contact between their own values, noted on the board, and the content of the video. After watching the video we discussed these. Firstly I asked what, according to the video, important values in Islam were. Pupils offered these responses:

- Prayer is very important.
- Remembrance of Allah is the most important value.
- Your own humility is very important.
- Allah's greatness must always be recognised.

There was lastly a plenary discussion where contrasts were made between the pupils' values and those Islamic values covered by the video. Several pupils offered considerations including 'the Muslim points are much less selfish than ours' and 'there is more about Allah and humility and less about oneself'. One pupil asked 'are we just really greedy and Muslims really kind?' I probed the pupils' impressions. Were these contrasts really true? Further pupils now joined the discussion to offer the following points. Good personal values are important regardless of religion. Other religions do the same thing but in a different way. For example, Christians have different ways of showing unselfishness – it just depends how you are brought up to do it.

The pupils' motivation seemed to be high throughout. They were very keen indeed to participate and to interact. The lessons were lively but it was rare for individuals or groups to stray from tasks. My observation notes connected phases of particularly strong pupil engagement to certain educational factors.

Opportunities to use drama to develop ideas were seized on with zeal. Drama performances stimulated thoughtful discussion. Pupils enjoyed moves from an Islamic concept to a related personal or philosophical question. Religious concepts provoked a process of translation, as the pupils grappled with the meaning of the concepts in relation to their own spiritual or moral thoughts.



Direct dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims created an atmosphere of interest and attention.

### **Pupil Diaries**

A week after the topic had finished I asked the pupils to complete a diary sheet. I had produced the sheet as a form to fill in and I realised later that in fact it was a questionnaire, or structured interview schedule. I asked the pupils to do this as a pair activity. Sixteen sheets were filled in, mostly fully; one pair of pupils could not agree on their answers so they each filled in their own individual form. For each of the four tasks in the Islam topic they had to give a mark out of ten for interest and enjoyment, helping us to create ideas of our own and helping us to think about what we believe ourselves. To begin my analysis I calculated class average marks out of 30 for each task (that is, the different criteria were not factored in):

- Learning the story of Muhammad and thinking of questions to ask about it: 16.
- Art on tawhid: 22.
- Drama on zakat: 22.
- Video on prayer in Islam and discussion on values in Islam and values of our own: 16.

The pupils were also asked to specify what kinds of work they would like to do more of in the future. All asked for more drama, five pairs for more art, five for more videos, one for stories, one for dance, two to make a magazine, one for

discussions, one to make a board game, one to learn about Buddhism and Sikhism. In relation to each specific activity of the Islam topic pupils also provided various reasons for the marks they had awarded. Each activity attracted a mixture of positive and negative comment.

In relation to learning the story of Muhammad and thinking of questions to ask about it, pupils welcomed the chance to gain new knowledge or ideas. They suggested that asking questions of their own boosts confidence. Some reported an increase in their interpretive skill and self-knowledge:

It was good to learn about another religious story. It made us recall our own religious story.

You weren't being told the information all at once. We were allowed to ask things we wanted to know and we could ask things that were interesting.

But on the negative side, the task was seen as not active enough, or that it was about Islam, not the pupils themselves.

Reflecting on the art task about tawhid, pupils were glad that their own ideas had been valued, and they appreciated its freedom and creativity. For some it was seen as deep work. On the negative side, some found the task confusing, others found it limiting and lacking in opportunity.



The drama on zakat was enjoyed as fun, and as a chance to empathise with the poor and to think about one's own responses. Some pupils saw the task as easy, and as a good vehicle for self-expression. On the negative side, only two comments were made, which are difficult to build into a theme: 'One of us hates drama and the other thinks that its OK.' 'We wernt given enuf info on the name of hell or heven just not enuf info.' In the case of the latter comment, their piece had speculated on the post-mortem effects of refusal to pay zakat.

Regarding the video on prayer in Islam and the discussion of values in Islam and personal values, pupils spoke of a development of self-awareness as well as knowledge of Islam. On the negative side, others reported that the lesson was passive and difficult to relate to your own self; that it was remote, and overly long.

In summary, I felt that the diaries offered three main points:

- In relation to drama and motivation, I had discovered nothing substantially different from my MA research. The pupils like to be active, collaborating with each other, exploring their own ideas, and not reduced to passive or descriptive work. For these reasons, (almost) all like drama tasks.
- When the pupils like more 'sedentary' activities (e.g. videos, discussion of stories) it is because of the chance to explore the self or their own ideas.
- After all, they could be motivated in history lessons by the enjoyable nature of drama work. It might be interesting next to investigate the

relationship between encounter with religious concepts and self-exploration more fully than before. This would still be within the context of motivation in RE, because the chance to investigate the self is evidently a factor of motivation.

## **Interviews**

The interviews were carried out in the weeks following the topic's close. The pupils were interviewed in groups of between four and six. Twenty-nine out of the thirty-one pupils in the class were interviewed. The questions to ask, or more accurately the issues to discuss, were taken from the summary points of the pupil diaries:

- Why is drama enjoyable?
- Is it true that quieter activities are good because they give you the chance to think about yourself?
- What is the relationship between thinking about religious concepts, and thinking about your own self?

These questions reflect the broad categories of cycle 1 data and the interview data are presented accordingly, one question or category at a time. The fine categories then emerge as the pupils' responses are analysed.

Firstly I asked the pupils about the engaging nature of drama activities. There were a great many responses celebrating the experience of drama work in terms of pure enjoyment, including the following examples:



RS: They're fun, because you get to do stuff, instead of sitting down writing, which I don't like, because it's boring.

JB: They're fun, because it's not as boring as writing, or sitting copying off the board or answering questions.

GW: It's more fun and it's better than writing.

AS: I think it's good because everyone gets to do something. Everyone gets to have a go and it's more fun. It's better than writing.

Other explanations of drama's popularity reflected an appreciation of what can be called interactive learning - that is, the developing of ideas in concert with others:

OH: It's nice because you get to work with your friends and things, and get to talk to them about your problems and things. If you're doing something about what happened to you, you can actually act it out, and that helps. That's me finished.

N: Yeah, it's much more exciting and fun, and you get to . . . you know, like talk to your friends and get to know what you're really doing.

R: I think it's really good . . . because it helps you kind of like focus and you can make up your full opinion on the ideas so you can kind of . . . I find it a lot easier to learn a lot quicker if I can do it in a drama in my head and act it with friends.

P: I think it's good because everybody gets involved. When it comes to the end of the lesson everybody enjoys watching everyone else's performances, and talking about them.

A third reason to value drama was its empathetic properties. Through drama, pupils believed that they could stand in other's shoes:

I: 'Cause you can actually show, show like the emotion.

HR: Well it's really fun and it helps you to understand better, like you know what it's like to be that person, more than you do if you're writing.

OH: Well if you're playing like a young girl, whose parents have died or something, it makes you feel that you're like . . .

RJ: It makes you *understand* on behalf of the person you're doing.

NG: Sometimes they hit emotionally. Like, what was our last one, zakat . . . well it showed that some people were ill, because they didn't have any money. Like with art, if you show someone who's ill, it just puts it in a picture, but with drama, you can act it.

At the same time, there were exceptions to the commonly held views of drama as fun, interactive and empathetic. It is important to give audience to discordant voices, and in chapter 4 I have underlined the advice of Le Compte and Preissle to seek negative and discrepant examples when categorising data (1993, 251).



The following exchange, though atypical, evidences unease about drama's educational potential:

O: What do you think of drama as an activity in RE?

ESM: I dunno. I don't really see what we're doing. When we do drama we just . . . yeah, sometimes it's quite fun and that . . . but you don't learn very much do you?

EH: True.

The second question arose from my impression that when the pupils enjoyed quieter activities, this was due to the chance to think about the self. On this issue there was less unanimity than on drama; some common themes did emerge, but they did so as debates. There was some indication that quieter tasks were seen as more reflective by nature:

P: It's like more personal than a group activity, to relate it to yourself.

I: I agree with what P said, because when you're talking with all the class you just come up with one decision about it, but when it's just yourself you get more points about it.

TA: Er ,yeah . . . in the quieter lessons you get to think more. Like JS said, in the drama you get to put your feelings in. In art, if you're angry, you can press down hard.

Yet a much more widely expressed view was that the quality of the resources, rather than the quietness of the activity, held the potential for self-investigation:

K: I don't agree with EH. Well when you're watching the videos some of them can be a bit like . . . well I like the ones where people act out and show you a real life situation. I've forgotten which it was.

O: The last one we watched was about prayer in Islam and you were thinking about values . . .

ESM: That one was boring!

EH: There just like wasn't anything to it . . . I wash my hands, I wash my hair, my nose . . .

A: And all the positions.

L: It depends what videos you watch to start the topics off. `Cause some videos can be really rubbish, or they could be good and explain it a lot better or something.

O: It depends on the quality of the video.

L: Yeah. Or how interesting it is or something.

HP: Well done L! (All pupils applaud).

A further significant theme was that when quieter activities were thought-provoking, this was because they included empathic or collaborative qualities usually associated with drama:



A: Er, I'm not sure. It probably would make me see what other people believe . . . and they believe it strongly, so they do the washing the body three times every day, or anyway more than once, because they believe strongly in whoever their god is. It did make you think, wow, I'm not that strongly devoted to God, but they're like amazing.

HR: Like, 'cause you know how they feel and what they believe and so you can think about that and decide what you believe.

HR: I don't know. Videos are like, good so you can see it from their point of view, but then I think you should do something where you can get more like involved.

KBC: Yeah. Because they're from different religions and you can see the similarities and differences. And you can take some of that and go along with it.

JS: You're on your own, you can still discuss between each other but then again, you're spreading ideas, aren't you?

Thirdly, I asked the pupils about the relationship between studying religious concepts and thinking about one's own beliefs. One particularly interesting construct can be traced through the pupils' responses, that religious concepts are reminders of existential challenges:

JS: You ask yourself, don't you, if you're doing the right thing. It doesn't change your mind about how. You do give money to charities already so it's already happened.

O: Would you ask if you're doing the right things without the religious concepts to draw on, though?

JS: Well yeah, but it just sort of brings it home doesn't it.

O: It's a reminder?

(All): Yeah.

O: Why do you agree with zakat?

CS: Because it's good to give things to other people.

O: Fine, but you know, couldn't you work that out without the concept from Islam to draw on?

JC: It just makes you think about it even more.

RJ: Yeah, because most people don't go around 'oh, I must give to the poor'. They would only think about it if you make them.

O: So, the religious concepts could be a stimulus to make people think about questions like this? And when you JC said it just helps you think about it more, how does it?

JC: As RJ said, you don't think about giving to the poor all the time.

O: You need to be reminded?

JC: Yeah.

OH: Yeah because sometimes you forget. You can't think about giving to the poor all the time.

RJ: Because until you've attained nirvana, you can't be perfect.



RJ: And it makes you think, say we've just had an RE lesson, and somebody says can I borrow 50p you might think about zakat and be kind to them.

O: So would that happen? Might we do something in an RE lesson and you remember it and think about it later?

RJ: Yeah, because it's gonna go into your brain, and it's gonna be there, and you're gonna remember it at some point. And it'll be in your memory and something'll jog your memory at some point, like if you've just done tawhid and you see some geometrical patterns you'll go mmm, tawhid!

I: It makes you like, look at yourself, and think, do I do this? It makes you think about other people and stuff, and how you are as a person. Whether you're good, or you just don't care about anyone else.

O: Couldn't you do that by yourself, without religious ideas to compare yourself to, though?

I: It depends what kind of person you are. If you're a really strong Christian or a really strong Muslim it's just natural to you. Or if you're a really nice person still. But if you're like, bad, you just don't care.

O: If you're bad, the ideas might give you a bit more stimulation to care?

I: Yeah.

A related idea is that drama can be an effective method of using religious concepts as 'reminders', because drama can put such concepts into operation as imaginary but concrete situations:

O: Really, what I want to ask you about is how say doing a piece of drama on zakat might help you to think through and express some of your own ideas about life. Could that work?

HR: Yeah (with emphasis) because I don't know, like I said earlier when you're acting it's like being the person, and it just kind of like makes you think if I was this person, would I believe this way or wouldn't I?

For some pupils it is the physicality of drama that aids memory:

JB: If it's a good lesson it's more kinaesthetic.

O: And that would help you to remember?

JB: If you just sit there I think for me it's harder to remember, but if you do it physically like you do a play . . . I remember that zakat play well.

For others, the drama on zakat had led them to ask personal questions:

N: I think it (the focus on poverty) did make you feel bad. Later on I asked my mum how old you have to be to pay zakat. She said not till you're old enough, like an adult. I can't give my pocket money, but like when you're older I can give money away to the poor. It didn't make me feel too bad, but it made me feel good that you can give money away to the poor.

O: Will it make you more likely to do it when you're older?

N: Yeah, because I don't have much money now but I'm sure in the future I'll have more to give.



A: God! Well, you know when zakat is giving money to the poor, if there are all those people on the streets in England and you just walk by them, pretend you haven't any spare change and try to ignore them . . . all these people wherever they are they feel really sorry for the poor people so you go and collect money and help them, and we just like . . . not care at all.

None of this meant that the pupils are unconditionally welcoming in their reception of religious concepts. Cases were recorded which strongly suggest otherwise:

ESM: 'Hey give us your money or you can't get into heaven'. It's nasty.

EH: When we do it, Christians, we're not that totally devoted. But the video

...

ESM: Catholics are!

EH: Some are. But when you see the video you see that their lives revolve around God.

O: Would that make you think about what you're like?

EH: It makes me realise that I don't actually believe in anything.

ESM: No, it makes you feel bad. I don't do any of that stuff, and I know I'm not a bad person, but it still makes you feel bad. And then you end up hating God.

### **Central and Satellite Categories**

So far I have shown how cycle 1's broad categories emerged from participant observation notes and pupil diaries, to be refined in the interview process. The

broad categories were the engaging nature of drama, the opportunity contained in quieter tasks for self-reflection, and the relation between studying religious concepts and investigating one's own beliefs. Through analysis of interview responses I have also shown the fine categories to be as follows: drama is enjoyable, interactive and empathetic; quieter tasks depend on interesting material or conceptual resources for their impact, rather than introspection; and religious concepts function as reminders of existential questions. My next problem is the relationship between these categories. Which are central and which are peripheral to pupils' motivation? Categories can be analysed in terms of their degree of exclusivity. Can they be integrated into other categories, or are they irreducible? I draw a spatial analogy in which more exclusive categories have a central position and others form satellites.

None of my three categories are exclusive, because all are mutually linked.

Regarding my first category, drama depends on its empathetic properties and in a study of Islam, this means that it depends on concepts like zakat. As for the second category, we have seen that the topic's quieter tasks also depended on interesting conceptual resources for their promotion of self-awareness. In the case of the third category, religious concepts can often be reminders of existential challenges because, like drama, they can generate hypothetical situations. These three categories are all therefore satellite categories; where, then, is the central category?

The central category might be defined by examining what is common to the satellite ones. It is striking that all three of the satellite categories depend on



dialogue and interactivity. There seem to be two forms of dialogue, one with other people (the teacher, the other pupils), the other with religious concepts like tawhid and zakat. A further striking feature of cycle 1 is the making of dialogic meaning through the research process, as was anticipated in my reflections on research methodology in chapter 4. Several of the quoted interview passages bring this out very clearly, and although it gave less scope to pupils it was also true of the diary writing. It would be counter-intuitive to demarcate the topic's learning from the pupils' reflections on the topic's learning. It seems necessary to point out this fourth category of dialogue to specify what is central, but in retrospect this element was powerfully present all along, all the more so because of its taken-for-granted status. The central category of cycle 1 is *dialogue*.

### **Areas to Investigate in Cycle 2**

Cycle 1 affirmed the power of drama to motivate pupils of RE. I had illustrated this power before (see chapter 1, above) and the engaging nature of drama was probably a saturated category already. Of course I continued to plan drama activities with the class, but I now thought that we might use these to pursue some new questions, based on the emergent central category of dialogue. What did the pupils understand to happen in their dialogues with religious concepts? And building on the idea that religious concepts were reminders of existential questions, what were the existential concerns of most significance to the pupils? Also, how did the pupils account for the value of dialogue with one another? Cycle 2 offered rich content for the investigation of these questions, for as a study of interfaith relations it was essentially concerned with mediation and with understanding, as well as questions of religious truth.

## **Dialogue, Adolescence and Creativity**

The category of dialogue therefore suggested directions for practice over cycle 2, but it also developed the theoretical discussions begun in earlier chapters. By the close of chapter 2 I could argue that adolescent needs for education for citizenship (e.g. Burkinsher 2002a, 2002b) and education for identity (e.g. Hargreaves 1994) posed particular challenges to secondary practitioners.

Education for citizenship should aim to give adolescents an internal locus of control (Coleman and Hendry 1990), and for this to take root, teachers must help pupils to develop knowledge and understanding of their local and national societies and of geopolitical issues (Gearon 2002, 2004). Regarding education for identity, adolescents should be encouraged to avoid foreclosure - an immature adoption of a personal identity (Head 1997), perhaps based on a partial appreciation of post-modern cultural plurality (Skeie 1995). Therefore, adolescents should be exposed to a wide variety of beliefs, values and stances. Ways should be found to build pupils' understanding of cultural plurality, and to contribute to their search for identity by assisting the clarification of personal beliefs and values (Hookway 2002). I concluded chapter 2 by suggesting that in RE practice, an overlap is likely between building understanding of cultural plurality and contributing to the search for identity, and I called for more research into classroom practice so as to orientate RE teachers in a complex field.

The cycle 1 data presented above may help us to understand what is involved, when secondary age pupils simultaneously build understanding of cultural plurality and engage in a search for personal identity. As we have seen, during their studies of Islam my respondents were fundamentally motivated by the



experience of dialogue. There was an interpersonal aspect to this motivation through dialogue, in that the pupils found it interesting and enjoyable to collaborate with others in their learning, especially when they could jointly build up creative ideas in arts-based activities. There was also a conceptual aspect to the motivation through dialogue. The educational value of Islamic religious concepts was highlighted: pupils found that concepts such as tawhid and zakat were worthwhile in so far as their own existential concerns could be addressed to those concepts, and vice versa. A well-known pedagogically strategic idea was underlined, that teachers should not attempt to engage pupils with subject content in isolation from the pupils' own ideas and interests – or more positively speaking, that pupils should be encouraged to relate subject content to their own ideas and interests. The draft recommendations for professional practice offered at the very close of chapter 2 already contained the ideas that pupils should work jointly, and that religious material should be opened to interpretation, criticism and response. Cycle 1's data provide illustrations of how this can happen in practice. Teachers should select religious material that promises conceptual transferability, from its traditional context to the life-worlds of the pupils; and should plan activities through which pupils can work collaboratively and creatively. By the criterion of pupil motivation, the most pedagogically successful ventures of cycle 1 were the art task on tawhid and drama task on zakat. These tasks provide cycle 1's most promising starting-point for teachers wishing to investigate these issues further, with their own classes (the principle argued in chapter 4, that action research data have the status of possibilities for change or action hypotheses, must be borne in mind throughout).

Such remarks also reverberate with chapter 3's preliminary investigation of RE and creativity. Owing to the discussion of Gadamer (e.g. 1975) there, by the close of chapter 3 I had added to my professional recommendations that RE should develop a hermeneutical pedagogy where pupils experience a dialogue with tradition. In such dialogue, it was argued, the pupils' responses have equal status to material from religious traditions, because a dialogue is an equal relationship. Influenced to do so by Bailin (1994) and Csikszentmihalyi (1999), I had also called for RE to develop pedagogies of creativity, through which should be sought unique and significant learning outcomes. Cycle 1's data have been analysed to show that the category of dialogue is indeed basic to pupils' motivation, and the analysis has also generated the nuances of interpersonal and conceptual dialogue. Because of their dialogical relationship with powerful concepts, the pupils' arts-based work on tawhid and zakat resulted in unique and significant learning outcomes, as described above.

## **Conclusion**

During cycle 1, dialogue emerged as the central factor in the pupils' motivation. Pupils were found to be motivated by opportunities to compare and contrast their ideas with those of their peers (interpersonal dialogue) and by opportunities to compare and contrast their ideas with those contained in religious concepts (conceptual dialogue). The central category of dialogue is the product of analysis of three satellite categories: the interactive and empathic nature of drama tasks, the dependence on interesting resources for the impact of quieter tasks, and the function of religious concepts as reminders of existential questions. The findings of cycle 1 have strengthened my earlier positions on adolescence and creativity,



demonstrating ways for secondary age pupils to experience agency, self-reflection (cf. Coleman and Hendry 1990; Head 1997; Hookway 2002), uniqueness and significance (cf. Bailin 1994; Csikszentmihalyi 1999) through their work in RE.

## **Chapter 6 Key Findings Cycle 2: Interfaith Relations, Peace and**

### **Reconciliation**

#### **Introduction**

At the close of cycle 1 were noted three questions for investigation during cycle 2:

- What do the pupils understand to happen in their dialogues with religious concepts?
- And building on the idea that religious concepts are reminders of existential questions, what are the existential concerns that are of most concern to the pupils?
- Also, how do the pupils account for the value of dialogue with one another?

At that time it was also anticipated that cycle 2's teaching material would be good for the exploration of dialogic and existential issues, because of the focus on interfaith relations. The teaching was therefore planned to give as much scope as possible for the investigation of such issues. It will be remembered that through the analysis of cycle 1's data, dialogue emerged as the central factor in the pupils' motivation. They were motivated by the opportunities for interpersonal exchange through dialogue and conceptual comparison through dialogue.

In this chapter I present and analyse the data from cycle 2. As in cycle 1 there are two layers of category formation. Broad categories are formed through analysis



of participant observation notes and questionnaire responses, and then those categories are made finer through analysis of interview data.

### **Participant observation**

It will be recalled that from cycle 2 onwards, briefer participant observation notes were made than in cycle 1. Their main purpose was still to recall the contexts of events, creating a week-by-week record of the lessons. As before, I refer to these notes in providing a résumé of the teaching and learning activities, and a brief summary of my initial constructs regarding the pupils' motivation. Again, the topic lasted for six weeks, with one lesson per week.

The first lesson was an introduction to the topic. The pupils were asked to define 'interfaith relations' and 'reconciliation', then placed into groups to list factors that get in the way of good interfaith relations. After the group activity these suggestions were offered:

- Conflict over holy places.
- Conflict over countries.
- Conflict over gods.
- Conflict over translations of beliefs.
- Racism.
- The urge to convert others to your faith.
- The wish to save others from hell.
- Someone might break someone else's religious symbol.
- Times of prayer might clash.

- Religion seeks control so conflict is inevitable.

To then build on the pupils' useful suggestions, we watched a video entitled 'Reconciliation' (British Broadcasting Corporation 2000b). It tells the story of Bushra, a London-based Muslim pupil who seeks to build good relationships with Jewish pupils despite tensions over the Middle East. Following the film, we discussed Bushra, whom the pupils saw as 'brave' and 'confident' and to be admired for sticking up for her principles in a difficult situation. We then assessed Bushra's mother's assertion that 'people with different beliefs should live apart', with which the pupils disagreed as racist and a recipe for an uninteresting society. Finally we discussed what is to be gained if people of different beliefs live together. The pupils gave very concrete responses, including the following:

- Our school is good because it is multi-religious.
- RE lessons are better with people who voice different beliefs.
- If you have no particular belief, but are in a multi-religious situation, you can find out what it is like to be guided by different beliefs.

The discussion was very intelligent and it made an immediate connection to the research issues of dialogue and existential concerns.

The second lesson was based on a story found in Chris Wright's *Judaism for Today* in which a group of Jewish settlers make a hole in the fence between Israel and Lebanon, to try to form bonds with the Lebanese Christians and



Muslims (Wright C. 2000, 52-3). The class were asked to prepare drama sketches on the difficulties facing peacemakers and how they would meet these. After some time, two groups volunteered to present their sketches. Both involved family pressure, where individuals had friends across religious divides and parents or other family members disagreed with this. In the follow-up discussions pupils speculated on what the situation would be like; they focused on the theme of divided loyalties, in that if you are trying to do something difficult which your heart is in, opposition from friends or relatives will be very disheartening. There was then a concluding summary discussion, prompted by a question of mine about the relevance of the idea of God if like our 'characters' you were struggling for peace. There were two different suggestions, one that prayer might inspire you to go on, and the second that the idea of one God could relate to that of oneness between people.

To begin the third lesson, I explained to the class that we would aim to apply some religious teachings to the issue of interfaith tension and to some contemporary events, and to set up a related homework investigation. We briefly went over the previous week's drama sketches. I then read aloud a BBC news article about the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in Chatham, Kent (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/kent/3286583.stm> ). We next referred back to year 7 lessons on the Good Samaritan parable (copies were passed around the class) and organised a task concerning what the Good Samaritan would do about the desecration of the Jewish cemetery. The pupils had to imagine the answer, and set out a step-by-step plan as a storyboard or cartoon. They worked on the task for twenty minutes. They were asked to work individually, because they had

been very noisy at the very start of the lesson and I was concerned about a possible lack of concentration on the task. In plenary session, they fed back their ideas, which included:

- Starting a community restoration project involving members of various faiths.
- Collecting money to rebuild the cemetery.
- Interviewing those who had suffered about how they felt about it.
- Finding and talking to the aggressors.
- Giving public talks about religious tolerance.
- Taking up the matter with the local council.
- Re-casting the story so that Muslim characters appear as Good Samaritans, in one case enlisting the help of a priest (the pupils concerned had not imagined that Muslims had vandalised the cemetery, rather their aim was to show that you can be a Good Samaritan in any religion).
- Teaching the aggressors about Judaism.

In this task the pupils had to interpret and apply the Christian teaching of love - a profound religious concept with which to place them in dialogue. Finally homework was set, in which they had to prepare to design a garden, prayer room, or poster or other item of their choice, designed to promote interfaith peace. The pupils were asked to look for resources including words (perhaps from sacred scriptures), images (perhaps of religious symbols), and details of plants, furniture, or whatever was required, and to bring these to the next week's lesson.



In the fourth lesson the class began the design task. Many had gathered various materials for homework. I additionally supplied a sheet with details of appropriate religious symbols and quotations. I explained the sheet, and went briefly back over the task, at the lesson's beginning. Most of the time was spent pursuing the task, which proved to be a very engaging one. For a lesson conclusion we had a brief discussion of what use had been made of symbols and quotations. They had been built into plaques, carvings on benches, patterns mown in grass, and stained glass window motifs.

In the fifth lesson the class were carrying on with designs begun the previous week. By the end, one design was finished and the designers held it up and spoke to the class about it. It was a circular garden with various religious symbols carved on a central bench. For most of the pupils the scale of the work meant that more finishing off time was needed, so this was set for homework.

In the sixth and final lesson, two presentations were given, one of a design for an interfaith meeting room, the other of a poster advertising an interfaith youth group. We then discussed the kinds of impact these might have in promoting understanding and reducing tension in Sheffield. The discussion was brief as there were also questionnaires to complete. The questionnaires were done, and then two pairs of pupils took turns to report their responses (they had asked to share their ideas with the class and I had asked them to wait until the last few minutes when the sheets had been collected in).

Overall, my participant observation notes indicated familiar factors in the pupils' motivation: their motivation had been high throughout, but they had been at their

most energetic when working in more active styles such as drama or design, and had engaged most easily when confronted with ‘real-life’ situations (e.g. the story of the cemetery) or those which approximated to or reflected real life (e.g. the need for an inter-faith garden or building or poster).

### **Questionnaires**

It was noted earlier that from cycle 2 onwards, questionnaires replaced pupil diaries. Briefer, sharper data were gathered, the central purpose of which was to construct interview questions. Fifteen questionnaire schedules were filled in, each one by a pair of pupils, and all were filled in completely. The pupils were asked to give each task a mark out of ten for interest and enjoyment (rather than marks on three criteria as in cycle 1). For all tasks, marks were over a full range, all tasks scoring at least one 10. Averages were calculated as follows:

- Watching and discussing video about Bushra: 6.
- Drama activity about peacemakers in the Middle East: 7.
- Cartoon strip or storyboard about the Good Samaritan and Jewish cemetery: 5.
- Designing a peace garden, poster or interfaith prayer or meditation room: 8.

The pupils were also asked to include reasons for their marks out of ten. Again, each task attracted a mixture of positive and negative comment. On watching and discussing the video about Bushra, several pupils appreciated the human interest in the story:



We learnt a lot about Bushra's character.

I liked it when Bushra said you should not surround your muslim sister like this!

We learned much about muslims and jews.

For two pupils it prompted criticism of the portrayal of Muslims:

I kind of liked it but it showed the muslims being negative a lot.

Where pupils were inclined to be unenthusiastic, it was because of the passive nature of watching a video:

It was a bit boring.

It had some points but didn't seem to be going anywhere.

It wasn't very interesting and we just listened to a video.

It was not exciting and took a long time.

On the drama activity about peacemakers in the Middle East, the pupils' liking for active, collaborative, creative learning was well to the fore:

We had fun and we learned things.

Its fun and we remembered it well because we are kinaesthetic.

We had fun creating it and it was very interesting. We performed well because we understood it.

This was good because we got the point across very well and the real story was inspiring.

We enjoyed it because you don't have to write loads and you can work with your friends and it helps you think about the subject.

A relatively small number of complaints were recorded, to do with the perplexing nature of an open-ended task:

It didn't have any structure. The questions had no set answers.

I didn't really understand this drama.

This was ok but we weren't quite sure what to do.

On the cartoon strip or storyboard about the Good Samaritan and the Jewish cemetery, positive comments reflected a sense that the work had been imaginative and enjoyable:

It was good because you had to imagine what a good Samaritan would do which makes you have to think a lot harder than when the information is presented in front of you, because of the extra thinking it helps you remember more and gives you a better understanding.

It was interesting and fun.

It was fun and easy.

Significantly, on the negative side several pupils bemoaned the absence of conversation:



We didn't like the fact that we couldn't talk and we found the question was hard.

Wern't aloud to discuss ideas.

Because we weren't allowed to discuss ideas, this piece was very boring.

On designing a peace garden, poster or interfaith prayer or meditation room, the opportunities to be creative, to share ideas with other pupils and to work on challenging problems were celebrated by much favourable comment:

Very fun and very interesting to think about how all the different religions, symbols and cultures could fit together.

It was good because we got to use our own ideas and design it in the way we want.

Good selection of ideas to develop and there was room for personal ideas as well.

It was a mind thinker and we had super fun. Working in pairs is better because there is room for two minds instead of one.

It helped us think of many good ideas and we could be very creative with this piece.

You could work and chat with your friends and it wasn't a set task so you had freedom on what to do.

This task attracted very little in the way of negative responses:

It was very boring but better than the cartoon strip.

We had good ideas but we couldn't put them on paper.

Overall, three themes emerged from the questionnaire data, and once more these were familiar themes. Firstly, the pupils appreciated opportunities for dialogue with each other. The individual task may have settled them to one lesson, but they certainly preferred to work collaboratively. Secondly, they liked concrete situations to work at – whether these are historical e.g. the situation in the Middle East (see the more lengthy positive comment on the Good Samaritan activity, above), or hypothetical, as in the drama task on peacemakers. Thirdly, they liked space to develop their own ideas. In their positive comments on the design task, the pupils celebrated autonomy. There was only one really negative comment on the design task.

### **Interviews**

At this section's outset it was made clear that cycle 2 would be about dialogue and existential questions. As we have seen since then, participant observation and questionnaires during cycle 2 suggested that dialogue continued to be an important factor in the pupils' motivation, and that the pupils were motivated to work on religious concepts such as peace and reconciliation (especially when they could bring their own creative ideas to such work). In framing interview questions for cycle 2, I tried to distil the above points into three clear questions that the pupils would understand and to which they would like to respond. I saw the needs for a question about a religious concept, a question about what is



existentially important to the pupils, and a question about the use of dialogue in RE. I decided to ask:

- Is it important to think about peace?
- What is important in your life?
- Why do you say it is good to share ideas with each other in RE lessons?

As in cycle 1 I present their responses one question or category at a time, showing how the broad categories of the interview questions were refined through analysis of the pupils' responses. Firstly, when asked whether it is important to think about peace, it was striking that every respondent immediately conceptualised peace as a social situation, as a state of affairs in the outer world. No pupil articulated peace in terms of an inner state of the soul, mind, spirit or person.

K: Yeah, I think it is, because if you just think about war all the time you're just thinking about all the bad things and everything. With peace you think about good things, and not to have wars and that kind of thing.

M: Peace is an important thing to think about, because if we don't have peace everybody is just fighting and nobody's getting along. There's loads of wars and everything and it makes you sometimes feel . . . and you wouldn't have friends without peace, or anything.

AS: I think peace is good 'cause everyone should get along and everything. I did a poster on my own, and it was about peace between all different religions, like Jews and Pakistanis.

JB: If there wasn't any peace well everyone would be falling out, and no-one telling the truth.

OH: I think peace is quite good because if there wasn't peace there would only be nasty stuff. If we didn't have peace it would be like . . . everyone fighting all the time, like we do. There is a bit of peace in England.

As the interviewing progressed and I became more and more aware of this trend, it began to form an additional interview question. I wanted to probe its significance, and as I did so I discovered that even when prompted to consider peace as an inner state the pupils invariably reverted to describing it in social terms:

O: Shall I just pass on an interesting thing? This is the third interview I've done. When I've sat down and asked them this question, people have immediately started to talk about peace as a state out there in the world, in society. Nobody's talked about peace inside, in your spirit or your soul or your mind. Do you immediately think about it, when I mention it, as a state of affairs out there in the world?

All: Yeah.

O: Is the idea of peace inside meaningful to you?

JS: It doesn't matter as much as a nation in the third world, or whether we care about the third world.

NG: Well peace outside and peace inside, if you think about it . . . if you're not peaceful to someone else they could start a fight or something like that, so it's just as important inside as out in the world.



OH: There, then. Why aren't they peaceful there, and stuff, and why is Saddam Hu- . . . Hu . . . Hussener . . .

EH: Isn't he dead, Saddam Hussein?

O: No.

OH: He's being tortured.

O: We don't know that he's being tortured . . .

OH: Oh, he is! He is!

HP: OH knows!

O: Maybe she does. But why do you think about it (peace) as a situation in the world, rather than inside people?

EH: It's easier. If someone says to me, what do you think about peace? I think it's about people having wars. War isn't something that goes on in your head.

HP: If everyone thought about peace themselves, it would be just like – everyone's got a bit of peace in them. But it wouldn't be like affecting the whole world. People with peace inside them, it'll be just like affecting what they do. But if you saw someone else you wouldn't go up to them and say I have peace inside me, stop this. You have to have peace over the world.

O: What about peace inside people? In their minds, souls or spirits? As soon as I say peace to you, you start to talk about peace out there in the world. Is that how you think about it?

A: Well if you don't have peace inside you, say if somebody was being horrible to you, and you were thinking 'don't retaliate – don't do anything stupid', then you might hit them or something and get in a lot of trouble.

Perhaps the pupils' use for religious concepts such as peace is a pragmatic one; they see the concept as a useful tool for getting to grips with a real or hypothetical situation in the world. Such a conclusion would resonate with this cycle's questionnaire data, which seem to show that the pupils like to work at concrete situations. It does not mean that they cannot handle abstract concepts; but that they prefer to do so in a concrete way. That religious concepts function as reminders of existential questions was also seen in cycle 1.

Very clear unanimity also characterised the pupils' answers to the second question, what is important in your life? The words 'family and friends' were contained in the answers of every pupil, very often as the first ones spoken:

JC: Family, friends and pets are important.

NG: Family and friends and education.

PB: Family and friends. Because if you didn't have them you'd be lonely.

HA: Family and friends and religion, and that's about it. Family because they're always there for you, they support you. Friends, or you'd be a loner. Religion, to guide you. It's really important, religion's really important. Education.



EH: It would be family and friends, they're always there for me and if I've got a problem . . . my family are like my family, so I've got to like them, haven't I?

HP: The most important things to me are my family and my friends. My friends really, because family's important but you can't tell your family everything but you can tell your friends. Family's important to me as well because say someone gets put in prison or something that's upsetting, so it's like . . . even if someone is poorly and in hospital that's upsetting, but I think friends are just as important as family because friends are always there for you.

There were one or two divergent responses:

O: What is important in your life?

OH: Chocolate.

O: Moving on, then? What's important in your life?

ESM: What, just in general?

O: Yeah, just in general, yeah.

ESM: Music. It is. Why are you laughing at me?

O: He is, I wasn't.

ESM: I know, I'm just looking at you and talking to him.

However, the predominance of the 'family and friends' motif was evident. Its significance was easily probed. Family and friends are important to the pupils because of their needs for personal closeness, trust and safety:

AS: Because my family's always there if something happens. Friends . . . you stick up for them, they're always there.

Jl: The most important thing for me is my family. Because if I didn't have a family I wouldn't be on this planet. If I didn't have any friends, I'd be bored and like HA said a loner.

HP: The most important things to me are my family and my friends. My friends really, because family's important but you can't tell your family everything but you can tell your friends. Family's important to me as well because say someone gets put in prison or something that's upsetting, so it's like . . . even if someone is poorly and in hospital that's upsetting, but I think friends are just as important as family because friends are always there for you.

OH: I think it's family and friends and pets like JC. If you're upset you can go to your family and friends and pets.

O: Pets like JC? Is JC your pet?

OH: No! I've got some animals and whenever I'm upset I talk to them and stuff, I know it sounds stupid but . . .

A minor theme was preparation for the future. One or two pupils expressed career aspirations, and one group held a discussion about education's importance:



AS: Football – it's good to play, to play together and I want to be a pro footballer.

KBC: Football because I'm going to be a professional footballer.

O: You mentioned education?

JS: Some people don't have education, do they?

RS: In the third world you don't. But also with education you know, if you don't do well at school you might not get a good job, if you don't get GCSEs, A levels . . .

TA: And you'd ending up working at . . .

NG: And if you can't get money it affects bigger things. You friends will do well and go off to university and you'll be stuck in Sheffield or wherever you live.

It would be extremely interesting, but is beyond the scope of the present study, to chart changes in the expression of what is personally important as the pupils move through their teens (cf. Coleman and Hendry 1990, 207 on focal theory and the idea that adolescents cope with one set of demands at a time). The words of my respondents suggest that work planned around the theme of close personal relationships would engage them very much at this point in their lives. RE usually covers such topics in key stage 4, but there is no reason why key stage 3 topics could not be interpreted in the light of what is obviously so important to my younger pupils.

In relation to the pupils' answers to the third question, about why sharing ideas with each other in RE lessons is good, two related strands could be discerned, one practical and the other more philosophical. At the practical level, the pupils' responses were reminiscent of the Piagetian claim that peer explanation is invaluable to understanding:

JN: If you work on your own, it's like you're the only person in the room. If I can't understand something, I can't ask for help.

ESM: It is hard. 'Cause there are some questions you feel a bit stupid asking the teacher. It'll be something really simple. Some teachers, if you ask them simple things they get really angry with you. And it's like, if you let me talk I could have just asked one of my friends.

PB: I think it's important to like contribute ideas, because if someone's got a better idea that's better than just thinking about it yourself.

JS: You might think the idea's daft, but then you don't want to tell the teacher do you? It might be a bit embarrassing. But if you tell a few of your friends, and it might be quite a good idea to use for something else.

At the philosophical level, the pupils showed a sophisticated awareness of plurality and dialogue as conditions of educational opportunity. They celebrated the religiously plural composition of their own class and they recognised the dialogical nature of religious truth:



O: I want to push you a bit on this. From what you say, talking about ideas is probably good in any lesson, on any work. But I want to know why it's important for RE content.

TA: Because you get to discuss views, and RE's what your views are.

RS: There's lots of different things to believe about.

NG: And because of the different religions, you can . . . that could be a way for peace, by like showing the different views of religions and so on.

O: Others have said it's important because in the class there are different religions, and people who don't have a religion. You can find out from each other about this kind of thing, in a way that we couldn't if there weren't people with all sorts of different beliefs in our class.

JS: Well we've got more . . . if you had a class of just one religion, all the drama's going to be very similar, aren't they? They've got views on how God doesn't matter or how God doesn't exist. It's going to be pretty boring if you've got a class that's exactly the same.

NG: It probably does make lessons more interesting.

JS: Because they've got a view on that that's different to yours.

JB: You'll just be able to discuss with people of different views.

PB: Well in maths there's only one correct answer but in RE there are lots of answers because there's lots of religions. Everyone has their opinion.

O: Could it be particularly important in RE to share ideas, because of the way RE is?

(Several pupils simultaneously): Yeah, yeah.

A: I think it's important to share ideas because like ESM says it makes you think better, it helps you concentrate and it makes the lesson a lot more fun. You won't look forward to a lesson if you think oh, we've got to work in silence.

O: But particularly with RE content?

ESM: Particularly with RE content because the stuff you do . . . you see I'm going to use another bad word again. . .it's stuff that needs to be discussed. If there are issues, and you only know your own opinion, somebody will say something in a way you haven't thought of it. Or you'll need another person who's a different religion, you'll need their view on it before you . . . whereas before you discuss your ideas, you've just got your own, and you might not realise it or you might not think 'yeah, there is that' until you hear everyone else's.

O: Why do you say it is good to share ideas with each other in RE lessons?

EH: Like, sharing. There are loads of people in our class from different religions. You're sharing with different religions about it, and all that information. And if you can't think of anything to say, other people give you ideas. It's like more fun. It's like when you're being quiet it's just a bit boring.

HP: I think like drama lessons are much more better. With people of different religions you can see their views. And they'll talk about it in their religions and stuff. Some of the class celebrate Eid and they get like



presents and they come back and we all ask them what they got for Eid and stuff. And it's like trying to join in with their religion.

In developing her thoughts about these issues, HP made an extraordinary contribution to our conversation which pulled together the themes of close family and friend relationships, dialogue with people of different faiths, and using religious concepts to make sense of challenging life situations:

HP: If you've made up your mind about what you think, it tells your mind about what they think, say a Buddhist and one's a Christian. My friend, my older friend, he's only a Buddhist . . .

EH: What is a Buddhist?

HP: . . . because his sister died, and he's been around all the churches asking why she died and stuff, and they didn't realise it and stuff, but he's a Buddhist now because he thinks his sister's going to have afterlife and he wants to have it. So I think that's made me think that that's actually a good religion because I believe in the afterlife as well and he's talked to me about it . . . I think it's better, I wouldn't know about this sort of stuff unless he'd told me, because it's not as if you just read it in a book. You take it all in, it's better when someone's talking to you.

### **Central and satellite categories**

As in cycle 1, I have shown how broad categories of pupil motivation were gained and then refined. In the case of cycle 2, the broad categories were supplied by cycle 1's conclusions and were then confirmed through participant

observation and questionnaires. The broad categories were dialogue with religious concepts, issues of personal importance to the pupils and the importance to pupils of dialogue with one another. I have gone on to show how these broad categories were refined by the analysis of interview data. The resulting fine categories were that religious concepts such as peace were of pragmatic significance in that they could help pupils to respond to hard real-life or hypothetical situations, that the close personal relationships pupils enjoyed with their families and friends were the most important feature of their lives and that the pupils' dialogue with one another facilitated understanding on practical and philosophical levels alike. Now, were these categories exclusive, or could they be accommodated to one another? Certainly the categories could be linked. An attractive hypothesis was that they formed a circle. Religious concepts helped to make sense of situations in life; such situations were important because people were important, as evidenced by the love of family and friends; dialogue at the practical level could help you bring out your responses to life-situations and at the philosophical level it could provide you with concepts to use in those responses, perhaps especially when in dialogue with somebody of a different faith background to your own. If there was a central category uniting these satellite ones, it seemed to be the importance of life and thus the human need to find meaning in life. Thus, the central category of cycle 2 is *existential interest*.

### **Areas to investigate in cycle 3**

Cycle 2 further demonstrated the use of religious concepts in helping young people to assess existential questions. Yet the concepts alone did not seem to have this power. My pupils needed to address the concepts to concrete situations



and they needed to experience dialogue as they did so. Underlying these remarks is my sense that human love is what made all of this important to my pupils. They said that family and friends were the most important aspect of their lives, but I had yet to use this statement as a basis for our RE lessons. But there were clear possibilities to try this in cycle 3, which was a study of Inspiration, Hajj and Passover. We could consider family celebrations in Islam and Judaism, and the inspirational qualities of close personal relationships.

### **Existential Interest, Adolescence and Creativity**

The above section has described how cycle 2 data provided directions for classroom teaching over cycle 3. As with cycle 1 data, they also contributed to the cumulative argument of this thesis as a whole. The analysis of cycle 1 data brought forward the motivating factor of dialogue and at the end of chapter 5, this was shown to relate back to earlier discussions concerning adolescent identity development (chapter 2) and hermeneutical relationships, uniqueness and significance in learning (chapter 3). The analysis of cycle 2 data has identified the factor of existential interest, and I will now describe how this too strengthens my earlier positions regarding adolescence and creativity.

During chapter 2, social psychological research was examined that places needs for self-comprehension and self-exploration at the heart of adolescent identity development. We saw how Furnham and Stacey analyse adolescent beliefs and understandings concerning religious and spiritual matters, and define the adolescent state of mind as a 'search for comprehension' (1991, 124).

Adolescents are impressionable and benefit from guidance through this process,

but they react against excessive socialisation in religious and spiritual matters, and may often strive for personal exploration and discovery. Their attitudes to religion form a personal search:

Adolescents' attempts to clarify and internalise their own value systems frequently affect their assessment of religious beliefs. (Furnham and Stacey 1991, 132)

As a result of my discussion of Furnham and Stacey, certain challenges for RE teachers were identified, in that adolescent pupils may need role models who are mature in their assessment of religious material and open to personal change and development. At the same time it is important for teenagers to interact with their peers. Modelled thus, RE would be a collaborative enquiry into religion and the self.

Cycle 2 data give practical instances of this and they also suggest promising future routes of enquiry. Probably the most striking example of self-exploration through interaction with religious tradition, peers and teacher is HP's contribution to an interview discussion, reported above. There, she answers a question about why it is good to share ideas with one another during RE lessons by relating it to her personal need for illumination concerning the afterlife. Yet there are other examples throughout the data. The concept of peace was of use in helping the pupils to sort out their views on the world before them, rather than in any inward or abstract sense. The religiously plural nature of the class was valuable in extending the pupils' intellectual resource-base for the consideration



of inter-faith issues, and these issues were made more real by this same immediate religiously plural environment. The data remind teachers, again, to try to direct lessons towards what is of tangible concern to the pupils.

At their most effective, then, cycle 2's activities can be seen as what Frydenberg (1997) describes as structured paths for young people to develop personal skills: stable environments where they can try out new behaviours or ideas, and begin to move beyond coping to flourishing. As we saw in chapter 2, pleas for opportunity and support for teenagers are prominent in her recommendations (Frydenberg 1997, 203). The more motivating RE tasks set out in this chapter were engaging for the pupils because they gave opportunities for the investigation of pressing life-issues. According to the questionnaire data, the drama activity about peacemakers in the Middle East and the design of a peace garden, poster or interfaith prayer or meditation room were valued highest amongst the topic's activities. These were creative tasks, in that they had arts-based methodologies and called on the pupils to create unique and significant outcomes. Their success recalls Helen Nicholson's (2000) discussion of active, collaborative and authentic learning through drama, cited in chapter 3. The guiding structure was the forging of links between religious materials and the pupils' own ideas and experiences. In this respect there is a clear link between the central category of cycle 1 (dialogue) and the central category of cycle 2 (existential interest).

## **Conclusion**

During cycle 2, existential interest emerged as the central factor in the pupils' motivation. Pupils were found to be motivated by tasks that related religious material to issues of importance to them, including peace and the achievement of meaning in life. Thus, there was a strong connection to cycle 1's key finding that dialogue with religious concepts motivates pupils. Like cycle 1's central category of dialogue, cycle 2's central category of existential interest is the product of analysis of three satellite categories: the pragmatic significance of religious concepts such as peace, the ultimate importance to pupils of close personal relationships with their families and friends, and the practical and philosophical benefit of the pupils' dialogue with one another. The findings of cycle 2 have further strengthened my earlier positions on adolescence and creativity.

Classroom experiences have been described in which pupils were able to use RE as a structure to examine what lies before them in life situations and to rehearse their responses to these situations (cf. Furnham and Stacey 1991; Frydenberg 1997). Learning processes have been exemplified that once more involved pupils in the creation of significant and unique outcomes (cf. Nicholson 2000; Bailin 1994; Csikszentmihalyi 1999).



## **Chapter 7 Key Findings Cycle 3: Inspiration: Hajj and Passover**

### **Introduction**

As cycle 2 closed, I noted areas for investigation over cycle 3. Existential interest had emerged as a further central factor in the pupils' motivation, and it had appeared that human love is what makes experience significant to my pupils. This had come up in relation to their assertion that family and friends are the most important aspect of their lives, but I had reflected that we had yet to draw on religious content related explicitly to love of family and friends. However, I anticipated that cycle 3's teaching material on Inspiration, Hajj and Passover would present chances to do so. We would be able to consider family celebrations in Islam and Judaism, and the inspirational qualities of close personal relationships. In this chapter I present and analyse the data from cycle 3. As before, there are two layers of category formation. Participant observation notes and questionnaire responses suggest the broad categories of pupil motivation and then interview data are analysed in order to refine those categories. The chapter closes in the same way as the previous two, with discussion of how its findings relate to earlier themes in adolescence and creativity, building the cumulative argument of the thesis.

### **Participant observation**

Again, the participant observation notes are used to summarise the teaching and learning processes and to show my initial understandings of the pupils' motivation. This time the topic lasted for five lessons. The first lesson was a topic introduction. I gave an overview of the content and I asked the pupils to think about the meaning of the word 'inspiration'. There were good responses,

e.g. 'when somebody can do something and you really want to do it yourself'. Examples were also suggested, including an Olympic runner, a famous footballer, or a social improver like 'the man who abolished slavery'. I then asked the pupils to try to see what other words 'inspiration' is made of and the first pupil to respond said 'spirit'. So I asked, what does it mean to say that someone is spirited? Pupils replied, lively, enthusiastic, and full of life. The pupils evidently had concepts of inspiration. Two video clips were now shown, to exemplify inspiration further. One was the life story of Van Gogh (Channel 5 2002) and the second was Channel 4's 'Faith in Action' programme about an ex-drug addict turned youth worker (Channel 4 2002). We discussed the clips one at a time, asking: what inspires these men? There were interesting pupil responses. Regarding Van Gogh, they thought him inspired by nature's beauty, the lives of ordinary people, even ugliness (in his drawing of his alcoholic, pregnant girlfriend); he could make what is ordinary extraordinary, through the use of vibrant colour. Regarding the youth worker they suggested that he was inspired to make sure that others would not go through what he had been through, inspired to be a good father, inspired by his new-found faith in God, and inspired by his feelings of belonging in his church. Finally I set homework, asking the pupils to begin to look for materials, e.g. pictures, symbols or quotes, to build into a poster or presentation on what inspired them personally. It would be several weeks before they made the posters or presentations, but they could be getting ahead with their preparations. Overall, there was a good, intelligent and thoughtful atmosphere about their speaking and listening, and mature attention and responses to the video clips. I judged it to be an effective introductory lesson.



In the second lesson we used pages 14 and 15 of *Judaism for Today* (Wright C., 2000) as a starting point, focusing on the quote from 'Alice' on Passover celebrations and family closeness: 'parents naturally love their children, but children don't naturally love their parents back'. I was trying to take account of the 'family and friends' strand in the cycle 2 interviews. Groups were tasked to take the quote and devise drama sketches to explore its meaning and whether they agreed with it. There was lively preparation with all the usual buzz and signs of enthusiasm for drama work. We picked out two sketches to have performed and discussed (on the basis of which groups felt most ready and confident to do this). In the first, a mother had accidentally thrown out a teenager's homework, so there was a row. Later when the teenager wanted to go out, the mother would not allow this before the homework was done! There ensued a complicated sneaking out aided by mobile phones. Discussion points emerged, including the ideas that parents try too hard to be good parents and that teenagers can be very crafty and devious. In the second play, a teenager saw a counsellor because his parents were hitting him. The discussion revolved around the point that the quote was reversed here, in that parents sometimes feel that children are a nuisance and react angrily whilst children are always moved powerfully by what their parents do. Finally, there was some summary discussion on family, inspiration and love, and how they linked. There was the suggestion that both good families and good inspiration rely on love, whether love between people or love for something. I said that next week we could do more on Passover and that I hoped it may help to bring out these themes more fully.

In the subsequent third lesson, we began with a review of the drama pieces. There was good recall and this set the scene well. We then watched Clive Lawton's film of his family's Passover celebrations in Liverpool (Viewtech 1992). There was excellent attention to the film, and a thoughtful, studious atmosphere. Later the pupils reported enjoyment of its 'personalised' quality, having rightly sensed that it was about a real family doing things that happened regularly and naturally whether or not a film was being made. We went on to discuss: what is inspirational here? The pupils' responses were that ancient traditions were inspirational because they ran deep; family closeness was inspirational because it made people safe and secure and allowed them to express themselves; and the emphasis on freedom was inspirational, because freedom itself was inspiring. I then set a task for the class, asking them to imagine and plan a special event for their family and / or friends, designed to reflect what is important, special or sacred to those concerned. The pupils began the task and after ten minutes or so they fed back some ideas. There could be the serving of favourite foods followed by giving of gifts and speeches to or about one another; performances of skills (e.g. musical skills) gained over the preceding year; or visits to favourite restaurants where perhaps there had been memorable family occasions before. There were also accounts of existing special family events including Eid celebrations ('we wouldn't change it'). Time was short to develop these ideas fully, and the pupils were asked to finish the task for homework.

The fourth lesson was unusual in that I was not in school to teach it. I left cover work from text-books on the Hajj (e.g. Aylett and O'Donnell 2000, Keene 1996) to get the pupils ready for what was planned for the next week. This was



intended as building general knowledge and understanding, and to be simple and straightforward for the supply teacher or probably non-specialist cover teacher. I also left instructions that the pupils were to have their ‘what inspires me personally’ presentation ready for the start of next week’s lesson. I later heard that the lesson went smoothly.

The fifth was the last topic lesson, indeed the class’s last RE lesson of year eight. We began by giving volunteer pupils opportunities to share aloud their inspiration presentations. Several took the chance to do so. An intricate ‘inspiration tree’ *papier maché* sculpture was presented. It had envelopes attached to the branches, containing details of inspirational people and things; pop stars and models for their confidence, song words and art for their beauty. Presentations of personal posters and collages followed, with pictures and notes about the loving qualities of family members, the beauty of the night sky, the possibility of inspiration and comfort through music and in one poster how God inspired. There were read aloud written pieces about the care of family members and even teachers: a Newly Qualified Teacher to whom the class had given a hard time was cited as inspirational for getting on and teaching them some interesting science despite their naughtiness. This was a very good twenty minutes indeed. A pupil noted the ‘inspiring things’ on the board in a spider diagram for me as the discussion went on. Next there was a brief review of what the class had learned about the Hajj in my absence the previous week, and then we watched the Belief File programme on the Hajj (British Broadcasting Corporation 2000c). The pupils were briefed to look for points of contact between our diagram on the board and what inspired Muslims on the Hajj. There

was attentive watching and then some points were offered in discussion. Firstly there was a connection between Muslims' feeling of inspiration from Allah on the Hajj and that some of our class had included beliefs about God in their posters or presentations. Secondly there was the point that the Hajj is said to prepare people to overcome difficulties later in life and that some of our speakers had said that loving family members help them to do that. Thirdly, pilgrims' reports of inspiration from nature on the Hajj were connected to remarks about the beauty of the night sky by one of our speakers. Fourthly, it was asked whether inspiration from the examples of Muhammad and Ibrahim could be compared to famous people inspiring speakers from our class. It would have been very good to discuss this latter point further, but we had run out of time.

Broadly speaking, my participant observation notes again reflected now familiar themes in the pupils' motivation. These were that they appreciated chances to relate material to their own lives and circumstances and they enjoyed work that they could design and direct themselves. Again there was a sense of dialogue between the topic's prepared material and the pupils' responses to it, through which they were often able to reflect on what was significant to them personally. The guiding concept of inspiration was an effective bridge between the religious content and the pupils' life-worlds. Perhaps the topic was the best version of such balance so far achieved. This had come not only through the effectiveness of the inspiration concept but also as a result of improving by repeated practice and reflection, for it was the fruitful relationship between religious material and personal response which I tried over and again to achieve in my teaching of RE. For the pupils, I sensed in retrospect that they were more and more used to this



same ideal. However, there also followed evidence (see Questionnaires, directly below) that my own interest and enthusiasm was a condition of theirs: the lesson for which I was absent, the study of Hajj from text books, was rated as least interesting by far.

### **Questionnaires**

The class were given questionnaire sheets on which I itemised the topic's activities and asked for a mark out of ten for each activity, marks to be awarded on interest and enjoyment, and for brief explanations of marks. Fourteen sheets were filled in, all but one completely (the incomplete sheet had marks out of ten for all activities but no explanations of marks). It was done as a pair activity.

Average marks for each activity (or in some cases lesson) were calculated:

- Discussion of what inspiration means, videos and discussion about what inspired Van Gogh and what inspired the drug dealer turned youth worker: 6.
- Reading on Passover and drama on 'parents naturally love their children, but children don't naturally love their parents back': 7.
- Video on Passover celebration and writing or design activity on what would be a special meal for you and your family or friends: 7.
- Using text books to find out about Hajj: 3.
- Preparing your own poster or other presentation about what inspires you personally: 8.
- Presentations on what inspires us personally, comparing these to video on Hajj and how Hajj inspires Muslims: 7.

As in the previous two cycles, there was a mixture of positive and negative comments on each task or lesson. On the discussion of what inspiration means, together with the videos and discussion about what inspired Van Gogh and what inspired the drug dealer turned youth worker, there were pupils who found this work enjoyable and a good way of comparing experiences of inspiration:

It was enjoyable and interesting.

I found this interesting because you got to see what inspired other people and it made you think about what inspired you.

A good comparison but video was not hard to follow.

But as in cycle 2 there were also pupils who complained that watching videos is boring:

It was boring and I didn't enjoy it.

The work did drag on and the drug addict was really boring.

Regarding the reading on Passover and the drama on 'parents naturally love their children, but children don't naturally love their parents back', positive remarks were appreciative of the active, collaborative and existentially relevant quality of the work:

Introduction was boring but vital and drama work was fun.

It was active and creative.

It was fun, interesting and you worked with your friends.



It was interesting acting out a sometimes really life situation.

Negative responses were few but evidently some had found the task slightly difficult:

It was a bit strange.

It was quite hard to understand.

When reflecting on the video on Passover celebration and the writing or design activity on what would be a special event for you and your family or friends, pupils had valued the creativity and enjoyment of the lesson:

It was fun designing a meal / ritual.

This was very fun. It was enjoyable to work with a friend and a good opportunity to be creative.

We enjoyed this.

Our work was all about us in a different way of telling people.

It was inspirational and fun to do.

Where pupils had reservations, these concerned an inability of the tasks to bring ideas out:

Good but hard for people who have no special meanings in life (*the mark is 8 though*).

It didn't bring a lot of ideas.

It was ok but a bit boring.

When explaining their low marks for using text-books to find out about Hajj, the pupils were inclined to complain of the 'text-book' character of the lesson, even though one or two found it informative:

They gave us lots of information on the Hajj.

It was boring because all we did was read some pages of writing.

This was one of the worst ways to find out about the Hajj.

I did not find it very interesting.

Commenting on preparing their own poster or other presentation about what inspires them personally, the personal and creative aspects of this work were highly valued by the pupils:

You couldn't give it less than 10 because its your work on inspiration and inspiration is important.

Great work.

Fun and creative.

This was fun and hard but it gave me a headache trying to think of all the things that inspire me! It is also a very personal thing.

I really enjoyed this because our ideas were our own and we could say what we feel.

It was fun because you could use your imagination.



Even so, there was again some limited complaint that relevant ideas were hard to come by:

It was hard.

We didn't know what inspired us so it was a bit boring.

Turning lastly to the presentations on what inspires them personally and comparing these to the video on Hajj and how Hajj inspires Muslims, the pupils again appreciated the possibilities for comparison of different peoples' experiences:

A good opportunity for some and another good comparison.

It helps you and others to understand what inspires you, and the things that inspire you are similar to the things that inspire Muslims.

It was very interesting.

Educational.

We enjoyed hearing about other people's work.

It was fun seeing what inspired other people and comparing it to videos.

And once more there were misgivings that this lesson – or, part of it – was passive and therefore boring:

Not very active.

We nearly fell asleep it was so boring but it was good to see what Muslims do on Hajj.

When analysed, the questionnaire data seemed to offer no substantially new points. The pupils were motivated by active and creative learning opportunities. They were motivated by the chance to engage in self-reflection, to bring forward their own ideas and experiences and to use these as content in their studies. The examination of material from religious traditions was motivating when in the service of these first two concerns. There were clear points about the value of chances to compare your beliefs and experiences with those of others. Regarding less engaging classroom experiences, these seemed to be characterised by a passive receiving of material or by activities not felt to promote the active, creative investigation of personally relevant content. The lesson felt to be least engaging, the study of Hajj through text books, took place in my absence. There are several possible lines of interpretation here. It could be that book-based learning was found dull. Alternatively, the pupils may have missed my personal interest in them and my confidence to ask them to learn in an active and creative way. After all, a key aim of the project was to help me to teach them in a motivating way. Yet there were also indications that for some pupils, creative and open-ended tasks need more secure scaffolding to be fully effective.

Because in this cycle the data from participant observation and questionnaires offered no really new conclusions in relation to style and process, I thought it would be wise to structure the interviews around issues of *content*. This proved to be a turning point in the study: from now, there continued to be a greater focus on content. The theme of inspiration appeared to have been an interesting one for the pupils. I thought it would be productive to hear what the pupils said about



inspirational features of their own lives, and why the task with the highest mark was the poster or other presentation on what inspired them personally. Following cycle 2's conclusions, I had already wanted to ask them about the inspirational qualities of close personal relationships, and also about how a study of religion – in this instance, of Judaism and Islam – can help to promote awareness of such elements of the self. Thus, the results of cycle 3's participant observations and questionnaires built on the conclusions of cycle 2, where the significance of the above factors had already begun to appear.

### **Interviews**

As in the two previous cycles, I framed three clear interview questions based on what participant observation and questionnaires had revealed or confirmed to be significant. The questions were:

- Why do you think the poster or other presentation on what inspires you personally was the task with the highest questionnaire mark?
- Why are family and friends inspirational?
- Did the work on Passover and Hajj help you to think about what inspires you personally?

As before, I present the interview data one question at a time. Again, the interview questions are the broad categories under which the data are organised, and finer, more differentiated categories then emerge as the data are discussed.

On the question of why the poster or presentation on what inspires you personally had been given the highest mark, the pupils gave two reasons for this. They had appreciated the personal nature of the work, and they had enjoyed the opportunity to be creative. In the first interview that took place, the two themes were mingled as the pupils and I conversed. The pupils also pointed out how as a consequence of the personal and creative aspects of the task, there was no right or wrong answer and that this enabled interesting communication between them:

O: Why do you think the poster or presentation on what inspired you personally got the highest marks?

K: Because some people find it hard to explain what they believe in a way that everyone can understand. I think for me as well I find it easier to draw it or present it.

O: So part of it was that you got to draw a poster. What about the part of it that you got to work on what inspires you personally?

K: Well I found it interesting because, erm, I don't know . . .

EH: I like to know what, like, everyone . . . inspired everybody, I thought it was quite fun.

K: Because until you . . . well I didn't know what actually inspired me until I thought about it properly.

O: Did you make a poster?

HP: Yeah you did, with HR. I liked my poster!

O: I liked your poster.

HP: It was good. I did it on cards, then you could see the things that I like. I like hearts. Heart means love and stuff like that. So I like that sort of stuff and



that's why I put it on the background. I like the . . . I thought it was good the way we could show other people what we liked.

S: Well I liked it because it was fun. I can't really remember mine. Oh yeah I can remember, because the stuff that inspires you is quite important because if you have nothing you want to get good at, nothing you want to do . . . the topic was my favourite but the actual idea . . .

EH: I think that's the best one we've done you know. Because there were loads of different answers to it. For different people different things inspired them.

S: Because you can say something that's close to your heart.

K: And there's no right and wrong. You just like draw your own feelings, like . . . I don't know, really.

S: No-one disagreed with what you said.

EH: Yeah because like you can't.

O: It hit home personally?

HP: Yeah.

In other exchanges pupils related the 'personal' aspect of the task to their liking of freedom over their work:

O: Why do you think the poster, or whatever – tree - about what inspires you personally got the highest mark?

R: I think it got the highest mark because you had complete and utter, you know, freedom. You could do it any specific way, you could do it however

you wanted. It was just what you thought and everything, and you didn't have to use other ideas. It was just something completely made up by you.

O: It's the personal nature of it?

R: And the freedom of it, yeah.

M: I felt it got the highest mark because everyone enjoyed it. They were doing what they wanted to do, they . . . there were two sets of things, like you could do a poster but some people might not like to do a poster but you could do what you want and they enjoyed it.

O: So it was the choice?

M: Yeah.

RJ: I think people liked it because you got to do what you wanted and you got to play around and it was more fun.

CS: It was good because you can do what you want. And there's no restrictions, and stuff.

JC: It was fun, and you got lots of different ideas.

OH: Because you could enjoy it more. And you got to do it at home as well, which was different. And you could like let other people know what inspires you instead of like . . . just telling them.

M: You didn't have a set task and people wanted to show how original they were. It was something they could really open up, and show off, yeah.

When pushed on the possibility that the concept of *inspiration* might have been the motivating factor, pupils nevertheless reverted to the 'personal' explanation:



O: Personal enjoyment. Well, you could have qualities like that if you weren't working on inspiration. So far you're saying it was the way we were working, right? But what about the fact that it was on inspiration?

NG: I suppose it made it a bit different, because like it's what inspires *you* so it's easier to think about yourself rather than have to do a poster on something you don't know or somebody you don't know.

Others valued the fact that the emphasis on personal inspiration directed them to substantial content:

ESM: You had a goal. You had to have stuff that inspired you. Like in my German lesson the other day the teacher said right, we're gonna be filmed and I want you to have a conversation about stuff you've learned in German. You'd ask her what stuff and she was just like 'well you know . . . .', there was nothing solid so no-one's bothered.

By the final interview I was able to use pupils' remarks to validate the 'personal-creative' point:

O: Why did the poster on what inspires you personally get the highest mark?

AS: 'Cause you put on what you like, and stuff. That's it.

HR: 'Cause you could say what you wanted and it could really express *you*.

And just like, well people got really into it and got all pictures and stuff.

PB: It was a good chance for everyone to be creative, because everyone was like doing their own different things so it helped everybody enjoy it more. They got more into it, and involved.

O: Between the three of you you've said what the others have said in the other interviews. It got the highest mark because you could think about yourself . . .

AS: You could tell people about what you like.

O: Exactly, and the other reason was your point about a creative opportunity, finding your own pictures, making your own poster or presentation. Do you think that's right – the personal side and the creative aspect, they were the things that made people enjoy it more?

AS: Yeah.

Others: Yeah.

There was a real scarcity of divergence from the 'personal-creative' line, amounting to one apparently isolated comment:

RS: I don't really think it makes a difference. It's just like drawing whatever. It doesn't really matter that it's a certain thing that you're doing.

On the second question of why family and friends are inspirational, discussions revolved around the idea of love:

O: How do they inspire you?

K: Through maybe what they do.



EH: 'Cause if you go through like hard times well they're always there for you. And with HR she gave loads of money to something and we all thought we want to do something like that too. We thought it was really good of her to do that.

O: If somebody like a family member or a friend loves you very much and makes it obvious that they do, why is that inspirational?

S: It's nice to feel that somebody appreciates you. And you have to try to do it back.

O: Like that drama activity, parents naturally love their children but children don't naturally love them back?

EH: I don't think it's true, I think it's the other way round. Some parents beat their kids up but . . .

S: Some kids can do worse than their parents! Every time you do something bad, or every time you argue with your mum and dad.

K: It's more like verbally because sometimes you go 'I hate you' or something like that. And you don't stop to think about all the things that you feel. You don't really have to do that much for them, do you?

HP: Actually I think that some kids actually do say they hate their parents but parents say I hate you back. I said I hate you to my mum and she said I hate you too! But then that made me feel sad because kids don't necessarily mean it and the parents know that they don't and how would you like it if they turned around and said it in your face.

S: She's just getting the point across about how she feels if you say it to her.

O: But why do you think HP that relationships with your family are inspiring?

HP: Because when they love you and then you sort of fall out with them you want to make up with them straight away, and it makes you feel a bit insecure when you love someone and you ask them to forgive you, and stuff like that. Because if you love someone so much, when they turn around and they're tight to you it makes you sad and you want to make up with them.

K: When you fall out you might still like love them but . . .

EH: If you've fallen out with someone and you write them a note with like 'I'll always love you no matter what happens' – some people do, on planners and stuff – and then if something really serious happens so that you don't actually love them . . .

S: If you have little falls out over little things like if somebody's laughed at the wrong moment, they say they've fallen out with you but I hope they don't mean it. You do like your friend, but you don't like what they did.

EH: But if you fall out with people it can kind of make the friendship stronger.

HP: When you fall out with people you sort of tell them what they're annoying you and stuff. You say what you've kept in your head. Then, you can forget all those things and be their friend, so it sort of stops.

It was also evident in other interviews that for the pupils, such intense love can focus you on how to become a better person; for them, this is one important meaning of 'inspiration':

O: Why are friends and family inspirational?

AS: 'Cause you need them, so.



PB: 'Cause they're the people you're with most of the time, and they're like really important to you. And anything they do, like if you have older brothers and stuff they set expectations and they help you out all the time.

HR: 'Cause like, if you didn't have family and friends you'd be lost, because I don't know how to describe it . . .

O: Just say what you think, just do your best.

HR: Erm, if your friends are really good friends and they're always there for you and stuff, and your family's like that, I think it just inspires you to be a better person. It's just like no matter what you do they'll always love you and it's . . . I don't know, I just think that they're great, and they inspire you in lots of different ways.

O: In the posters and so on, family and friends again came out as very important, this time in the sense of being inspirational. Why are they inspirational?

A: Erm, well when you're like normally at home you don't think of it that much but when you gave us that homework it made me think, well my parents love me so much and that's what inspires me. Because I believe that people should love each other equally.

ESM: Yeah, kind of similar. I don't think I put family and friends in my work 'cause - did I? Do you remember?

O: Your case was slightly different. Headlines were things like music.

Whereas for most people headlines were really family and friends, that came into yours but not in such an important way I don't think.

ESM: Yeah, because I do get inspired by family and friends and love but I don't think like we should love each other equally because that's not fair. You can't love everyone equally, or you can't love everyone, or you just turn into one of those psychos or hippies and end up taking a lot of drugs. But I think it inspires a lot of people because your family can love you so much that it's really hard to believe and things that are hard to believe I think are stuff that almost always inspires you. Because it's so high, and you wanna push yourself that high as well. Does that make sense?

For other pupils, related to the complex of ideas about love and personal improvement were concerns for individuality. Some saw family and friends as contexts for their development into individual characters:

M: Friends and family, like they're quite close to you and everything. Everyone's really my friend and family in my opinion . . . but, they're true to themselves. They're not like following everyone around, copying everyone. They're being their own person and they're not copying someone, like dressing the same or acting the same.

AB: I think your family is inspirational to you because they're different, and you want to be different and have your own likes and stuff.

O: What do you mean? That they're all individual and that helps you to be?

AB: Meaning, my sister . . . my brother likes music, my Dad likes . . . stuff, my Mum likes cooking horrible food . . .

O: Ungrateful!



AB: I am! They're all different, they're all different people, my brother's got brown hair, me and my sister have got ginger hair.

O: Why's that inspirational?

AB: Because you want to be different as well. You want to stand out, and stuff.

Here again, some slight diversion from the dominant themes could be noticed.

One or two pupils were against the idea that family and friends are inspiring:

RS: Not really! Because they're just like people. They aren't going to inspire you! Or maybe it's just because I'm like boring. They aren't like pop stars and stuff.

JS: I don't think they're inspiring, more like important to you.

On the first and second questions it is easy to analyse the data into dominant and divergent themes; on the third question, whether studies of Passover or Hajj had helped the pupils to think about what inspires them, it is harder to do so. The complexity of this first exchange shows why (it is also an excellent example of searching and frank dialogue between pupils of differing backgrounds, in this case a Muslim and four secularised friends of hers):

O: Did learning about Hajj and Passover help you to think about what inspires you?

A: Not really.

ESM: No, I can't say it did at all. I enjoyed the bit where you had to do the meal and stuff but learning about the Passover and Hajj . . .it didn't inspire me at all, it was just what inspired other people. And you get given a list of what inspires other people and unless it's very well explained or you actually know the person, it's completely needless to you.

O: Why did you like making up the meal?

ESM: Because it was fun. Again, it was like creative and free and something to work to, which I like.

N: It was alright. I did enjoy working with my friends and making that friendship meal. There were certain things that we had in the meal like all the food had to be round, to represent the earth. It was really really fun.

ESM: Ours were all from different countries to represent the world.

JN: I thought it was interesting but it wasn't very inspirational.

AB: I think people didn't find it inspiring because the people who are doing it are not likely to do it in their lifetime. They may go to the country where it's done but they're not gonna kiss the black stone or anything.

ESM: I think it's often people who are quite removed from you, like their religion is completely different from all my beliefs, so I have to use a lot of effort to get around to seeing why it could be inspirational and it keeps clicking into the back of my head when they say that they're inspired to walk around the black stone. Well it's just a black stone – however they see it, to me it's just . . .

JN: Yeah but it means more to them.

ESM: I know it means more to them, but I just see it as a black stone so it's not gonna inspire me.



JN: It's about how people come together.

A: I think why it doesn't inspire me – it's what somebody else does, it's what somebody else finds inspiring, and you don't really find that inspiring because it's not something you normally do or anything.

O: What about JN's idea of togetherness on the Hajj, that it can be inspiring?

N: And wearing the same clothes.

ESM: I don't think I'm that cynical but maybe I am about religion. People going together and trying to touch this big lump of rock, and I just think brainwashing, so, you know. And if it inspires them then great, they should carry on with it, but it doesn't inspire me.

O: Brainwashing?

AB: I don't see it as brainwashing. It's not brainwashing, it's just lots and lots of people showing their beliefs. Because you can be different and have the same beliefs.

ESM: I'm not saying you can't, I'm saying I think it's brainwashing when they're saying 'once in your lifetime you have to go to such a place and you have to walk seven times around this black stone or whatever' and I think it's controlling.

JN: They're not going to kill you if you don't.

ESM: But you'll go to hell if you don't do it.

N: I don't think it's brainwashing because you know - if they think that it makes sense then it is true. It's their belief isn't it? People are not forcing them to believe it.

ESM: I'm not saying they're forcing them to believe it, maybe brainwashing was the wrong word.

O: It's got a good discussion going.

ESM: But now I feel like everyone's angry at me.

A: No-one's angry! I don't really see it as brainwashing, I see it as what people have been taught to believe. And if they want to go and run seven times around a black stone then they should do it. But it's not brainwashing, they can make their own choices and people don't have to tell them that they've got to go to that place.

ESM: They don't tell them that and that's what I don't agree with. It says in the Quran that you've gotta go once in your lifetime unless you're ill or you don't have the money. If you believe in Allah you have to do this and I don't think that's right, to tell someone that they have to do something. Unless it's something obvious like you have to not kill people.

JN: Well people choose to become Muslims and then it's their choice. They might want to go to the big black stone.

ESM: I know, I'm saying if they want to then they should. But you shouldn't have to go in case you burn in hell if you don't.

N: It's just showing that if you believe in Allah then he'll command you and you'll do everything for him. You realise that it does show that you love Allah.

When religion was read as commitment, the pupils had no difficulty in pointing out how commitment in religions other than their own can be inspiring as objects of study:



O: Did learning about Passover and Hajj help you to think about what inspires you?

S: I think it's inspirational that they have their feelings for their god. Because they believe that it'll make them a better person. It's amazing that they can do all that.

EH: I agree with what S said that they can do that, because I don't do that. At Christmas all the Christians do . . .for some it's a religious thing but I just think right, get presents. And have a nice meal.

NG: It might inspire me to think about the pilgrimages and stuff. Some people go half way across the world, to get to that one place. That's what inspires me, it shows that they're true to their religion.

The next exchange reinforced the point about the potential to be inspired by material from 'other' traditions, with one Muslim pupil even offering the suggestion that to learn about Hajj should be *more* inspirational to a non-Muslim:

O: Did learning about Passover and Hajj help you to think about what inspires you?

AS: I know about Hajj and stuff already. I thought it might help someone else to think about inspiration.

O: You thought it might help somebody else who wasn't a Muslim more than you?

AS: Yeah.

O: But why would you say as a Muslim that it could help you to think about what inspires you?

AS: I don't know. Because they might be a Muslim or something.

O: When we watched the film about Mecca did it help you to think about what's important to you?

AS: A bit. Praying and stuff, and you need to pray and you need to go to Hajj. That's it. I didn't really think about family at the time.

O: What do you think about this?

HR: Well, I think it's really good to see what inspires other people and I think it's good because we could see the Hajj, and their faith, and everything they do and they just go that far. So like what they believe, and it's kind of the same for me because I'm a Christian and I'd do anything for my faith. If someone asked me right now I'd die for my faith. And I think it's just – it just helped people to see the inspiration that they got out of things and helped them to think about stuff.

As this particular interview concluded, ideas of comparison and dialogue came to the fore:

O: When you think about it, might you compare in your mind Muslim inspiration on the Hajj to Christian inspiration to you?

HR: Well, I think – I don't know because I don't know what it feels like to be a Muslim but I think kind of, because it's both something that people really believe in and what people go for, and what they find improving and all that kind of stuff. In lots of ways it's very different, but in the inspiring way I



think it's the same. You find something that you really believe in and you go for it, and you shouldn't mind what other people think. Cause if you have lots of faith, and if you have a strong view, that's just good.

PB: It's good to see what other people are inspired by because if you don't have a good understanding of it . . . it can help you to understand what you're inspired by. It's like not something that you think about every day so it helps you. It's just something that you don't think about, so it reminds you and helps you to think about it.

In the conclusion to another interview, the same ideas were expressed more in terms of the direct dialogue which had taken place between Muslim and non-Muslim classmates during lessons:

OH: Are white people allowed in?

O: You have to be a Muslim to go in.

OH: Well it's quite interesting. It gets boring after a while, watching videos and that but you know HA and that lot they could actually tell us what it's like to be there.

M: I feel OH is quite right. Videos can be misleading but if someone said in person and you misheard something they could correct you, but on TV they can't.

RJ: It could make you decide that your walk to the bus stop is inspirational!

Or make you think about doing something that you'd always wanted to do.

If there was a core value in the responses to the third question, it was about sharing experiences of commitment, although as we have seen some doubted that religious commitment is positive. Even then, the pupils managed their disagreements amicably and we could say that there was a positive dialogue over the nature of religious commitment.

Reflecting back over the three questions it was possible to see refinements of the original categories. For question one, the broad category was the popularity of the poster or presentation on what inspires you personally, and the fine categories were that the pupils appreciated opportunities to work on personal issues and to work in creative ways. For question two, the broad category was that family and friends were inspirational, and the fine categories were that experiences of love, self-improvement and the development of individuality were valued highly by the pupils. As we have seen there were some atypical divergences from this picture. Although for question three the divergences were more pronounced, the broad category was that studies of Passover and Hajj might help you to think about what inspires you, and the fine category was that this was because of the chance to compare experiences of commitment.

### **Central and satellite categories**

Thus, there was a cluster of categories to consider, including the motivating nature of personal work, the motivating nature of creative work, the very high value of experiences of love, self-development and individuality, and the benefits of comparing experiences of commitment. Clearly what united these factors was the *personal* aspect. Creativity could partly be understood in this light, as the



process of working as yourself in your own way (as we have seen, some of the pupils linked this to a need for freedom). It is difficult to think of more personal matters than experiences of love, self-development and individuality; and when the young people compared their experiences of commitment, these were highly personal, or inter-personal, discussions. Cycle 3's central category was therefore *personal significance*. Close to it were the pupils' continuing needs for active and creative tasks, and to be in dialogues with one another and with material from different religious traditions.

#### **Areas to investigate in cycle 4**

Cycle 3 demonstrated the motivating power of investigations of personal concerns. In this way it was continuous with cycle 1, the central category of which was the motivating power of dialogue, and with cycle 2, the central category of which was the motivating power of existentially interesting investigations. Dialogue is an edifying relationship with religious material (cycle 1), existential interest comes through the direction of such dialogue towards life-issues (cycle 2) and personal significance through the direction of the dialogue towards the inner person (cycle 3). Cycle 4 was the final cycle and I thought that it might be useful to base it on the central categories of all three preceding ones. The teaching could be planned so that experiences of dialogue, together with investigations into the meaning of life and discussions of personal concerns, were fundamental to it. These aims were especially promising because the dialogue would be with Hinduism, a religious tradition with which the pupils were unfamiliar. It would raise profound questions of meaning (especially because the planned topic would also address issues of the origins of the universe). There

would be plenty of scope for debate of personal matters, including life style and particularly vegetarianism. In this way, cycle 4 could introduce new material but I hoped that perhaps it could also have a synoptic function within the project as a whole.

### **Personal Significance, Adolescence and Creativity**

We have seen that for my pupils, personally significant RE meant RE directed to their experiences of love, of close personal relationships, self-development, commitment and individuality. Cycle 4 would present opportunities to develop and investigate this form of RE further, together with the factors of dialogue and existential interest prominent in previous cycles. Before moving to the report and discussion of cycle 4, however, it will be well to consider how the notion of motivation through personal significance affects earlier positions regarding adolescence and creativity, and how it helps to inform the overall recommendations of this thesis to RE teachers.

During chapter 2 (above), considerable thought was given to the ideas of John Cotterell (1996) regarding adolescent needs. It may be remembered that Cotterell is interested in the use of knowledge of adolescents' social relationships in creating educationally motivating environments. In his social psychological perspective, individual well-being is a matter of healthy group membership. In Cotterell's 'convoy model', a person always retains a personal and unique social network. A teacher's task is to maintain supportive environments for young people, especially with attention to group relational structures and settings (Cotterell 1996, 18). Thus, the notion of the school as a motivational



environment is a very useful one. Learning tasks must foster social and personal meaning, or disaffection will set in. But a weakness in Cotterell's work is that he can recommend no such tasks, and instead he sets teachers the unacceptably passive role of providing 'breathing space' for pupils to foster meaning themselves.

Perhaps Cotterell's best pedagogical idea is 'the possible self' (1996, 116).

Adolescents can be helped to focus on the adults they wish to become. When discussing Cotterell's work, I suggested that it would surely be possible for teachers to develop classroom activities that implemented his very positive theories and that enabled pupils to focus on the possible self. What seems primarily to have motivated my pupils over cycle 3 is the chance to do so.

Concentration on what is of primary personal importance helps move one closer to the possible self, because maturity involves clarity on what is important in life; mature people choose lifestyles, partners and occupations on the basis of such clarity. The analysis of cycle 3 data has positioned me to describe RE tasks that may succeed in fulfilling Cotterell's laudable but generalised aims: for the outcome of cycle 3 is that my pupils agree with him on the need for personal significance in a motivating classroom task. However, as I will now show, they are able to be more specific than he about what is involved in such a task.

According to cycle 3's questionnaire data, the most effective task of the topic was the poster or other presentation about what inspires you personally. This task scored highly because it asked pupils to think about their own personalities in a challenging way that also required imagination and creativity. This initial theme

was followed up in interviews, where a more differentiated picture emerged. That there was no right or wrong answer for the ‘personal inspiration’ task enabled interesting communication; the posters and presentations were all different, and therefore the plural and varied nature of the class again proved to be an excellent educational resource. The task was a means of communication and there was reflexive learning, through which awareness of others fed awareness of the self, and vice versa. There was freedom to carry out the task as one wished, but there was a guiding structure. At the close of chapter 6, the forging of links between religious materials and the pupils’ own ideas and experiences was described as a guiding structure for classroom task work; in the case of the ‘personal inspiration’ task, the guiding structure was one of more direct interpersonal dialogue between members of the class. This point is lent further substance later in the interview record, where it becomes clear that the success of the task had to do with sharing experiences of commitment. Even though some pupils doubted that religious commitment is positive, there was a positive dialogue over the nature of religious commitment. The dialogue was lively, because pupils were encouraged to debate different points of view, some of which were sharply critical.

Thus, the following pedagogical strategies can be offered to RE teachers in addition to Cotterell’s pedagogical principle of focusing on the possible self. Develop creative, imaginative tasks where pupils reflect on what really matters to them personally. Set up structures through which the pupils can exchange ideas on this subject and encourage plenty of dialogue and discussion so that they can learn about and from one another. Allow differences over the nature of religious



commitment to result in animated and mutually enriching exchange, although these are obviously issues that require careful handling by a teacher.

During chapter 3's survey of creativity (above), Paulo Freire's demand for authentic education was considered in terms of the possibility for pupils to create unique and significant knowledge of their own (Freire 1996, 1974a, 1974b). The aim of knowledge-creation was later modified through engagement with Gadamer's hermeneutics (1975), according to which new understanding needs to be seen as built through tradition and dialogue rather than achieved unilaterally.

Clearly cycle 3's data support a dialogical approach to learning, and yet they also appear to reverberate with Freire's concerns for authenticity. In chapter 3, I reported Freire's insistence on the need for teachers to help pupils to identify generative themes in their own experiences and to investigate these in personally meaningful language (1996, 68-105). Cycle 3's 'personal inspiration' task evidently satisfied these conditions. I also considered Freire's view that this investigation of generative themes must be combined with an awareness of relationships with others and with the world (1974a, 3); the positive dialogue resulting from the 'personal inspiration' task indicates that pupils value these factors too, and it has led to recommendations concerning how RE teachers might approach this issue in practice.

During chapter 3, I also aligned Freire's thought with that of John Hull (1996).

The open-ended, robust nature of the pupils' discussions of religious commitment in this cycle is reminiscent of Hull's request that they should be

encouraged to investigate religious material in a critical way, including questions about whose interests are served and whose denied as consequences of religious beliefs or practices. For Hull, the key question is where the authority resides, and authentic authority is always dialectical, or mediated. In order to mediate authentic authority, Hull argues, RE must move dialectical relationships into the place of non-dialectical forms of thinking. RE must continue to be multicultural, and to encourage pupils to reflect on and take account of what they learn. My cycle 3 data add this observation to those of Hull: RE's pupils must have opportunities to consider what really matters in their lives, and to participate in searching, yet sympathetic, dialogues concerning the varied nature of their personal commitments.

### **Conclusion**

Over cycle 3, personal significance emerged as the central factor in the pupils' motivation. Pupils were motivated by tasks that related religious material to issues of importance to them, including peace and the achievement of meaning in life. Again, there are strong connections to the key findings of previous cycles (cycle 1's of dialogue and cycle 2's of existential interest); and again, the central category of personal significance is the product of analysis of several satellite categories: the motivating nature of personal work, the motivating nature of creative work, the very high value of experiences of love, self-development and individuality, and the benefits of comparing experiences of commitment. The findings of cycle 3 have continued to develop my earlier positions on adolescence and creativity. Following Cotterell (1996), classroom tasks have been described in which pupils investigated what is vital to them personally and



were able to consider their possible selves. In ways reminiscent of Freire (1996) and Hull (1996), pupils could examine their own generative themes with their own forms of expression, and the resulting debates over the nature of religious commitment placed them in situations of dialectical authority.

## **Chapter 8 Key Findings Cycle 4: Hinduism and Creation**

### **Introduction**

As was stated earlier, cycle 4's teaching material was Hinduism and Creation, and the research was planned to review the core categories of the first three cycles (dialogue, existential interest and personal significance). Methodologically, cycle 4 followed previous cycles in the use of participant observation and questionnaires to identify broad factors in the pupils' motivation and of interviews to establish a more detailed and differentiated account of these. But as we will see when the interview data are introduced, because of the synoptic aim of cycle 4, the interview schedule was not only framed by its participant observation notes and questionnaire responses but also by the core categories of the first three cycles. Towards its close, the chapter includes discussion of how its findings relate to earlier themes in adolescence, thus building the cumulative argument of the thesis. In this way also it is similar to the previous three chapters, but because by the end of this chapter my initial presentation of empirical data is complete, I can also offer new summary remarks on what the central findings of all four cycles suggest in relation to motivation in RE.

### **Participant observation**

Once more, the participant observation notes were used to summarise the teaching and learning processes and to show my initial understandings of the pupils' motivation. This time the topic lasted for eleven lessons but, for reasons given below in the Questionnaires section, the data presented here result only from the first eight of those lessons.



The first lesson was a topic introduction. We discussed the definition of an ultimate question. Pupils suggested good ideas, such as ‘a final question’, ‘a question nobody can answer’ and ‘a question people have different answers to’. This latter plurality theme continued all lesson. The pupils were next asked to make a preliminary expression of their thoughts about two questions (‘why are we here?’ and ‘why is there anything?’) in any way they chose. There was a wide range of responses including poem, essay, story, art sketch, cartoon strip and drama piece. Some pupils worked individually, some in pairs, and there was a drama group of six. The class worked away very well (my impressions were that this was because of engaging ultimate questions and freedom to choose work style). Finally there was a plenary where some pupils reported their task work. We watched and discussed an excellent drama piece, a ‘TV interview’ with different people of different viewpoints (religious, scientific, etc.). Then two written essays were read aloud. The first surveyed different viewpoints and concluded with a personal belief (‘I think it is because of God but I’m not sure.’). The second argued that God has placed us here to fulfil our potential and to improve the world. Listening pupils were quick to point out in response that although good, this second piece reported only one point of view. Thus, the plurality theme was again at the forefront. Overall, it was a lively and very enjoyable lesson. Homework was set, to find and bring one natural and one manufactured object to the next lesson. I asked that the objects should be personally meaningful and interesting for others to hear about.

In the second lesson all pupils had a pair of objects. There was a rich variety: antique dresses, photographs, semi-precious stones, interestingly shaped leaves, vegetables and sports equipment. The objects were placed on tables and within their groups of six, pupils took turns to talk about their choices of objects. I noted an excellent engaged and friendly atmosphere. After about fifteen minutes we took some whole class feedback about what had been interesting. The antique dress had attracted attention; it was Chinese and had been worn for a memorable wedding. The story of the wedding was told to all by the pupil who had brought the dress. A task was then set, to choose one of the objects you had brought and compose its biography or autobiography. Imagination could replace factual knowledge but there was a requirement to take the story as far back in time as possible. Despite the 'hard' nature of the writing the class got on well with only one or two people stuck for ideas. These pupils were sent to look around the classroom to see how others were doing it, and then they were able to begin writing themselves. About twenty minutes of story-writing later, one or two attempts were read aloud to stimulate a plenary discussion. The biography that provoked most comment was of a leaf. Where do you really begin it? By describing a tree, or a seed? An orange brought by another pupil was cited as an instance of the same problem. The point would be useful in discussions of Hinduism and cyclic time, and I said that next week's lesson would develop the themes further.

To begin the third lesson I explained that we would build the 'objects' stories and ideas to a consideration of three questions:



- What is involved in creation?
- What are the differences between made and natural objects, as far as creation is concerned?
- Is the universe more like a made or natural object?

The pupils were then tasked to get into groups, to choose one object brought by one member of their group last week, and prepare a mime piece on how it was made (or how it began). They were advised to pick an object that had had an interesting story written about it. After fifteen minutes to prepare, mimes were presented on a rose, a ring, a shoe and a football. After each mime a volunteer from outside the group had to try to 'tell' the story and once this had been accurately done I asked 'what is involved in the creation of this object'? Useful ideas came out of the pupils' responses, such as a mingling of natural elements and good circumstances, the skill of a craftsman, a clear sense of what the object will be used for and a good design. Then, to sum up, we went on to the second and third questions identified at the commencement of the lesson. On differences between natural and made objects, the main point made was that natural objects do not rely on human ingenuity. However, it was countered that the rose was not a wild rose and had had to be cultivated and cared for. Another point, reminding us of last week's discussion, was that made objects may have a more definite beginning – natural objects such as leaves are in a way 'circular'. It was also stated that all made objects have their origin in natural materials anyway. On whether the universe was more 'made' or 'natural' there was an interesting disagreement. Some said 'natural' because it is circular (i.e. science

suggests it will implode in the future, then there may be another big bang), others said ‘made’ because God created it. These last points set us up nicely to go on and consider a Hindu creation myth in the next lesson. This lesson had been very lively and thought provoking. The mime activity had allowed all to be involved and in the discussion, many pupils offered sensitive and perceptive comments.

At the start of the fourth lesson we reviewed the ‘is the universe more like a natural or manufactured object?’ question and the various responses that had been made. These matters were easily recalled. I then read aloud a Hindu creation story (Palmer and Bisset 1988, 20) and asked the pupils to name its most important features. They identified circular time, the impacts of the members of the *trimurti* (*Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, the three Hindu gods of creation, preservation and destruction respectively), huge powers of creation and destruction, and vast time scales. I asked the class how you might tell the story, and emphasise its main features, in an art composition. There were good first ideas including the use of a circular shape, the invention of symbols for the gods, the use of darkness and light for periods of destruction and creation. The pupils were then given thirty minutes to draft such art compositions. All pupils engaged well, and there was good work in progress; the emerging ideas included a battle between warriors of darkness and light, and a world sometimes ablaze and sometimes at peace. For a plenary session, these first sketches were displayed and discussed before homework was set, to look on [www.hindunet.org](http://www.hindunet.org) for images of the trimurti and think of ways to build these into the final compositions next week.



The fifth lesson had a straightforward structure where the aims of the art task were reviewed, the class spent forty-five minutes working to make display posters from their sketches and homework, and we looked at and discussed one or two completed pieces at the end. Some excellent art had been done by now, and further completed pieces were given in after finishing off at home or at lunchtime. An outstanding effort involved the cradling of the world by the members of the trimurti, beautifully described.

The sixth lesson aimed to build on the art ideas to get more into the Hindu philosophy, and to make a dialogue between the pupils' views and experiences and the Hindu ideas. Therefore three main lesson questions were introduced at the start:

- What cycles exist in our lives?
- If you believed that life was a cycle, how would that affect your behaviour?
- How might a Hindu person respond to the first two questions?

As a starter activity the pupils brainstormed and noted ideas on the first two questions, in small groups. Points were then fed back. There were many examples of cycles including night and day, the seasons, having a baby who later has a baby, and being helpless at the start of your life and again at the end. Next there were two suggestions on 'effects on behaviour' and both involved reincarnation beliefs. One person said that if you believed your life would begin again as many times as you died, it would make you reckless: you would not care what you did, it would not matter. RJ replied that you would care because you would want to break out of

*samsara* (the wheel of reincarnation). She had been reading a Hinduism text-book (Mercier 2000), which happened to be on her table in the classroom, and she explained the meaning of the word *samsara* to the class. To engage with question three, and Hindu people's responses to the issues of cycles in life and how belief in cycles should affect behaviour, we looked at a video that surveys Hindu belief and lifestyle in Leicester and India, mostly through the eyes of young Hindus (British Broadcasting Corporation 2002a). AS was amazed at the ideas of an 'elephant god' and of 'many gods' ('so unlike Islam'). Afterwards we drew out good responses, including: *puja* (worship) is a cycle, repeated early each morning, and Hindu celebrations are cyclical, repeated at the same time every year. I invited AS to relay his amazement at *Ganesha* (the elephant-headed deity in Hinduism, associated with wisdom and good fortune) to the class and asked what others had found startling about Hinduism. One pupil replied that she had been surprised to see the destroying of images of deities after the festival, even though they were so beautiful. When I asked why it was done, many were quick to point out the 'reincarnation' link (the deity will have a new body in time for the next celebration). We ran out of time at a good point from which to go on and look at *karma* and reincarnation in the next lesson.

In the seventh lesson, the plan was to build on the previous lesson's points about cycles and to go on to consider *karma*, and whether the pupils believe *karma* is true. So we began with a review of the previous lesson's video and discussion; this was effective, with lots of recall. I wove this into a definition of *karma*. I had several 'translations' on the board ('action', 'action and consequence', 'as ye sow so shall



ye reap’) but the one we used to set up a task was a phrase I had often heard members of the class say: ‘what goes around, comes around’. This was also a good phrase for being cyclical. The task was to present a drama piece, based on ‘what goes around comes around’. After fifteen minutes to get ready there were five entertaining presentations:

- A stressed entrepreneur was killed in a contract murder set up by his wife, who lost all her belongings because the killers burned down their house to destroy any evidence (this one was viewed by the class as especially ingenious).
- In a schoolgirl fall-out the rejecter ended up rejected.
- A mobile phone thief ended up as a victim of theft.
- Gang fights gave rise to a cycle of violence and revenge.
- A serial killer was executed.

We watched and discussed the pieces, assessing whether they worked as illustrations of karma. Then we had a plenary discussion in which I asked the pupils to say whether they believed ‘what goes around, comes around’ is always true, sometimes true or never true. There was only time for three pupils to respond, and all three said ‘sometimes true’. Two agreed that if ‘what goes around, comes around’ was always true, an unmanageable amount of grief would build up and the world would be out of control. The other suggested that karma existed but not because of a god – it was just natural that people reacted to one another. The lesson was a good example of

how a religious concept can be a framework for pupils' own philosophies to emerge and develop, but it is worth noting that 'what goes around, comes around' was already a part of the worldview of many, and not because of prior exposure to Hinduism. This finding links to Eleanor Nesbitt's comment that discussion of Hinduism and vegetarianism needs to take place in the contexts of several different backgrounds to vegetarianism; the belief is not the property of the faith tradition, nor hermetically sealed inside it (Nesbitt 2004, 34).

The plan for the eighth lesson was indeed to focus on vegetarianism, aiming for the broad context mentioned above in relation to Nesbitt's observations. I set up a starter activity where pupils imagined a post-GCSE party for our class, planning a menu that would meet everyone's likes and needs. Feedback succeeded in bringing out good points about belief and diet; we would need vegetarian food, kosher food, halal food as well as food for those with allergies. Several pupils suggested that a vegetarian menu would be the easiest way to meet everyone's needs, but others objected to this; what if some people wanted to eat meat? The exchange of views was lively. We went on to watch a video on Hindu beliefs about food, the sacredness of cows and environmental commitments (British Broadcasting Corporation 2002b). Then, to prepare a plenary discussion, we had a five-minute essay-writing session to follow up the ideas about vegetarianism in the film. The pupils wrote as much as they could about the questions: Is it wrong to eat meat? What do you think of vegetarianism? Finally essays were read aloud by five or six pupils. There was a wide range of responses to the questions, including: meat is a natural part of the food



chain; meat is unnecessarily cruel; meat is not ideal but is necessary if you live in the Arctic, and so on. One pupil offered the thoughtful point that some people justify meat-eating by reference to a cycle of life, whereas in Hinduism the cycle of life idea is used instead to argue for vegetarianism.

### **Questionnaires**

The questionnaires referred only to the first eight lessons, because - unusually - the school made interview time available to me during the final weeks of term. The interview questions had to be identified in good time and the questionnaire data were needed to do this. But the process of administering and analysing questionnaires was as before. I listed the activities of the Hinduism and Creation topic so far on a sheet, leaving room for the pupils to mark each one out of ten for interest and enjoyment and to give brief reasons for their marks. The questionnaires were completed as a pair activity and fifteen sheets were filled in altogether. I calculated average marks out of ten for each activity and analysed the reasons for marks in terms of positive and negative comments. The average marks were:

- Writing and miming the stories of natural and manufactured objects: 6.
- Making an art piece based on the Hindu creation story: 8.
- Discussing cycles in life and watching the video about Hindu beliefs about God: 7.
- Preparing and performing drama pieces about *karma*: 8.

- Watching the video about Hindu beliefs about the world, and writing about and discussing vegetarianism: 6.

On writing and miming the stories about natural and manufactured objects, a clear majority found this 'fun' and 'interesting'. One pair of pupils also enjoyed the work because it was 'different'. Negative views of the tasks were more varied. One reply bemoaned the personal nature of the work: 'these were very personal objects and we didn't enjoy talking about them'. Several expressed unease because the work was 'hard'. One said that doing one's own mime was good but that watching others was boring; another that my request that no valuable objects should be brought to school had proved restrictive. Yet another stated that the writing was good but the miming was boring. Overall the positives seemed to be due to the active, creative and unusual style of the tasks, whereas the negatives seemed to owe more to various personal reservations than to any generalised difficulty or dislike.

On making an art piece based on the Hindu creation story, the mostly positive comments again stressed the 'fun' element. Often linked to this was the observation that organising one's own art composition aids understanding, e.g.: 'It was fun thinking of how to set out your work and making the art piece'. It 'had many possibilities' and 'made you think' as well as the fact that 'we learned about many different religious things'. The negative side was slight. There were hardly any complaints, and therefore it was again hard to find a pattern in those that were expressed: 'it was a bit boring', 'we always do art and RJ hates colouring in'.



On discussing cycles in life and watching the video about Hindu beliefs about God, positive comment usually concentrated on the interesting quality of the material in the programme: 'it was interesting and we learnt different ways of life'; 'this was fun watching the video about the different gods'; 'it was interesting finding out Hindu belief'. One response focused more on the use of videos to 'visual learners' and another stressed the interest in cycles of life. On the negative side, there were responses that equated watching videos with passive and therefore boring lessons; and in one case, the report that watching the programme was good but discussing it was boring.

On preparing and performing drama pieces about *karma*, the responses were almost all very positive indeed. The reasons for responding positively fell into two broad categories. The first was the by now familiar celebration of drama as a method of learning. It is enjoyable, active, good for understanding and creative:

I enjoyed drama and I like working with people your happy working.

It was good because we moved more.

This was good and fun and I understood it all.

I enjoyed this because everyone had different stories!

In the second there was a slightly different emphasis, on the use of drama in engaging with the Hindu content:

This was a good method to get the karma point across as we played the roles of the people involved. It was good because it made you think about your opinions on actions and consequences.

The negative response was atypical: 'We don't really like drama and didn't have enough time'.

On watching the video about Hindu beliefs about the world, and writing about and discussing vegetarianism, positive assessments focused on the importance of the issues and the chance to debate:

I enjoyed this because I thought I could express my opinion and listen to others.

It was good thinking about whether it was wrong to eat meat.

Makes a good discussion.

There were mixed reports contrasting the active enjoyment of making the menu with the passive nature of watching the video:

The menu was a good idea but the video was bad and not memorable.

It was alright making the menu but everything else went as good.



However, one response was that because the video was good, the writing was easy to manage. Fully negative comments questioned the relevance or interest of the vegetarianism debate:

Didn't see the point of discussing what you eat.

Didn't enjoy discussing this.

### **Interviews**

Once more the interview questions were framed through the consideration of participant observation notes and especially through the analysis of questionnaire responses. As we have seen, the art task on the Hindu creation story and the drama task on *karma* were the activities that gained the greatest enthusiasm. By the end of cycle 3, I had already noted that the motivating character of creative art and drama work was well established and needed no further investigation (creative art and drama are active rather than passive, enable collaboration and present opportunities for pupils to develop work in their own ways); and so as in cycle 3, I therefore decided to use the interviews to investigate why certain religious *content* had been experienced as interesting. For this purpose two interview questions were identified:

- Why is the Hindu creation story interesting?
- Why is karma interesting?

The relatively narrow focus on two admittedly broad conceptual areas would, it was hoped, help to make the interview process sharp. To this end, I also decided to have copies of the story available as memory-refreshers, as well as cards bearing our ‘what goes around, comes around’ definition of karma. The pupils were asked to look over these resources before the taped conversations began.

At the end of cycle 3 I also said that I would like to use cycle 4 in a synoptic way, using the teaching and the research to review the conclusions of the previous three cycles: the learning could be planned so that experiences of dialogue, together with investigations into the meaning of life and discussions of personal concerns, were fundamental to it.

With this synoptic aim in mind, I also planned prompts for each of the interview questions, so that the interview schedule was as follows:

1. Why is the Hindu creation story interesting?
  - Does it help you to think about your own views on the beginning of the world?
  - Does it help you to think about the meaning of life?
  - Does it help you to think about what is important to you personally?
2. Why is karma interesting?
  - Does it help you to think about the events in your own life?
  - Does it help you to think about the meaning of life?



- Does it help you to think about what is important to you personally?

But I also decided that the extent to which the prompts would be used would depend on whether the pupils responded freely and extensively to the main questions – in short, on whether or not they needed to be prompted. It turned out that the need for prompts varied from interview to interview. Some interviews contained lengthy passages of free verbal exchange; others were more like series of brief answers to the questions and the prompts. Twenty-five pupils were interviewed, in groups of five. As with the previous cycles, I present the interview data one question at a time. Again, the main interview questions are the broad categories under which the data are organised, and the finer, more differentiated categories then emerge as I analyse the data. On this occasion, as the interview data were analysed, a striking degree of unanimity was discernible, with a very small number of negative or discrepant cases.

On the question of why the Hindu creation story was interesting, the interview responses were based on three clear concepts: plurality, philosophical interest and intrinsic interest. We will see that these three concepts are undoubtedly linked, but it is as well to take each separately in the first instance and consider the links later. Regarding plurality, many pupils indicated that gaining knowledge of a new story helped them to develop awareness of the multiplicity of the world's belief traditions:

O: Why is the Hindu creation story interesting?

NG: I think the story's interesting because it's how the Hindus think the world was created, and that's interesting to find out if it's the same as like, the Christian way.

This comparative aspect came out more fully in several of the conversations.

Sometimes religious plurality was the focus:

ESM: I think it's very interesting because there's more than one god. A lot of . . . in fact I think in all western religions there's only one. There's a lot of emphasis on 'you should only have one god'. And then this – there's thousands, although they're all part of the same one.

AS: I think it's interesting because it tells about a new religion or something. And it's kind of complicated compared to ours, yeah, because they've got like three gods. And we've got different beliefs and they've got different beliefs, so.

O: Do you remember what you said in the lesson about it?

AS: Yeah.

O: You were amazed because it's so different from Islam . . .

AS: They've got so many different gods. Everyone else might believe in, like, a different one.

AS: I reckon Allah made it, and we all have different opinions and stuff.



HA: It makes me think like how the universe was created, and how everything was created. We've got like one god, and these have got three.

AS: They've got like five, man.

KBC: They've got loads!

AS: That elephant, and . . .

HA: Our god doesn't split into, like, three, different . . . whatever it does, it like, covers all.

In another discussion, pupils explored the plurality between religious and scientific views of the universe:

HP: I think it's good because it tells you about reincarnation and stuff. Different people believe different things about the world.

K: Two different beliefs, one about the big bang and one about something else.

HP: All the Hindus believe in the creation story, all the scientists believe in the science story.

As their discussion developed, they debated the nature of religion and science, by assessing the compatibility of Hindu and scientific cosmologies:

EH: What if you're a Hindu scientist?

O: Absolutely.

HP: That's a good one EH!

K: I don't know, because if you're a true Hindu and a scientist, you'd be investigating the science, you wouldn't *believe* it.

HR: You'd probably try to put it into that story.

O: Would you try to make the big bang into a kind of god?

K: Maybe, because the god might have created it.

EH: No, because the three gods might have come out of the big bang.

HP: No, because the three gods are the big bang.

EH: What's he called, the Super Guy or whatever . . .

O: The Supreme One.

EH: If he did the big bang, all the other bangs could be like little bangs.

HP: I think they should call all the lords the big bang.

S: I don't think that a scientist that was a Hindu, I don't think they'd believe that the big bang was a god, because they'd believe in their religion.

K: Just because you're a scientist doesn't mean you believe it; it just means that you're investigating that.

EH: It means you're interested in it. They'd probably do what we're doing, they'd probably put different things together.

S: Yeah but you'd put your religion before your job.

HP: It's easy for us to say because we're not scientists.

HR: You know like Hindus believe that the universe gets destroyed and then created again, well they could like think the big bang is like part of being destroyed or then created again. People like scientists might think there's been a world before and then after, and the big bang's like the start of another world.



This latter exchange is noteworthy for the manner in which the attempt to accommodate plural world-views builds a framework for the pupils' own philosophical questionings. Thus, it reflects the fine categories of plurality and philosophical interest simultaneously. The following conversation also straddled these two fine categories, but in this case plurality was seen as a cause of philosophical difficulty rather than opportunity:

M: Some people believe there is the big bang, or others that different gods created it or something, but it's nice to read sort of everyone's kind of view. Then it gives you kind of like an idea. Some are . . . quite a few are the same, or like, go that way.

A: Well I think it would (help me to form my own view) but, because I've been influenced by lots of stories about how the world was created like the big bang or this, so it would be pretty hard to make your own decision.

AB: It doesn't really help me, it just confuses me even more. There's so many to choose from and I don't really believe in any one of them. It's kind of a mixture of them. Because there's no way a big bang can make the whole world.

JN: I suppose it could, a big bang, create everything . . .but it makes you think how difficult it is.

Other 'philosophical interest' discussions were more straightforward:

JB: I think it's interesting because every time you like . . . it's created every time it's destroyed, when it disappears.

CD: I think it's because of the fact that Hindus believe that the world is destroyed, and then the gods create it again after it, like . . .

TA: It's interesting because it kind of like makes you think. How did the universe really start?

RS: It's interesting because it's a cycle. It goes on for ever.

Here, the story alone had provoked thought about the nature of the universe. Other conversations were animated by the pupils' recognition that in Hinduism they had encountered something unusual, hence the third fine category of intrinsic interest:

JN: I thought it was interesting because it's a bit more exciting than just like the big bang. There's kind of like three gods . . . I can't remember what it says . . .

A: It's cool, he says he's lonely and splits himself in two . . .

JN: Yeah . . . and then he goes around on a big snake thing.

A: And er . . .

JN: And an evil one destroys it but it's like everlasting.

M: Every time he's asleep the world gets destroyed. But every time it gets created again.



HP: I think the story's interesting, it's like talking about the creation of the world and saying about all the lords and stuff. And it's like do you believe it or do you not believe it?

K: I like it because it's . . . this guy has the earth coming out of his belly-button.

EH: A flower comes out of his belly-button.

Jl: I think it's interesting because it's right complicated. The way that they do things. Destroying the universe and a new one comes.

There were other expressions of 'intrinsic interest' which were close to the theme of philosophical interest, where the pupils went beyond remarking on unusual features of the story to include those features in philosophical dialogues of their own. These dialogues included theological reflection on the personality of God and on divine-human relations:

JN: It doesn't say anything about people very much. In a kind of way it says we're little insects. He just comes and destroys the world without any thought for anybody. And then it just starts all over again, without any thought for people.

AB: I don't think it does really, because it just doesn't make sense.

A: I think it makes like, a bit of sense because he grows lonely and splits himself in two to create male and female . . . and then he becomes one again. It does a little bit.

AB: Also on the meaning of life, M might have her own meaning of life that she might grow up and be a great millionaire businesswoman and A could want to be a Kentucky fried chicken and everyone has their own meaning of life.

M: They have different things they want to do. I don't think it says anything. But the part of the story where it says the world is destroyed every night – it kind of says you've got to, if I destroy it every night maybe I'll say I don't want to create it again. It's kind of saying do what you want, enjoy yourself.

OH: But then you die.

JN: And then your purpose in life is to be better when you come back.

O: If you believe in reincarnation.

OH: I don't know, I might do.

There were also instances where the identification of intrinsic interest led back to reflections on religious plurality. Within the reflections on religious plurality could also be discerned further theologically-based interest, expressed in points on the nature of God, good and evil:

N: What I think is, they still say that all the lords like come from one. The Supreme One, and they create so many. What I find is they use it for concentration when they pray, but normally when you look at other religions they don't make statues, they pray wherever they are. But here they have special temples and I think that's very good.



RJ: I think the creation story's really interesting. It's like a story and it's very unusual because a snake starts it off, because in the science story they don't exist then.

ESM: Yeah, in the Bible there's like a snake who's evil and tempts Eve and Adam. But the snake being good in this one is a real turnaround. It's different from the other religions we've studied.

As this latter discussion developed, it was clear that Hinduism was also found to be intrinsically interesting because of its *internal* plurality:

RJ: Different religions have different meanings in life. It just reminds me of a Terry Pratchett book – he's got a world there with little elves and it just reminds me of that.

N: What I think is, the way they've got all these gods, it is a bit complicated. If you're young, say you're a year ten, and you went to fifty festivals a year, it would be quite complicated to get hold of your religion. Having so many gods, and everyone has their own favourite god as well. I just think it's a bit complicated with all these gods.

ESM: It's complicated but I quite like that because it's not just the same story again. You get bored with one, you can go and get another and another, and you get to choose your favourite one. Whereas with most religions you've got a story and if you don't like it, then that's it.

Overall, regarding the pupils' interest in the Hindu creation story, we have a complex pattern of motivation where three factors of plurality, philosophical interest and intrinsic interest interweave in different ways. There were hardly any interview responses pulling in different directions or falling outside the pattern. Of those that were made, either it was hard to detect a pattern or theme to them:

O: Is the story interesting?

OH: It's just very boring. Tedious. It's the way it's set out. I can't read the whole story.

AB: I didn't really find it that interesting because it's not the kind of thing that I like to read and find out about, you know.

Or, they could be interpreted as negative instances of - for example - philosophical reflection:

O: Picking up TA's point, does reading it help you to think about your own views on the beginning of the world?

RS: I don't think it makes you think like that; I just think it's kind of stupid. Weird. Unrealistic.

What of the pupils' interest in the idea of karma? In relation to karma the picture is, perhaps, less complex. The pupils saw karma as a belief which could structure their discussions about existential situations; this was reminiscent of the conclusion to



cycle 2, where it was noted that debates about concrete situations helped the pupils to discuss ideas about life's meaning (see 5b, above). Their reflections on their work about karma were rich in ethical interest. Where interest in karma is the broad category, ethical interest is the fine category: drama and discussion on karma had motivated the pupils to consider the rights and wrongs of human relationships. Often, pupils had to reconsider their drama pieces as a prelude to making their remarks about karma:

O: Why is karma interesting?

TA: Actions and consequences.

O: What happened in your play?

TA: There was a mugger, and then he got mugged . . .

CD: And he expected help.

JB: Not everything you do gets done back to you. Some things do.

NG: Like JB, not everything comes back. But if you're quite nasty to someone, then you can expect something back. And that's the explanation. If you're thinking of something nasty you shouldn't do it.

CD: I think it . . . not much, but it is a bit, because say if you do something bad you're gonna get punished. Not always but if you're caught, you could get away if you're smart.

O: Why is karma interesting?

ESM: What did we do on karma?

NH: We did that play, remember? Where you killed JN for his money.

ESM: Oh yeah, I remember. Karma I think is interesting, I just didn't enjoy the lesson. Well I think there's that principle in all the religions because . . .in all of them, where if you're bad you go to hell or you go to wherever you go. It's just in Hinduism you get another chance.

The need for the pupils to refer back to their drama pieces can be seen as further evidence for the practical and pedagogical utility of referring religious concepts to concrete situations, whether real or imagined. Once initial engagement had been gained, interview conversations often turned into debates over the truth of karma:

O: Why is karma interesting?

M: Well it was interesting because it was different. And everyone has loads of different views on like, *karma* and everything. I think that there is *karma*. I think that it kind of exists. And it was interesting the way we had different views towards it.

OH: Well I think it's true actually. I think it's quite interesting.

A: I think it was interesting to see the drama pieces. And the way they portrayed it, like HP's where they bullied and then they got bullied back. And I think it is true, what goes around comes around.

AB: I don't like the idea of *karma* because it kind of means . . .well it might be, because it says you're going to have to do this in one period of time or another and I don't like being told what to do.



O: What do you want to say about it JN, is it an interesting idea?

JN: Yes it is, because I think it's true, that's like . . .vengeance, or do unto others, and it usually does work. Things come around.

M: It might not be the same thing, that's all. Like if you bully someone you might not necessarily get bullied back.

OH: You might get run over or something.

A: I don't think if you bullied someone you'd get run over by a bus, because the person who bullied me hasn't been run over by a bus.

OH: Yeah but A you don't know, they might get run over by a bus!

A: You're a bully then!

OH: Yeah but it doesn't mean . . . you don't have to be a bully . . .you can just be a normal person, like sir.

(Laughter)

O: Now that is funny!

AB: You're confusing us!

Several of the interviews turned into discussions of some sophistication, continuing to explore ethical issues but also revisiting the themes of plurality and philosophical interest we saw in relation to the Hindu creation story. One pupil wanted to compare karma to Christian concepts of judgement:

K: You know if you're like a Christian or something and you believe like if you're bad in life, then you'll go to hell or something? Well maybe that's like, you can do something bad, you'll go to hell and that's your karma.

S: No. It's sort of like – don't treat people how you wouldn't want to be treated yourself.

EH: Treat people how you want to be treated.

In another group, the ethics-and-plurality discussion was about whether karma only applied within Hinduism:

O: What about whether karma could help you to think about the meaning of life, and whether karma can help you to think about what's important to you personally?

TA: Not me. It might help, like, a Hindu.

CD: It would only help somebody who believed in the thing.

NG: Me personally, probably not no. If you're a Hindu you've sort of got to take from it. But everyone does kind of.

JB: For someone it is important to, it does.

CD: I think it could help you, but only if you believe in it.

In another, ethical deliberations were enhanced by a reference to an unexpected source:



N: Karma's what goes around comes around. I think this is very good because if you work hard in life, and you're really generous, but things are not always that good, eventually they do come . . . there'll be something good about it. You've achieved a lot. But if you've been bad, you haven't been generous, you've been naughty and really nasty to other people, later on they won't be there by your side. Then you'll be all alone, and I've seen this happen in many forms and ways so.

ESM: It's in Wicca as well. You can't hurt others or it comes back to you by the power of three. I think it's true because if you hurt someone they are going to be pretty angry with you. Or their family are, or their friends.

In the richer discussions, the full import of karma (karma combined with reincarnation theory) was brought out, so that the ethical issues took on an increased significance:

O: With karma, would it help you to think about the meaning of life, or what's important to you personally?

M: I think it would. Because if karma's like real, and what goes around comes around, you kind of like . . .if you're spreading stuff you're going to ruin your life because someone's always doing something back.

A: I don't really think it helps because it doesn't really make much sense. I suppose that if you do something bad to someone then something bad could happen to you, but that could be just a coincidence.

AB: It doesn't help me, because as I said earlier I don't like fate because I don't like being told what I'm doing. Fate means you're going to definitely do something in the future and karma also means that.

JN: I think it helps people who believe in reincarnation because what goes around comes around and you might come back as something rubbish in another life.

M: I agree with that.

In the very richest conversation – an extended one, but worth reproducing in full here on grounds of interest – notions of karma, reincarnation, soteriology, religious upbringing and the natures of souls and spirits were combined into a heady mix:

RJ: But karma could be unfair. If you're brought up in the middle of an East End gangster situation, you're going to be more likely to be horrible to people but it won't be your fault, because you've been brought up like that. It's much easier to be good when you're sitting in a palace.

O: But they might say that you got the favourable or unfavourable births through past karma in past lives, mightn't they?

RJ: You might have started out like that but it's just going to get worse, when's it ever going to get better?

ESM: They're saying that everyone deserves another chance, but she's saying that if you get an unfavourable birth it makes that chance a lot harder. And it just keeps going down and it'd be very hard to get up.



RJ: It's really unfair, because if you're born in a brothel then it'd be much harder to get up. And you just keep going down and down, and how can a stick insect live a good and honourable life?

N: But everybody has their own choice to be good or bad.

RJ: But stick insects can't go to chapels and stones can't think.

N: When you get reincarnated is there any new life or is it the same people going round and round?

RJ: Exactly, they could never actually go away, like Adolf Hitler might be around your garden pond. People say that you can escape your karma.

ESM: Wait a second – you go to nirvana. No that's Buddhism, where do you go in Hinduism?

O: Moksha.

N: I'm never going to get there.

ESM: I don't know, you could turn yourself around. You gotta remember that that guy who was helping Hitler was secretly drugging him.

N: You can be good in other ways, like believe in it.

ESM: We're not saying that you can't, we're saying that it gets a lot harder as you go down. You've been brought up with religion and you really believe in it.

My parents read me all these stories, but we never celebrated any festivals and we never went to church, so I don't have a belief.

RJ: My family, none of us believe in God, so the only time we went to church was in guides, to sell buns.

ESM: I think church actually sort of spoils religion.

RJ: How far down can you go? Can you get reincarnated as a floorboard?

ESM: They say it has to be something living.

RJ: What if you were reincarnated as a stone?

ESM: Stones aren't living.

RJ: But some spirit might like remain in them.

CS: Stones can't be alive because they don't have souls. If it was a fossil then the soul would already be gone from that creature.

ESM: They also don't have functions of life.

Thus, there were ethically motivated discussions of karma set in the relatively mundane context of everyday human relations, and others set in a very broad context of overlapping ultimate questions. Again, it was very hard to pick out responses standing beyond these categories. There was one case in which a pupil located the interest of karma in its status as 'the only part of Hinduism which is true'. In another contribution it was suggested that karma could be true most of the time, but that as an idea it does not help one to think about life. Yet these discrepant responses appeared to be idiosyncratic rather than pattern forming or representative.

### **Central and satellite categories**

As with the previous three cycles, I next examined the fine categories that had been established through the analysis of interview data, in order to see whether a central motivating factor could be detected in cycle four. It will be remembered that the interview questions were designed to investigate the broad categories of interest in



the Hindu creation story and interest in karma. I have shown in the previous section how the interview responses could be grouped into the four fine categories of plurality, philosophical interest, intrinsic interest and ethical interest (although the ethical interest was sometimes expressed within very broad parameters). I considered whether the fine categories should be seen as irreducible or as mutually inclusive and whether it could be said that there were fine categories occupying central positions or satellite ones.

It is clear from the interview record that the reasons why the Hindu creation story was interesting to the pupils were linked together. There were conversations during which the strands of plurality, philosophical interest and intrinsic interest interwove almost seamlessly. I reflected that the relationship between the three strands could reasonably be set out as follows. Plurality sparked philosophical interest because the encounter with difference stimulated the pupils' intellects and imaginations. Further, Hinduism's intrinsic interest was due to its novel and unusual quality (the pupils had not studied Hinduism before, neither were there any Hindu pupils in the class and very few in the school). It might be imagined that the greater the difference, the greater will be the stimulation. But we have also seen that the idea of karma was not new to the pupils (perhaps only the word was new). With karma, the motivating factor was the relevance to ethical concerns in the pupils' own experiences. As we saw, there were conversations where such concerns took on added dimensions. However, these stood out as particularly rich, rather than fitting in as typical.

It seemed to me appropriate to identify two central categories for cycle 4. Firstly I thought that the categories of plurality, philosophical interest and intrinsic interest were dependent on the principle that *difference stimulates the intellect and imagination*. This finding supported Gadamer's model of understanding (see chapter 3, above). Secondly I concluded that karma was a concept that could motivate pupils primarily because it could be a point of reference for their *ethical understanding*. As has already been noted, this finding would support that of cycle 2, where pupils were enthused by opportunities to consider existential situations. The aim that cycle 4 should be a synopsis of the previous cycles had therefore been realised quite successfully. The dialogue with Hinduism did indeed motivate and stimulate the pupils: dialogue was cycle 1's central category, and cycle 4 had added the point that when dialogue was with radically new ideas, it could be particularly powerful. Ethical discussions based on the idea of karma motivated the pupils during cycle 4, and this was added evidence in support of cycle 2's emphasis on existential relevance. There may have been less in cycle 4 to support cycle 3's central idea that RE motivated pupils most by offering chances to address personal concerns. As was shown in the Questionnaires section above, the lessons during which the pupils worked with objects of personal significance to them were rated relatively less favourably.

### **Difference, Ethical Interest, and Adolescence**

Thus, cycle 4 demonstrated that a dialogue with difference stimulated my pupils' intellects and imaginations. It was also shown that religious beliefs such as karma



could work as bases for motivating ethical discussions. In these ways, cycle 4 re-emphasised findings from earlier cycles, including the motivating power of dialogue and the need for RE to address issues of existential concern. Cycle 4 was the last cycle in the study, so this thesis will contain no discussion of issues to investigate in a next cycle. This is not to suggest that from lesson eight of their Hinduism and Creation topic, the students' agency within our lessons ceased. For the remainder of their year 9 they continued to express views on the lessons and I continued to shape pedagogy by those views. But from the close of the period of thesis field study, the practices of participant observation note writing, questionnaires and tape-recorded group interviews all ceased. From the beginning of year 10 the pupils were spread among different RE groups as a result of the school's arrangements for key stage four. In chapter 1 it was noted that a period of collaborative research between a teacher and a class is a special set of conditions, unlikely to be sustained as customary practice. I give further reflections on this matter during chapter 10's review of research methodology (below).

However, it will be instructive to consider how cycle 4's findings relate to my earlier theoretical investigations. In closing chapters 5, 6 and 7, I related empirical data back to material on both adolescence and creativity. Here, although a creative approach clearly played a part in the success of the Hinduism and Creation topic, I will concentrate on adolescence (there is particular resonance between dialogue with difference, ethical interest and the content of chapter 2 of this thesis).

Regarding dialogue with difference, because cycle 1's central category was dialogue, some connections between dialogue, adolescence and creativity have already been made, towards the close of chapter 5. There, I drew on chapter 2's concerns for education for citizenship and education for identity, underlining the importance to these of a dialogical encounter with plural beliefs and values (Skeie 1995; Meijer 1991, 1995; Hookway 2002). I also linked the category of dialogue to chapter 3's considerations of Gadamer's hermeneutics (1975) and the creativity theories of Bailin (1994) and Csikszentmihalyi (1999). The emergence of dialogue with difference as a central category of cycle 4 now offers possibilities for further analysis of Skeie (1995) and Meijer (1991; 1995).

As was shown in chapter 2, Skeie (1995) reflects on two modes of plurality (traditional and modern) and their challenges to RE professionals. Traditional plurality comprises competing worldviews, e.g. religious traditions, but modern plurality includes competing rationalities. Traditional plurality is visible at the societal level, but modern plurality becomes manifest within the individual, who is faced with a repeated need to evaluate his or her identity in relation to increasing differentiation of ideas and values. The role of RE is 'to make us become increasingly conscious participants in this process' (Skeie 1995, 90). The epistemological challenge is to analyse competing worldviews. The ethical challenge is to include competing worldviews in a just society. Schools must intensify their work in these respects, in order to enable young people to identify themselves.



Meijer's (1995) focus is also on the evolving and historical self; self-awareness is a matter of cumulative interpretation. The self is always open to revision, meaning that self-aware people must live with difference. In discussing Meijer's ideas during chapter 2, I suggested that the relevance to RE pedagogy of this view of the self was waiting to be drawn out, but that a conversational process was implied in which pupils continually interpret and reinterpret their own orientations in the light of their studies. The question was raised: how will these aims work out in classroom practice?

Since then, cycle 4 has demonstrated that dialogue with difference can be a strong factor in pupils' motivation. A Hindu creation story has been presented as a case of religious plurality, and the pupils have found it to be philosophically and intrinsically interesting. But how does the fact of their interest relate to Skeie's notions of traditional and modern plurality, and Meijer's description of the self? Firstly it is quite clear that traditional plurality is a concept used by the pupils, even if they do not call it that, as they approach the Hindu story:

RJ: Different religions have different meanings in life.

ESM: It's complicated but I quite like that because it's not just the same story again.

As for modern plurality, the interview record has repeated and vivid examples of pupils' consideration of competing rationalities, and of their recognition that one's

sense of self is formed in response to these. Modern plurality is expressed in the pupils' desire to see whether the story could make sense to them, in the difficulty posed by its difference from scientific accounts, and in their knowledge that different people will respond to the story from different points of view:

AB: It doesn't really help me, it just confuses me even more. There's so many to choose from and I don't really believe in any one of them. It's kind of a mixture of them. Because there's no way a big bang can make the whole world.

JN: I suppose it could, a big bang, create everything . . .but it makes you think how difficult it is.

A: I think it makes like, a bit of sense because he grows lonely and splits himself in two to create male and female . . . and then he becomes one again. It does a little bit.

AB: Also on the meaning of life, M might have her own meaning of life . . .

Thus, my field study data reflect that Skeie's conceptual framework is one that is recognisable to early adolescents. Where Skeie describes traditional and modern plurality as challenges to young people, however, I have shown how they are features of pupils' motivation to learn in RE (even if they can be confusing). There is no contradiction in this, and it ought to invite Skeie to go further, asserting that if traditional and modern plurality do not form part of RE's self-understanding, school pupils will find it hard to engage with the subject. If these remarks are true, the cycle 4 data also lend support to Meijer's view that the self is developed through



cumulative interpretation: here, the pupils shape their identities through a complex encounter with Hindu tradition. It might once more be argued that my study shows this to be a positive factor in the pupils' motivation. Teachers should devise creative opportunities for pupils to consider their own beliefs and values in relation to new and challenging material. The pupils' identity development is a condition of their engagement and their learning.

With regard to ethical interest, this theme was also visited during chapter 5, where the call of Gearon (2002, 2004) for RE to attend to human rights issues – initially mentioned in chapter 2 - was briefly discussed in relation to education for citizenship. Already in this chapter, brief comparisons have also been drawn between cycle 4's category of ethical interest and cycle 2's finding that pupils are motivated by opportunities to engage with existentially significant matters (below, in analysing the relationships between the central categories of the four cycles, I use existential or ethical interest as one composite category). However, let us first revisit Gearon's ideas in relation to cycle 4 data. In chapter 2, I argued that Gearon is to some extent correct in his claim that 'religious education in the United Kingdom remains almost entirely unengaged politically' (2002, 143). He suggests that RE should include a study of the place of religious traditions in fostering dystopian political realities (Gearon 2002, 149).

As we have since seen, my cycle 4 data certainly show how pupils can be motivated by chances to address issues of ethical concern. The features of this motivation were

that it was directed towards situations directly in front of the pupils' eyes or imaginations and that it sometimes took root in a rich base of religious and philosophical thought (where karma was considered along with reincarnation, for example). Teachers might reflect on the wisdom of continuing to direct pupils' learning towards their own experiences and ideas, and encouraging them to set ethical debates within the rich conceptual resources given by religious traditions. In cycle 4, my pupils may not have engaged with geopolitical issues in the manner envisaged by Gearon, but the stimulation of their ethical interests could be seen as useful preparation for their later work in RE, when – as was anticipated in chapter 2 – they would relate religious material to global issues including racism, poverty and interfaith tension. It is clear that my pupils are able to evaluate religious concepts such as karma in terms of their positive or negative contributions to personal life. For now, I tentatively suggest that at the ages of thirteen and fourteen they are inclined to do this in relation to their own local social world. I raise the question whether Gearon's geopolitical RE may be better suited to pupils of fifteen and sixteen. I do so on anecdotal bases (my fifteen and sixteen year old pupils are often enthusiastic for world issues and political discussions, especially the Iraq war) and I believe that more research is needed here. Chapter 6 has shown how my pupils of thirteen and fourteen were motivated by the study of interfaith relations, but in that case, a marked feature of their motivation is their immediate interfaith environment in school and in Sheffield.



## **Conclusion**

Over cycle 4, two central categories of pupil motivation emerged. The intellectual stimulus of difference was the product of analysis of the satellite categories of plurality, philosophical interest and intrinsic interest; and ethical interest was seen to underlie the pupils' motivation to engage with the concept of karma. Once again, there are close connections to the central categories of earlier cycles. Cycle 4 has realised synoptic aspects within the field study as a whole. Indeed, its findings suggest that there are composite categories from several cycles: *dialogue with difference*, from cycles 1 and 4, and *existential or ethical interest*, from cycles 2 and 4. Also as with previous cycles, the findings of cycle 4 have helped to illuminate earlier issues, this time particularly concerning adolescence. In relation to Skeie (1995) and Meijer (1995) we have seen how traditional and modern plurality and the evolving self are not just circumstances in which young people learn, but conditions for their motivation. In response to Gearon (2002, 2004), it has been suggested tentatively that although early adolescents are certainly ethically motivated, a geopolitical RE might be more effective during the years of middle adolescence.

## **Key Findings: Overall Conclusion**

At this point it will be useful to reflect back over the four cycles of the field study as a whole. Firstly, the field study data illustrate the benefits of iterative action research. I have shown how the alternation in cycles of classroom intervention, data collection, data analysis, reflection and planning may build up cumulatively enriched meaning. Ethnographic methods were also central to this. My interview data

especially revealed that pupil accounts of RE should mean very much to teachers and other professionals – it has been made clear that young people have important points to offer regarding the content and processes of their lessons. My impression was that to carry out the study was to release a motivating momentum of its own. The pupils liked the interest that I took in their views, and the enthusiasm that came with collaboration was then transmitted to the lessons. Because we focused on motivation, motivation became a basic presence or given condition in our work together. It could therefore be argued that my personal interest was more determinative of the level of pupil response than was the particular content of this process. Again, it should be emphasised that the identified motivation factors are intended to be action hypotheses that need to be re-assessed in different situations.

The field study has also shown that different teaching topics depended on different motivating factors, although cycle 4 worked to some extent as a confirmation of what had been found before. As each cycle progressed I tried to refine the broad account of motivation into an identification of more specific categories and at the end of each cycle came an attempt to distinguish which of these specific or ‘fine’ categories were centrally significant. Cycle 1’s central category was dialogue; cycle 2’s was existential interest; cycle 3’s was personal significance and cycle 4’s were the intellectual stimulus of difference and ethical interest. I have already pointed out the overlaps between the intellectual stimulus of difference (cycle 4) and dialogue (cycle 1), and between ethical interest (cycle 4) and existential interest (cycle 2). In thinking about the overall conclusion to the field study, I wondered at first whether it



would be useful to assess whether the central categories of the study as a whole could themselves be separated into central and satellite categories. There is a composite category, *dialogue with difference*, from cycles 1 and 4; a composite category, *existential or ethical interest*, from cycles 2 and 4; and a category of *personal significance* from cycle 3. It could be argued that *personal significance* can be accommodated to *existential interest*, perhaps, or that pupils will only undertake *dialogue with difference* when *personal significance* or *existential or ethical interest* are at stake (although in effect this reinforces the mutuality of the categories rather than placing one at the centre). As I deliberated, I sensed that to reduce the central categories of the study as a whole would be an analytical step too far. These categories are already products of analysis. Furthermore, when left to stand alone, they offer a good definition of the essence of RE. According to my data, RE should be a dialogue with difference, intended to clarify issues of existential and ethical interest and matters of personal significance.

This view of the nature and purpose of RE is highly compatible with the recommendations for professional practice advanced at the close of chapter 2 and revised at the end of chapter 3. Through my enquiry into adolescence (chapter 2) I could affirm that RE should balance interaction with the teacher and interaction with peers, address issues of cultural plurality and issues of justice and assist young people in their search for personal identity, especially in the area of beliefs and values. Through my review of creativity (chapter 3) I argued that RE should espouse a critical pedagogy, also enabling pupils to create unique and significant knowledge

of their own (although my subsequent reading of Gadamer led to my acceptance that such knowledge creation cannot be *ex nihilo*). In these earlier remarks we have much that anticipates dialogue with difference, existential and ethical interest and personal significance. Thus, my field study data do not add to or detract from the recommendations for RE of earlier chapters, but lend empirical weight to them, and provide illustrations of them in practice. Additionally, in concluding each of chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, I have drawn specific links between the central categories of the relevant cycles and elements of the theory of adolescence and the theory of creativity, investigated in chapters 2 and 3 respectively.

The next chapter also contains detailed discussion of the findings of my field study, but in the context of aspects of the wider literature concerning RE pedagogy, specifically in the form of a critique of the work of Andrew Wright. As we will see through chapters 9 and 10, my critique of Wright, although suggesting some reshaping of my existing recommendations, also adds to their force.



## **Chapter 9 A Critical Discussion of Andrew Wright's religious literacy pedagogy with reference to my field study data, to Ninian Smart's phenomenological Religious Studies and to John Dewey's educational philosophy**

### **Introduction**

By the close of chapter 8, the key arguments of this thesis had become clear; the pedagogical principles developed through chapters 2 and 3 had been refined through action research into documented possibilities for change within RE practice. The categories of dialogue with difference, existential and ethical interest and personal significance had been established as factors in the motivation of RE pupils. Because these factors have very much in common with the draft recommendations for professional practice offered at the close of chapter 2 and again in revised form at the close of chapter 3, those recommendations were left intact for the time being.

In this chapter, my aim is to integrate the findings of my field study with wider debates over RE pedagogy. I do so through a critical discussion of Andrew Wright's religious literacy programme (1993; 1996; 1997; 2000; 2003; 2004), mostly in the light of my field study's findings but also with regard to other sources, including the phenomenological Religious Studies of Ninian Smart (1968; 1996) and the educational philosophy of John Dewey (1961). I begin by setting out why Wright's work is a good context for the discussion of my own and why it has been chosen as the focus of the chapter. I go on to critique Wright's religious literacy project pre-2004 (it is argued that Wright's 2004 book *Religion, Education and Post-Modernity* represents a significant shift in his

approach). I next assess Wright's attempt to elucidate a classroom pedagogy based on religious literacy, arguing that his attempt to do so is poorly developed. There then follows a section on the consequences of Wright's post-2004 accommodation to strands in post-modernist philosophy. I say that this move largely meets my earlier theoretical criticisms and helps to position Wright's religious literacy approach closer to Robert Jackson's interpretive approach. I also argue that my own pedagogy illustrates Wright's new concern for alterity, and meets his requirements of honesty, receptivity, wisdom and truthfulness. There follows discussion of a general issue arising through the juxtaposition of my data with Wright's ideas: is the value of RE intrinsic, or pragmatic? Here, the Deweyan ideas are joined to the discussion, in order to help expose the misleading nature of the intrinsic-pragmatic dichotomy. Ultimately, I reflect on the significance to debates over RE pedagogy of the integration of my data with Wright's thought. I suggest that an original contribution of this thesis is my identification of action research as a necessary element of truly hermeneutical practice.

### **Why Andrew Wright's religious literacy pedagogy?**

Wright has made a substantial contribution to the development of RE. He has a comprehensive theory of the subject, grounded in his own very wide theological and philosophical erudition. Wright has been at the heart of debates over RE's nature and purposes for over a decade at the time of writing and he is a most interesting and influential writer indeed. Wright's work has a particular focus on issues of truth in RE, and an important theme in his authorship has been the significance for RE of discussions of modernity and post-modernity. As has been mentioned above, he has recently put this theme centre stage.



A weakness in Wright's work is a pronounced overbalance towards theory. As will be shown below, he has evident difficulty even in relating his ideas to possible outcomes in classroom practice. Again, the context for his writing is his (mostly) philosophical and theological scholarship. The fact that my starting point is motivation in the classroom is a counterbalance to Wright's excess of theory. I have accounts of RE lessons to draw on, and the pupils' own voices are central to these accounts. Perhaps my classroom-based data can be a testing ground for Wright's ideas.

Equally, Wright's ideas can be a testing ground for my classroom-based data and subsequent pedagogical recommendations. A great strength of his work is its clear articulation of important pedagogical principles for RE, primary among which is Wright's insistence that pupils should be equipped to search for truth. He has commendable and challenging ambitions for RE, against which my data and recommendations might usefully be assessed.

A third reason for addressing Wright's religious literacy approach is the recent course of its progress. Fertilised by strains of post-modernism, it has now taken greater part in what I have elsewhere called RE's hermeneutic turn (O'Grady 2005c). From my data and interpretations come calls for RE to be a dialogical, ongoing process of identity formation, and later in this chapter I discuss the extent to which Wright's augmented position reflects the same emphases.

Thus, there is enough in common between Wright's work and mine to allow fruitful comparison, and enough that is different to allow contrast and debate.

This is a promising point of focus, unobtainable – say – through a critique of the work of Robert Jackson in the light of my data; Jackson’s interpretive approach already forms part of the bedrock of my study. To bring a fresh and different perspective to bear will help to avoid circularity, even if one conclusion to the discussion is that Wright’s religious literacy approach and Jackson’s interpretive approach are now compatible.

### **Religious literacy (1)**

In this section, selected writings are summarised in order to reconstruct Wright’s pre-2004 stances and their implications. I draw on Wright (1996) and Wright (1997) to trace the earlier course of his religious literacy theory, and on O’Grady (2005c) to illustrate certain of its difficulties (as is then shown, I am indebted to Ninian Smart for the substance of this part of the discussion); I then consider Wright (2000), so as to demonstrate the inadequacy of his address of classroom pedagogy. I refer back to the findings of my field study, in order to give empirical grounding to my analysis and to continue to build the cumulative argument of the thesis.

Wright (1996) attacks what he calls the ‘experiential-expressive’ model of religion and RE. The distinguishing feature of that model is its assumption that we need to transcend external expressions of religion to gain understanding of an experiential core. But for Wright, developments in hermeneutics have exposed weaknesses in the experiential-expressive model. He therefore proposes an alternative model, aiming at linguistic competency rather than existential capacity. Although he begins by applauding Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker (1994) for focusing on concepts and language, Wright is very soon criticising



them for giving too much importance to children's private worlds. He draws on Ricoeur to argue that '... experience does not constitute an autonomous realm of private meaning, but is always informed by, and dependent upon, public discourse' (Wright 1996, 167). Meaning is thus inherent in words themselves; Ricoeur is quoted to the effect that 'seeking meaning no longer means spelling out consciousness, but, rather, deciphering its expressions' (Wright 1996, 167).

Wright argues that in experiential-expressive RE, religious language is significant only as an expression of religious experience. This goes back to the 1960s and Loukes' and Goldman's discovery of a gap between religious language and children's experience, resulting in the promotion of an implicit RE which begins with children's experience. Wright traces the same movement through the phenomenological approaches of the 1970s and 1980s, in which religious language was seen as a description of external phenomena that needed to be supplemented with empathy if children were to grasp religion's essence. In the spiritual RE of the 1990s, for example the work of Jack Priestley (e.g. 1992), the imagination had priority and language had use only if made meaningful by pre-linguistic experience. At this point, it should be noted that in his criticisms Wright laments Priestley's privileging of creative art over theology. It may damage Wright's argument that his own broad definition of religious language includes art (Wright 1996, 167). However, Wright continues by saying that in spiritual RE experience no longer prepares children to understand religious language but appears to be an end in itself; we are offered a post-modern situation in which children 'use language as the mere building blocks in the game

of creating their own private experiential realities. 'Conversation' with religion reverts here to an internal monologue' (Wright 1996, 169).

Wright goes on to consider notions of selfhood, language and religion. Regarding the self, the experiential-expressive model calls on the cult of the autonomous individual rooted in Cartesian thought. But Wright's own hermeneutical view of the self, grounded in critical realism, is communally orientated and requires moves away from consciousness in the directions of language and intersubjectivity. These readings of selfhood and language suggest a realistic theology in which the meaning of religious language is in its ability to picture reality. For Wright, all systems of thought are ontological, and religions are ontologies that compete and overlap:

To understand religion requires religious literacy, an immersion not in private experience, but in the various public linguistic traditions that seek to account for the ultimate nature of reality. (Wright 1996, 174)

Wright seems next to say that a pedagogical focus on experience is in any case unnecessary, because intense personal experience is a given. In adolescence the task is to differentiate and interpret one's experience in the light of public discourse and to do this one must be initiated into public language. Otherwise it is impossible to locate one's own beliefs. RE should give pupils the ability to respond intelligently to contemporary culture's diversity of religious truth claims. He concludes the article by stating that when pupils come to RE, they possess some religious language, but to build religious literacy they must engage in



dialogue with religious and secular traditions. There is an ambiguity between what they already know and competing narratives, and to appreciate this ambiguity they must gain the academic skills of Theology and Religious Studies.

Wright (1997) develops the above discussion; the context of this next article is the debate following the SCAA model RE syllabuses (1994). Wright characterises this debate as between nominalist and generic stances (respectively viewing religions as distinctive and as expressions of universal experiences), in which terms the debate can be related easily to his 1996 article. His subject is Trevor Cooling's attempt to overcome the debate's polarities by exposing the theological backgrounds to both stances (the nominalists reflect revelation-based theology, the genericists liberal theology) and calling on RE to represent both, as well as comparing and contrasting them. Wright asks whether Cooling's efforts are adequate.

His answer is that Cooling points the way without fully showing it. Cooling is right to say that RE's equipment should be conceptual and linguistic; but he underestimates children's existing grasp of Christian concepts, given through the culture, and he does not recognise their need to study Christianity holistically. Cooling also does not go far enough, because children must not only be helped to comprehend but also to criticise. To be criticised, Christianity must be compared to other world-views, and in this way nominal and generic models must be combined in practice. Again, Wright concludes that religious literacy must be RE's aim:

Religious literacy embodies the capacity to embark on an ongoing dialogue that does justice to the emerging integrity of the child's own theology, or a-theology, and the integrity of the variety of theological positions encountered in society. (Wright 1997, 153)

My criticisms of Wright's pre-2004 theoretical position are grounded in a view that he polarises matters in a damaging manner (cf. Teece 2005, 38). It is very commendable that he supports young people's right to debate sophisticated religious issues, and he is clearly right to insist on the importance of religious language and concepts in this regard. However, Wright is mistaken when he emphasises language and concepts over experience and imagination. It is an unnecessarily divisive stance, and the main cause of Wright's misappropriation of 'experiential-expressive' RE. Wright offers phenomenology as an example of 'experiential-expressive' RE, but careful reading reveals that in Ninian Smart's phenomenology we find no straightforward privileging of experience. Instead what we find is a model of religious traditions rich in potential for understanding and for pedagogy (O'Grady 2005c). I argue now that such careful reading not only proves the over-emphases to be Wright's but also provides a corrective to these.

Let us consider Smart's 1996 book, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*. Here Smart presents a developed or 'dialectical' phenomenology, which sees the dimensions of religions as relational and explores the relationships between them (Smart 1996,7). This sophisticated approach reduces the danger of crude essentialism, because dimensions will be



seen to interact differently from faith tradition to faith tradition. (I would add that the same applies *within* faith traditions; consider how the doctrine of the incarnation conditions differing ritual responses between Roman Catholics and Quakers.) I am sure that Smart would have had no difficulty with this qualification of mine. His essential point appears to be that religions are far from 'equidimensional' (Smart 1996, 10); therefore dialectical phenomenology is a tool to help scholars to achieve a balanced series of views, and is in no way a theory of essences.

Smart goes on to discuss the place of the philosophy of religion. It receives no substantial treatment in *Dimensions of the Sacred*. Here the aim is anatomical. However, even in the attempt to describe religious traditions, we must naturally identify doctrines. Yet before debating their truths, first we must have a sympathetic understanding of what they mean to others. In my personal experience of Smart as a teacher, he certainly believed debates over truth claims to be an important part of Religious Studies and he could set such debates within a wider frame of reference than could anybody else (other Lancaster philosophers of religion tended to limit debates to issues arising from Christianity). But for Smart, there should always be an interim state of suspension and generosity while we seek to sense another's meaning. Smart emphasises the need to understand the historical contexts of doctrines (1968, 30), and the need for inter-religious dialogue concerning the varied doctrinal consequences of religious experience (1968, 89).

As we would expect, Smart has examples of his own to illustrate the dialectical character of the dimensions of religion. In a striking example he shows how the *doctrine* of the trinity is conditioned by Biblical *narrative* and also by the *ethics* of love (1996, 44). For my immediate purposes – I am investigating the possibility of a dialectical relationship between religious experience and religious language – it is very helpful that Smart provides a series of examples where experience is linked directly to doctrine (1996, 67-9). In the first, it is suggested that meditation states of *dhyāna* (absorption) promote philosophical teachings of *śūnyāta* (emptiness) in the Mahayana Buddhist traditions. In the second, experiences of the numinous underlie theologies of the ‘Wholly Other’ as in Judaism and certain forms of *bhakti* (devotion, in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions). In the third, shamanistic experience of the powers of spiritual forces or presences is connected to doctrinal systems that include pantheons of gods and goddesses.

In this light, the power of Smart’s dialectical dimensions approach is to offer a varied classroom diet to pupils. There is no reason why the study of religious experience should take precedence over that of language, or ritual over society or ethics, or mythical over material. The RE teacher is liberated to draw from Wright’s pedagogical suggestions, from Priestley’s or from those of other interesting writers, in a methodologically flexible manner.

The dialectical relationship between language and experience is a strong theme in my field study data. In cycle 1 was shown the motivating quality of the use of religious words and concepts to reflect on one’s own experience, religious words



and concepts functioning as *existential reminders* within the central category of *dialogue*. The dialogue that engaged pupils was between the conceptual world of Islam and the existential world of the self. Thus:

RJ: And it makes you think, say we've just had an RE lesson, and somebody says can I borrow 50p you might think about zakat and be kind to them.

O: So would that happen? Might we do something in an RE lesson and you remember it and think about it later?

RJ: Yeah, because it's gonna go into your brain, and it's gonna be there, and you're gonna remember it at some point. And it'll be in your memory and something'll jog your memory at some point, like if you've just done tawhid and you see some geometrical patterns you'll go mmm, tawhid!

I: It makes you like, look at yourself, and think, do I do this? It makes you think about other people and stuff, and how you are as a person. Whether you're good, or you just don't care about anyone else.

O: Couldn't you do that by yourself, without religious ideas to compare yourself to, though?

I: It depends what kind of person you are. If you're a really strong Christian or a really strong Muslim it's just natural to you. Or if you're a really nice person still. But if you're like, bad, you just don't care.

O: If you're bad, the ideas might give you a bit more stimulation to care?

I: Yeah.

O: Really, what I want to ask you about is how say doing a piece of drama on zakat might help you to think through and express some of your own ideas about life. Could that work?

HR: Yeah (with emphasis) because I don't know, like I said earlier when you're acting it's like being the person, and it just kind of like makes you think if I was this person, would I believe this way or wouldn't I?

N: I think it did make you feel bad. Later on I asked my mum how old you have to be to pay zakat. She said not till you're old enough, like an adult. I can't give my pocket money, but like when you're older I can give money away to the poor. It didn't make me feel too bad, but it made me feel good that you can give money away to the poor.

O: Will it make you more likely to do it when you're older?

N: Yeah, because I don't have much money now but I'm sure in the future I'll have more to give.

A: God! Well, you know when zakat is giving money to the poor, if there are all those people on the streets in England and you just walk by them, pretend you haven't any spare change and try to ignore them. . . all these people wherever they are they feel really sorry for the poor people so you go and collect money and help them, and we just like. . . not care at all.

In the above examples, what seems instructive is the need for a concrete personal context through which the significance of the Islamic terms may be brought out. From the point of view of those interviewed it makes little sense to say that the



Islamic beliefs are ends in themselves. This anticipates the discussion in a later section of the intrinsic or pragmatic value of RE. For now it suffices to say that for motivation to be sustained, language and experience must be connected.

During cycle 2 the same point was shown in a sharper way. The pupils encountered teachings about peace and responded through various activities, the most successful being a design task for an interfaith garden, meeting room or similar. It was striking when I began the interviews that all pupils conceptualised peace in relation to experience, especially to social circumstances. The concept alone was insufficient. Thus, in answer to the interview question whether peace is important:

K: Yeah, I think it is, because if you just think about war all the time you're just thinking about all the bad things and everything. With peace you think about good things, and not to have wars and that kind of thing.

M: Peace is an important thing to think about, because if we don't have peace everybody is just fighting and nobody's getting along. There's loads of wars and everything and it makes you sometimes feel. . .and you wouldn't have friends without peace, or anything.

It will be recalled that as I noted the tendency to understand peace in social terms, I probed the issue:

O: Is the idea of peace inside meaningful to you?

JS: It doesn't matter as much as a nation in the third world, or whether we care about the third world.

NG: Well peace outside and peace inside, if you think about it. . .if you're not peaceful to someone else they could start a fight or something like that, so it's just as important inside as out in the world.

O: But why do you think about it (peace) as a situation in the world, rather than inside people?

EH: It's easier. If someone says to me, what do you think about peace? I think it's about people having wars. War isn't something that goes on in your head.

HP: If everyone thought about peace themselves, it would be just like – everyone's got a bit of peace in them. But it wouldn't be like affecting the whole world. People with peace inside them, it'll be just like affecting what they do. But if you saw someone else you wouldn't go up to them and say I have peace inside me, stop this. You have to have peace over the world.

It was reflected in my analysis of this data during chapter 6 that perhaps the pupils' use for religious concepts such as peace was pragmatic. Cycle 2's questionnaire data had also shown that the pupils like to work at concrete situations; not that they could not handle abstract concepts, but that they preferred to do so in a concrete way. There was a resonance with cycle 1's 'existential reminders' theme. Again, the cycle 2 data reflect the need to connect terms to experiences and anticipate my later discussion of the intrinsic or



pragmatic value of RE. So far it is worth reflecting that representative excerpts from my data substantiate my critique of Wright's pre-2004 theoretical position, demonstrating that he is absolutely correct to state the importance of religious language and concepts while failing to recognise that their value to young people is as aids to reflection on experience.

### **Pedagogy**

Wright (2000) is an attempt to apply his theoretical position to classroom pedagogy. For the most part in this book chapter, Wright is reflecting on his Spiritual Education Project of 1996-2000. His use of the term 'spiritual' could be confusing given his earlier criticisms of Priestley, but in Wright's understanding spiritual is communal rather than individual; and in any case he sets his view of spirituality and RE in the context of his broader critical RE work. Once more he declares his aim to deconstruct the mind-set of 'liberal' RE and to construct an alternative, critical, theory. These remarks on 'liberal' RE add nothing new to those of earlier articles (1996; 1997). His spiritual pedagogy for RE is inter-subjective and conceptual; through it, Wright aims to free pupils to create their own world-views. Such pedagogy links to the aims of the whole school, which should include a hermeneutics of nurture ('A good school will unashamedly induct children into the spiritual values and world-view which it considers to be of greatest worth . . . ') and a hermeneutics of criticism ('. . . as well as insisting that children explore alternative possibilities.') (Wright 2000, 175).

Five pedagogical principles are then stated, in Gadamer's language of 'horizons':

- Critical RE must do justice to the horizon of religion. Instead of a quantitative pluralism which reduces all to a common phenomenological framework, there must be a qualitative pluralism which takes account of intrafaith diversity and interfaith relations.
- Critical RE must do justice to the horizon of the pupil, an emergent theologian who must be made able to articulate his or her beliefs without manipulation.
- Critical RE must equip pupils to recognise and respond to power structures; pupils should be aware of their own ideologies and those of the religious and secular traditions which they study.
- Critical RE must enable a dialogue between religious and pupils' horizons, avoiding colonisation in either direction.
- Pupils must develop an intelligent religious literacy. They must become reasonable theists, atheists or agnostics, aware of ambiguities and ready to learn further. Because this places them in a critical relationship to ultimate reality it is the fundamental aim of RE.

Next, Wright presents his pedagogical strategies in a three-phase model. Phase 1 is the horizon of the pupil where topics are introduced, questions raised and initial pupil responses made. Phase 2 is the horizon of religion where religious and secular perspectives are outlined and the pupils' positions located within or alongside these. Phase 3 is the engagement of horizons, a conversation between pupils and religions which allows pupils to re-assess their initial responses. An example is given, of teaching about the existence of God.



It is curious that in Wright's teaching example the religious material is couched in 'generic' terms (cf. Wright 1997, summarised above): a range of perspectives on God is studied through his three-phase pedagogy. Although the example contains a warning against presenting the views in a 'common interpretive framework' it also sets up such a framework: material from diverse sources is gathered under the philosophical-theological categories of theism, atheism and agnosticism. Whilst this may be unproblematic to many it may undermine the consistency of Wright's argument. A more conceptual focus may fit his theory more closely (e.g. concepts such as tawhid, Brahman or the Trinity could be placed before the pupils in their traditional contexts, once pupils had been given helpful cues). It will be worth emphasising that I suggest this dialogue with rich religious concepts for two reasons. One is my cycle 1 pupil motivation factor of conceptual dialogue (chapter 5, above). The other is that I fully support Wright's view that pupils can be emergent theologians and philosophers, because they are entitled to debate sophisticated theological and philosophical material and are capable of doing so. This more conceptual emphasis would bring Wright's three-stage pedagogical model very close to that of Grimmitt (2000, 216-22).

However, a difficulty with Wright's pedagogical strategies is that they are rather vague. He gives no attention to questions of what pupils will actually do, or how long the three-stage process will take, that is whether it will be conducted during a lesson, a term, or a year (his exemplar content could easily frame a year's work). The classroom teaching applications of Wright's theories are not thought through.

Finally Wright responds to four criticisms of his work, two of which are simply mistaken readings of his position, but two of which are worth investigation.

Firstly, Wright has been asked whether his approach will work in the classroom and his answer is that the necessary empirical tests have yet to be made.

Secondly, he has been accused of mistaking the nature of religion by privileging realistic language. In his response to this charge Wright risks two further charges, essentialism and arrogance: he states that Christians who espouse non-realistic theologies are only 'a small radical group' (2000, 185). A charge of arrogance could also be levelled at his concluding sentence:

Critical religious education, with its commitment to enabling children to achieve appropriate levels of religious and spiritual literacy, simply offers the most appropriate ideological framework for religious education, since its basic ideology is that of the empowerment of children to learn to be responsible and wise as they encounter the vitally important, though extremely dangerous, horizon of religion. (Wright 2000, 186)

No doubt these are highly desirable qualities not restricted to Wright's pedagogy. In the absence from Wright of detailed suggestions for classroom practice, not to mention analyses of data resulting from trials of such practice, let us analyse an example from my field study in the light of Wright's strategies. They are that questions should be raised and preliminary pupil responses made (phase 1: the horizon of the pupil). Next, religious and secular responses to the questions should be studied and the pupils' initial responses placed alongside these (phase 2: the horizon of religion). Then pupils re-assess their responses in the light of



the studied material (phase 3: the engagement of horizons). The aim is for pupils to build informed, religiously literate responses to significant public religious questions.

During cycle 3 my pupils were most motivated by the chance to consider and express what inspired them personally - making posters, collages, writing pieces and in one case, making a sculpture on the subject. This was a very good 'horizon of the pupil' example. The question 'what inspires you personally?' can be taken as a public religious question, equivalent to questions such as 'what is the good life?' or 'what is life about?', which can be taken as religious in a broad sense although not all would think about such questions within a specifically religious frame of reference. After some of the pupils had presented their ideas, a video about the Hajj was shown and then a discussion followed, comparing the pupils' inspiration to that experienced by the pilgrims. The pupils suggested that there were connections between feelings of inspiration from Allah and the inclusion of beliefs about God, in some of our presentations; between the point that the Hajj prepares people to overcome difficulties, and that for some pupils loving family members help them to do so; between inspiration from nature on the Hajj and one of our pupils' remarks about the beauty of the night sky; and between inspiration from the example of Muhammad and Ibrahim and the inspiration felt from famous people by some members of our class. This discussion was a very good 'horizon of religion' example. As was reported in chapter 5, we ran out of time for the topic at this point. However, the resulting interview data gave detailed evidence on what 'the engagement of horizons' meant to the pupils in this case, because an interview question was: did the work

on Passover and Hajj help you to think about what inspires you personally? They were being invited to say whether and how any re-assessment had taken place, of their ideas on personal inspiration.

The pupils' responses suggested that 'the engagement of horizons' is a less than straightforward matter. As will be remembered, there were several initial rejections of the notion that one's self can be enriched through what is important to another:

ESM: No, I can't say it did at all. I enjoyed the bit where you had to do the meal and stuff but learning about the Passover and Hajj . . . it didn't inspire me at all, it was just what inspired other people. And you get given a list of what inspires other people and unless it's very well explained or you actually know the person, it's completely needless to you.

AB: I think people didn't find it inspiring because the people who are doing it are not likely to do it in their lifetime. They may go to the country where it's done but they're not gonna kiss the black stone or anything.

A difference came when the interview discussions began to gather around the notion of religion as commitment. Then, the pupils had no difficulty in pointing out how commitment in religions other than their own can be inspiring as objects of study:



S: I think it's inspirational that they have their feelings for their god. Because they believe that it'll make them a better person. It's amazing that they can do all that.

EH: I agree with what S said that they can do that, because I don't do that. At Christmas all the Christians do . . .for some it's a religious thing but I just think right, get presents. And have a nice meal.

NG: It might inspire me to think about the pilgrimages and stuff. Some people go half way across the world, to get to that one place. That's what inspires me, it shows that they're true to their religion.

HR: Well, I think it's really good to see what inspires other people and I think it's good because we could see the hajj, and their faith, and everything they do and they just go that far. So like what they believe, and it's kind of the same for me because I'm a Christian and I'd do anything for my faith. If someone asked me right now I'd die for my faith. And I think it's just – it just helped people to see the inspiration that they got out of things and helped them to think about stuff.

PB: It's good to see what other people are inspired by because if you don't have a good understanding of it . . .it can help you to understand what you're inspired by. It's like not something that you think about every day so it helps you. It's just something that you don't think about, so it reminds you and helps you to think about it.

As we saw in chapter 7, if there was a core value in these responses, it was about sharing experiences of commitment, even given some pupils' doubt that religious commitment is positive. Even then, there was a positive dialogue over the nature of religious commitment. The motivation was gained through the emergence of some common ground, in the form of the transferability of the notion of commitment from the religious material to the pupils' experiences and back. In this particular teaching example, the move from inspiration to commitment was unplanned, unforeseen and would have remained hidden from the teacher were it not for the interviews through which it emerged. It counts as an example of the 'engagement of horizons' – the pupils were reviewing their learning and adding to their understanding of inspiration, through the studied content. Yet it is also an example of Elliott's 'dynamic curriculum' (Elliott 1991, 11), revealing how pupils adapt materials to their own searches for meaning in ways that are unpredictable and not easily amenable to objectives or targets. The great challenge for the teacher is to maintain awareness of this process and to respond positively. My main claim for this thesis is that it offers and illustrates a method to do so.

The above analysis of Wright's pedagogical principles, through an example from my field study, has shown that they are basically true to what motivates pupils in practice. I have previously made the point that there is no need for teaching to *begin* from the pupils' horizons (O'Grady 2003, 223). But I certainly agree that it is vital that the pupils' horizons are expanded, and I have re-presented one example from many in my study where religious material helps to provoke such horizon-expansion. Where Wright's pedagogy might be developed is the area of



horizon-engagement and its consequences. At the point where young people re-assess their ideas in the light of their engagement with religious material, what we see is an unpredictable and ongoing process of identity-formation. This calls for the kind of responsive and reflexive pedagogy associated with action research. It necessitates a view of truth in RE as provisional, dialogical and always in formation (Meijer 1995). Elsewhere I have criticised Wright for holding to a view of truth that is too propositional and static to allow rich dialogical processes to flourish (O'Grady 2005b). As we see next, his post-2004 position is much less susceptible to this criticism.

### **Religious literacy (2)**

In respect to Wright post-2004, all my attention is paid to *Religion, Education and Post-Modernity*. I argue that the book meets several of my earlier criticisms of Wright and is significant for its placing of the religious literacy approach in proximity to Robert Jackson's interpretive approach. In this regard, there are positive signs for RE's future direction, based on a convergence around hermeneutical models of teaching and learning. Once more, data from my field study are re-presented in order to substantiate the argument.

*Religion, education and Post-Modernity* benefits from Wright's great scholarly sweep and sharp critical edge. It is in four sections, only the final one addressing RE directly. I will confine most of my critique to this final section, because it has most relevance to my purposes here. By the time it begins, Wright has presented philosophical, theological and educational implications of post-modernity, preferring this term to 'post-modernism' even though he is usually discussing

writers and ideas rather than an era or set of social or cultural conditions. The core of his argument is that three modernist meta-narratives have dominated philosophical, theological and educational thought since the Enlightenment: a naturalism that has reduced knowledge to natural science, marginalizing values to mere opinion status; a liberalism that has emphasised tolerance, rendering irrelevant the distinctive content of world-views; and a romanticism that has led to an exaggeration of the importance of inner experience. Wright discusses the attempts of various post-modernist thinkers to disrupt the dominance of these meta-narratives. He tends to dismiss harder deconstructions and welcome softer ones. An example of this tendency is where he rejects Baudrillard's closed anti-realism (or hyper-realism), where we are free to create our own realities, but welcomes Levinas' philosophy of difference, where we attend to voices of alterity and otherness, not accommodating these to our own identities but allowing ourselves to be unsettled by them. Wright makes clear his view that this less radical post-modernism is preferable:

. . . far less likely than a closed anti-realism to fall into the trap of simply replacing the meta-narratives of modernity with a distinctive post-modern meta-narrative. (Wright 2004, 51)

Thus, on pedagogy, Wright cites the Freirean educators Aronowitz and Giroux, in whose work concerns for freedom and justice combine with an open post-modernity where one is open to the voice of the Other. Such attention to alterity is not merely descriptive; it equips pupils for personal re-assessment (Wright 2004, 164; cf. 'positive pluralism' in Cush 1999). He develops this theme by



advocating a hermeneutical pedagogy, where knowledge is a movement outwards through alternative horizons. A critical realist epistemology is advanced, in which knowledge has a real connection with the world but is always provisional and incomplete, because there are always further horizons (Wright 2004, 167).

These remarks provide the context for Wright's treatment of modernity, post-modernity and RE. For Wright, 'modern' RE is the twin of Religious Studies. Both are accommodations to modern meta-narratives. The naturalistic-romantic dualism is visible in the distinction between learning about religion and learning from religion, and the liberal strand of tolerance is also to the fore. The main problem is the marginalisation of truth, whether through naturalism's tendency to describe external phenomena, liberalism's tendency to downplay difference or romanticism's tendency to see truth claims as secondary expressions of spirituality (Wright 2004, 184-94). Wright promises solutions to the problem later, but firstly some misconceptions of his own should be noted. Firstly, he gives no empirical evidence of the marginalisation of truth claims from current RE in practice – a cursory examination of GCSE Religious Studies specifications and papers shows that the subject's pupils are indeed required to deal with questions of religious and philosophical truth (see e.g. Edexcel 2004). Secondly he misunderstands the idea of 'learning from religion', apparently seeing it as distant from 'learning about religion' and directed towards private experience. But in the original formulation, it is where pupils use 'religious beliefs and values as instruments for the critical evaluation of their own beliefs and values'

(Grimmitt 1988, 141), a process surely compatible with Wright's own hermeneutical method.

However, Wright goes on to outline a positive pedagogy for RE, renewed by his encounter with post-modernity. Beyond modern 'absolutism' and post-modern 'relativism' can be established a 'critical RE placed under the authority . . . of the truth inherent in the order of things' (Wright 2004, 207). This is a rather grand styling of one's own position and we are left to ponder its exact meaning. Given Wright's previous denunciations of 'experiential-expressive' RE, it is also surprising that he now claims the central significance of Rudolph Otto and Mircea Eliade to any RE worthy of its name (Wright 2004, 209-12), but less surprising when he adds that there must be linguistic not just experiential capacity (Wright 2004, 214). Through this capacity, the liberal relegation of religious truth to the private sphere must be challenged; debates over religious truth must be a public matter, where all take positions. This must be no instrumental pursuit in the service of a modern or post-modern social agenda but must have '*intrinsic*' value (Wright 2004, 219; my italics). All of this can be grounded in a post-modern alterity, where the horizons of truth are left open. Because it is a transformational RE, the position one takes can be a shifting one. So perhaps Wright's 'order of things' contains two related truths:

- There are religious questions.
- There are different responses to these questions.



Finally Wright offers conclusions in the form of four virtues for a truly critical RE:

- Honesty. All must identify their values; curriculum principles and practices must be transparent.
- Receptivity. All must accept the need to have their values challenged by those of others.
- Wisdom. Clashes of horizons must be seen as opportunities for growth.
- Truthfulness. All must recognise contingency and therefore avoid foreclosure.

Now, Wright's realism is softer than pre-2004. Elsewhere, I had asked whether his realism was sufficiently hard to alienate those of different persuasions from one another (O'Grady 2005b); whether in insisting that RE pupils have clear answers to questions of truth, we risked their adoption of fixed positions from where they would find it hard to consider those of others. Now Wright is more sensitive to the need for RE pupils to engage with the beliefs and values of others. He adopts the concept of foreclosure avoidance so helpful to my clarification of RE's contribution to adolescent development (chapter 2 above). If Wright now sees development through RE as a matter of clarifying one's stance through a progressive encounter with others, there may be little in practice to distinguish his pedagogy from Jackson's interpretive approach. It will be recalled from chapter 1 that for Jackson, in studying religious traditions pupils should not be expected to set aside their own presuppositions, but should compare their own concepts with those of others: 'the pupils' own perspective is an essential part of

the learning process' (Jackson 2004, 88). Through their studies of religious traditions pupils should re-assess their own ways of life; they should be constructively critical of the material they study; and they should maintain an awareness of the development of the interpretive process, reflecting on the nature of their learning (Jackson 2004, 88). It is hard to see that these principles of Jackson's are far from those that close Wright's book. A separate discussion would be required, to assess whether Wright could also accommodate to Jackson's view that religious traditions must not be presented as bounded systems. (That discussion might begin with the question: if one values alterity, can one reasonably view a religious tradition as a bounded system?)

In the meantime, we can again note that Wright gives no empirical instances of his principles. What will emerge if we again bring forward data from my field study, and again try to use these data to illustrate and assess Wright's ideas? In fact, material from cycle 4 of my study has already been shown to relate closely to Wright's new concern for alterity. In cycle 4 my pupils studied Hinduism, a religious tradition previously outside their knowledge and experience, and *dialogue with difference* emerged as a central factor in their motivation. I shall now show how my pedagogy as it stood by the study's last cycle, refined through the previous three cycles, reflected Wright's final virtues of honesty, receptivity, wisdom and truthfulness. I restrict my attention to one example from cycle 4, the teaching on a Hindu creation story. Over two lessons, the pupils had read and discussed the most important features of the story before presenting these in their own art compositions. It will be remembered that this work was ranked highly by the pupils in their questionnaire responses, and that their enthusiasm for it was



then discussed during the interviews, leading to the identification of the dialogue with difference category (uniting the satellite categories of plurality, philosophical interest and intrinsic interest).

Much of the interest in encountering a Hindu creation story, as an example of plural beliefs and values, arose from the opportunity it presented to clarify and re-assess one's own beliefs and values. This theme was presented strongly in several interview exchanges, including the following:

AS: I think it's interesting because it tells about a new religion or something. And it's kind of complicated compared to ours, yeah, because they've got like three gods. And we've got different beliefs and they've got different beliefs, so.

O: Do you remember what you said in the lesson about it?

AS: Yeah.

O: You were amazed because it's so different from Islam . . .

AS: They've got so many different gods. Everyone else might believe in, like, a different one.

AS: I reckon Allah made it, and we all have different opinions and stuff.

HA: It makes me think like how the universe was created, and how everything was created. We've got like one god, and these have got three.

AS: They've got like five, man.

KBC: They've got loads!

AS: That elephant, and . . .

HA: Our god doesn't split into, like, three, different . . . whatever it does, it like, covers all.

As was pointed out in the original analysis in chapter 8, such data reflect the categories of plurality and philosophical interest simultaneously. This is the power of the dialogue with difference principle, that difference stimulates the intellect to renewed activity. The example also resonates with Wright's desire for *honesty*. The pupils are able to make their own existing standpoints visible through the pedagogical process and this is then enhanced through the reflective activity of the follow-up interview. Underlying all of this is the action research ethic of an ongoing dialogue between the teacher-researcher and the pupils regarding the teaching and learning, requiring the teacher-researcher to be open about the values that inform and indeed are built through the project as it develops.

Once the pupils are honest about their beliefs and values, are they then open to challenge from those of others? Certainly there were interview conversations through which the pupils combined interest in Hindu thought with questioning over their own stances. In the following example we see how engagement with the Hindu story led pupils to re-assess their own views on themes such as time, human nature and mortality:

JN: It doesn't say anything about people very much. In a kind of way it says we're little insects. He just comes and destroys the world without any thought



for anybody. And then it just starts all over again, without any thought for people.

AB: I don't think it does really, because it just doesn't make sense.

A: I think it makes like, a bit of sense because he grows lonely and splits himself in two to create male and female . . . and then he becomes one again. It does a little bit.

AB: Also on the meaning of life, M might have her own meaning of life that she might grow up and be a great millionaire businesswoman and A could want to be a Kentucky fried chicken and everyone has their own meaning of life.

M: They have different things they want to do. I don't think it says anything. But the part of the story where it says the world is destroyed every night – it kind of says you've got to, if I destroy it every night maybe I'll say I don't want to create it again. It's kind of saying do what you want, enjoy yourself.

OH: But then you die.

JN: And then your purpose in life is to be better when you come back.

O: If you believe in reincarnation.

OH: I don't know, I might do.

We might go further and say that religious material is interesting to adolescents *only if* it provokes reflection on their own ideas and experiences. This has been a key idea throughout the thesis, emerging originally in its background MA study (chapter 1) and literature review on adolescence (chapter 2); and gaining further ground through the analysis of field data into categories such as existential interest and personal concern (chapters 6 and 7). Overall, Wright's virtue of

*receptivity* seems to be very close to my conceptualisation of a dialogue between pupil voice and religious material. However, my view - that religious material has a kind of pragmatic relevance to the pupils - clashes with Wright's principle that RE must be seen to possess intrinsic value. I take up this issue fully in the next section.

Is there also evidence that my pupils cultivate what Wright calls *wisdom* through their encounters with religious material: that is, do they experience clashes of horizons and see these as opportunities for growth? Again, the answer is yes. The pupils see the Hindu story as divergent and unfamiliar and such newness enlivens their thinking:

JB: I think it's interesting because every time you like . . . it's created every time it's destroyed, when it disappears.

CD: I think it's because of the fact that Hindus believe that the world is destroyed, and then the gods create it again after it, like . . .

TA: It's interesting because it kind of like makes you think. How did the universe really start?

RS: It's interesting because it's a cycle. It goes on for ever.

HP: I think the story's interesting, it's like talking about the creation of the world and saying about all the lords and stuff. And it's like do you believe it or do you not believe it?

K: I like it because it's . . . this guy has the earth coming out of his belly-button.

EH: A flower comes out of his belly-button.



JJ: I think it's interesting because it's right complicated. The way that they do things. Destroying the universe and a new one comes.

N: What I think is, they still say that all the lords like come from one. The Supreme One, and they create so many. What I find is they use it for concentration when they pray, but normally when you look at other religions they don't make statues, they pray wherever they are. But here they have special temples and I think that's very good.

RJ: I think the creation story's really interesting. It's like a story and it's very unusual because a snake starts it off, because in the science story they don't exist then.

ESM: Yeah, in the Bible there's like a snake who's evil and tempts Eve and Adam. But the snake being good in this one is a real turnaround. It's different from the other religions we've studied.

What is striking in these exchanges is that the pupils do not respond to the story's strangeness by rejection, but try instead to fit its features to their own philosophical interests. When analysing the data initially, I was able to say that the story was unusual to the pupils (intrinsic interest) and that it stimulated their thoughts and questions (philosophical interest) but I was unable to separate these categories very sharply.

Finally, Wright holds up the virtue of *truthfulness* (the recognition of contingency and the avoidance of foreclosure). Earlier, the following excerpt was

cited as an example of the recognition of plurality leading to the awareness of complexity:

M: Some people believe there is the big bang, or others that different gods created it or something, but it's nice to read sort of everyone's kind of view. Then it gives you kind of like an idea. Some are . . . quite a few are the same, or like, go that way.

A: Well I think it would (help me to form my own view) but, because I've been influenced by lots of stories about how the world was created like the big bang or this, so it would be pretty hard to make your own decision.

AB: It doesn't really help me, it just confuses me even more. There's so many to choose from and I don't really believe in any one of them. It's kind of a mixture of them. Because there's no way a big bang can make the whole world.

JN: I suppose it could, a big bang, create everything . . . but it makes you think how difficult it is.

With regard to what Wright calls truthfulness, it is interesting that the pupils resist straight 'either-or' decisions about cosmologies, for example to adopt a 'religious' or 'scientific' point of view in an unconsidered manner. They recognise that the questions are complex, that different perspectives must be taken into account and that there need be no rush to take a position. Another discussion of the Hindu story, also reported in chapter 8, developed around the contingency of the labels 'Hindu' and 'scientist', the pupils debating the consequences of holding to both orientations simultaneously:



HR: You know like Hindus believe that the universe gets destroyed and then created again, well they could like think the big bang is like part of being destroyed or then created again. People like scientists might think there's been a world before and then after, and the big bang's like the start of another world.

Over the course of chapter 2, I argued that the avoidance of foreclosure was one mark of a healthy adolescence and that RE had a vital part to play in this, building young people's awareness of plural beliefs and values. It is encouraging to see evidence of RE's positive impact in my interview data, and to claim reasonably that my pupils show Andrew Wright's excellent virtue of truthfulness.

### **The value of RE**

As was reported above, Wright makes the interesting assertion that the value of RE must be seen as 'intrinsic': RE should not serve a modern or post-modern social agenda, but must be held up as worthwhile in itself (Wright 2004, 216). This ought to provoke some discussion, as many RE practitioners assume that our work is aimed at the benefit of society – perhaps through the promotion of liberal democratic values including free speech and respect for diversity (O'Grady 1996; Jackson 2004, ch.10). My own respondents experience religious material as intrinsically interesting, a process I have reported above in relation to Hinduism, but I am far from committed to the view that RE should have no

social agenda, and my study demonstrates the role of RE in assisting intercultural understanding. What does Wright mean, and can his view be sustained?

Firstly let us make closer scrutiny of Wright's words. The passage concerned is close and copious:

. . . the pursuit of religious truth becomes an important, unavoidable and entirely justifiable activity in its own right . . . The contribution of religious education to personal and social development need not be grounded in its extrinsic utility as a buttress to one or other modern or post-modern way of ordering society. On the contrary, its intrinsic value lies in its ability to enable society to learn to ask fundamental questions about the nature of reality in an informed and intelligent manner, and as a result to open out a range of different options for our personal and social being in the world. (Wright 2004, 216)

On reflection, it is quite difficult to see precisely what Wright means by intrinsic value. If intrinsic is meant in a strict sense, we would understand it to mean that the activity concerned has its value purely in its own performance and not as a means to a related end. RE tasks would be completely self-contained in terms of their value, the benefit to pupils full and actual during the time of their engagement. Perhaps there are precedents in Platonic contemplation of The Real or in the Buddha's view that association with the beautiful is the whole of the holy life. But Wright tends slightly away from such purism, wishing RE to play a part in the establishment of a more questioning and open society. Yet this must



not go so far as to aid the imposition of any modern or post-modern social agendas. What these agendas could be is not made clear, but given Wright's remarks in previous chapters, it is safe to assume that liberal tolerance is his target here. A rule of tolerance of others' beliefs must not obscure differences over truth, restricting pupils to safe questions or positions.

Yet it is not self-evidently true that respect for others results in a narrowed repertoire of questions or beliefs. Neither does Wright argue for the position, nor bring forth empirical data to support it. At various points, my own data reveal my pupils to be perfectly capable of combining regard for others with sharp views of their own. A very good example can be found in the following excerpt from cycle 3, where a group including one Muslim pupil debate whether Islam is brainwashing:

ESM: I don't think I'm that cynical but maybe I am about religion. People going together and trying to touch this big lump of rock, and I just think brainwashing, so, you know. And if it inspires them then great, they should carry on with it, but it doesn't inspire me.

O: Brainwashing?

AB: I don't see it as brainwashing. It's not brainwashing, it's just lots and lots of people showing their beliefs. Because you can be different and have the same beliefs.

ESM: I'm not saying you can't, I'm saying I think it's brainwashing when they're saying 'once in your lifetime you have to go to such a place and you

have to walk seven times around this black stone or whatever' and I think it's controlling.

JN: They're not going to kill you if you don't.

ESM: But you'll go to hell if you don't do it.

N: I don't think it's brainwashing because you know - if they think that it makes sense then it is true. It's their belief isn't it? People are not forcing them to believe it.

ESM: I'm not saying they're forcing them to believe it, maybe brainwashing was the wrong word.

O: It's got a good discussion going.

ESM: But now I feel like everyone's angry at me.

A: No-one's angry! I don't really see it as brainwashing, I see it as what people have been taught to believe. And if they want to go and run seven times around a black stone then they should do it. But it's not brainwashing, they can make their own choices and people don't have to tell them that they've got to go to that place.

ESM: They don't tell them that and that's what I don't agree with. It says in the Quran that you've gotta go once in your lifetime unless you're ill or you don't have the money. If you believe in Allah you have to do this and I don't think that's right, to tell someone that they have to do something. Unless it's something obvious like you have to not kill people.

JN: Well people choose to become Muslims and then it's their choice. They might want to go to the big black stone.

ESM: I know, I'm saying if they want to then they should. But you shouldn't have to go in case you burn in hell if you don't.



N: It's just showing that if you believe in Allah then he'll command you and you'll do everything for him. You realise that it does show that you love Allah.

If RE does have the instrumental value of contributing to a healthy social order, must this be seen negatively as the imposition of a modernist meta-narrative, or is it rather a mark of a mature positive pluralism grounded in educated personal awareness? Again we see how Wright polarises matters unnecessarily. The sense in the above extract is that pupils experience immediate and significant gains in personal knowledge and understanding, and can then go on to be participants in a more positive and respectful society. There is no clear demarcation between the intrinsic benefit and the pragmatic outcome. What we have is a process of dialogue. Perhaps the participants impose their democratic values upon it, and perhaps this is valuable in a democracy.

It is likely that as a simple two-part matter, the distinction of intrinsic and instrumental value stands little scrutiny. Lemos (1999, 948-9) describes not two but four ways in which something may be valuable. Indeed the experience of pleasure may be *intrinsically* valuable and the taking of a warm bath may relate *instrumentally* to the state of pleasure. Yet the experience of beauty may be intrinsically valuable and the setting sun may thus have *inherent* value, as it were waiting to be experienced. Your experience of pleasure or beauty may enhance mine, therefore having *contributory* value. Regarding RE, it might be said that all four forms of value are present: intrinsic because of the immediate personal development taking place as RE, instrumental because of RE's causal relation to

awareness of plurality in society, inherent because of RE's inexhaustible resources and contributory because of RE's interpersonal nature. My data carry all four senses of value and perhaps the contributory sense is especially strong: throughout the interview record can be appreciated the dialogic meaning-making between the pupils, and the same would apply to their preference for joint, creative activity during the lessons themselves. Now, I do not say that RE has no intrinsic value. My data are richly suggestive of pupil personal development through RE. I simply say that RE has not only intrinsic but also instrumental, inherent and contributory value. I also say (with Dewey, see below) that the intrinsic – instrumental dichotomy is false. For these reasons, I think that Wright's emphasis on intrinsic value at the expense of instrumental value is misleading, but I maintain that the intrinsic form of value is very important to RE.

A way to break down the simplistic intrinsic-pragmatic (or intrinsic-instrumental) distinction is to view the creation of social order as a desired outcome of education, but also to place it at the heart of education's fundamental purposes. It is intrinsic to education's reason for being that it will result in a more just society. This echoes the thought of John Dewey. Dewey's philosophy of education is grounded in his observations about life, the essence of which is to work towards its own continuance and enhancement, always transmitting itself into renewed forms. For Dewey this applies equally to social and physical life, and he uses a biological analogy to express the significance of education:



It is the very nature of life to strive to continue in being . . . what nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life . . . communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession. (Dewey 1961, 9)

The commonality or mutuality of true knowledge is a significant theme in Dewey's educational thought. This is brought out clearly when Dewey discusses the difference between training and education. Training is the manipulation of the environment to secure useful habits in others, but education involves co-partnership and shared commitments. Those educated and not just trained exercise responsibility. So we can assume that Dewey does not mean that shared commitments must mean shared views; the commitments are to democratic values and discourse modes. Therefore, the social environment of learning is of deep importance.

Dewey shows how the democratic environment of learning has great value in the plural society; it has 'steady' and 'integrating' functions in the face of competing rationalities (Dewey 1961, 21). Conjoint meaning is essential to social control, 'the business of education' (Dewey 1961, 39). Dewey does not use 'control' to mean coercion but something akin to Durkheim's social solidarity or consensus. His distaste for coercion is further shown in his views of childhood and adulthood. Dewey insists that childhood must be seen *intrinsically* as a state where one's immaturity is a source of great generative power, rather than *comparatively* where one lacks adult accomplishment (Dewey 1961, 42). He notes the significance of humans' prolonged infancy compared to other species;

we learn for longer because we learn far more complex operations, the defining one of which is to learn to learn. In Dewey's thought, education and life are practically synonymous. Growth and development are synonyms for both, neither has ends beyond itself, both are boundless and ongoing. Both entail continual adaptation to and of the environment.

The criterion of the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective in fact. (Dewey 1961, 53)

Thus, priceless human life depends upon the civilised society for its nurture and furtherance, so the dualism of intrinsic value and instrumental value breaks down.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have made a critical assessment of Andrew Wright's religious literacy pedagogy, drawing mostly on my own field study data but also on the thought of Ninian Smart and John Dewey. In relation to Wright's pre-2004 work, I have argued that he is right to stress the importance of religious language and concepts to the progress of RE pupils, but that he polarises language and experience in too strident a fashion and is too hard in his insistence that pupils should confront truth claims. I have also shown that whilst his pedagogical principles and strategies are basically sound, they need more rigorous testing in classrooms; reflection on my own examples suggests that the engagement of pupil horizons and religious horizons can be an unpredictable matter, best



handled through an action research approach where the curriculum is viewed as dynamic.

Regarding Wright's post-2004 conversation with post-modernism, I have said that it meets some of the *theoretical* criticisms previously offered, because his recent concern for alterity places pupils in a more open and developmental relationship with truth. If Wright now wishes pupils to occupy the hermeneutical situation where progressive understanding of religious traditions clarifies their own stances and vice versa, his pedagogy may be similar in practice to that of Robert Jackson. Such a convergence on essentials means optimism for RE's future self-understanding. I have offered a confident assessment of my own pedagogical examples in the light of Wright's four new principles of honesty, receptivity, wisdom and truthfulness, and I have also demonstrated why his claim for the essentially intrinsic value of RE might be reconsidered. RE has several forms of value. However, if Wright really means that a rightful concern for mutual respect need not and should not obscure differences over truth, then I agree wholeheartedly.

Wright's ideas lack sustained empirical testing, but my own field study data have proved useful in the assessment of their utility, and have led to positive suggestions for their refinement. Equally, Wright's pedagogical principles have given sharp criteria for the assessment of my classroom practice. As we shall see towards the close of the next and final chapter, they have also impacted on my recommendations for professional practice in RE.

Has the analysis of Wright's theory in the light of my data (and vice versa) moved forward the debate over RE pedagogy? I would argue yes, through the emergence of action research, as a necessary tool for the handling of the subject's increasing self-understanding as a hermeneutical activity. Both Wright and Jackson already stress the need for hermeneutical learning in RE, but the emphases on action research and the dynamic curriculum as conditions of a fully hermeneutical RE pedagogy are original contributions of this thesis.



## **Chapter 10 Conclusion and recommendations for professional practice in Religious Education**

In this final chapter I review the thesis and offer its conclusion. Each previous chapter from 2 onwards is revisited in turn, in order to assess what has been established in relation to key themes. I then give closing recommendations for professional practice in RE, based on my earlier versions but now revised in the light of the thesis as a whole.

### **Adolescence and Religious Education**

At the close of chapter 2, on the basis of a literature review on adolescence, I argued that the central adolescent needs were to develop an internal locus of control (Coleman and Hendry 1990) and to establish a life-long search for personal identity (Erikson 1950,1968; Heaven 2001; Head 1997). Educators were charged to respond to these needs by providing education for citizenship (Burkinsher 2002a, 2002b) and education for identity (Hargreaves 1994), two overlapping fields. RE was said to have a distinctive role here, both in the formation of pupils' understanding of cultural plurality through religious studies and in their search for identity by assisting the clarification of personal beliefs and values (Skeie 1995; Meijer 1991, 1995). I suggested that the area was increasingly complex and called for research to clarify the classroom implications of my remarks. I gave a first provisional set of professional recommendations based on my concerns for pupil agency, education for citizenship and education for identity.

The first point to make here concerns adolescent agency in the research process: my field study data show how placing the pupil voice at the centre of teaching and research leads to valuable insight regarding effective RE. This point will be developed further under Research Methodology (below).

Secondly, in relation to RE teaching, a hermeneutical relationship has emerged between education for citizenship (awareness of cultural plurality) and education for identity (clarification of personal beliefs and values). At the close of chapter 8 when summarising my key field study findings, I was able to say that RE should be a *dialogue with difference*, intended to clarify issues of existential and ethical interest and matters of personal significance. In a dialogue with difference, not only are new beliefs and values encountered, but one's existing beliefs and values are brought forward for clarification and renewal. Given this hermeneutical emphasis, religious educators can no longer sharply distinguish learning about religion and learning from religion, which must be seen as phases of the same process.

Thirdly, and also in relation to RE teaching, my review of adolescence led to the conclusion that young people have to consider issues of justice (Gearon 2002, 2004). This point has also been reinforced by my empirical findings, in that *existential or ethical interest* has emerged alongside dialogue with difference as a central factor in pupils' motivation to learn in RE. At various points in the thesis I have returned to the view that unless religious material can be linked to pupils' own experiences, ideas and concerns, they will experience their studies as meaningless and flat. Yet the way in which religious concepts can enliven and



form a framework for their existential or ethical discussions is often illustrated vividly, for example in the pupils' reflections on karma in cycle 4. At the same time, I have found reasons to suggest that a fully geopolitical RE - of the kind favoured by Gearon - might wait until the mid-adolescent years.

A related fourth point comes up where pupils are engaging with religious material broadly concerned with life's meaning – personal or philosophical material. *Personal significance* was the other central factor of pupil motivation, alongside dialogue with difference and existential or ethical interest. It was clear that tasks planned to encourage pupils to consider what is important to them personally, for example the presentation on inspiration in cycle 3, were received enthusiastically and provoked genuine reflection. This finding further reinforces the need for hermeneutical learning and for a dialogue where pupils' concerns are of equal importance with religious material.

### **Creativity and Religious Education**

Chapter 3 involved discussion of the nature of creativity in RE, again on the basis of a literature review. Firstly I drew five educational principles from the psychology of creativity (Bailin 1994; Csiksentmihalyi 1999; Collins and Amabile 1999; Fontana 1995): the need to plan for creativity, the need for a supportive motivational environment, that unique outcomes must be sought, that intrinsic motivation must be gained and that truly creative products have significance and not just novelty. Secondly I considered writings on creativity and spirituality (Nicholson 2000; Wooding 2000; Lealman 1993, 1996) to show how creative RE will link to an understanding of the whole person and also to an

ethics of resistance to indoctrination (for example, from consumerist values). Thirdly, to follow up the need for an ethics of resistance, I discussed Freirean principles of praxis and humanisation as complements to my existing concerns for education for citizenship and education for identity (Freire 1974a, 1974b, 1996). These Freirean principles were then interpreted in the light of John Hull's remarks on freedom and authority in RE (1996). Fourthly I re-assessed the concept of *knowledge-creation* issuing from Freire. I adjusted knowledge-creation in favour of a model of hermeneutical understanding owed largely to Gadamer (1975). To close the chapter I revised my professional recommendations, now expanded to take account of the creativity-related points concerning unique and significant learning outcomes, classroom climate and dialogue with tradition.

My field study data are rich in evidence concerning creativity. In relation to planning collaborative creative arts tasks to gain the motivation of RE pupils, there is much evidence that such activities can create a supportive motivational environment. My participant observation log, questionnaire and interview responses consistently show that pupils give high value to opportunities to work together on drama or art aimed to explore moral or spiritual themes. The pupils create unpredictable and sometimes arresting work, when given the freedom to do so. That these outcomes are often significant and not just novel also relates to the summary of adolescence in the preceding section: the pupils' dialogue with difference motivates them only when it puts them in touch with matters of ethical, existential or personal interest. By the end of cycle 2 the motivating quality of active creative arts work was already a saturated category.



Furthermore, regarding the pupils' autonomy and independence of thought, my field study data also show how they experience strong motivation when placing themselves in ethical debates. In any dialogue with difference, the pupils' responses to religious or related material must have equal importance to this stimulus material. In retrospect my engagement with Gadamer during chapter 3 was a turning point in the thesis. The point arose that because of their relationship with tradition, the pupils cannot create knowledge *ex nihilo*. The interview data especially reveal how they articulate their views in relation not only to religious stimulus material but also through direct dialogical meaning-making. There has been insufficient space to compare my work with that of Julia Ipgrave (1998, 2002, 2003), but some discussion of the parallels has taken place elsewhere (O'Grady 2005a).

### **Research Methodology**

In the course of chapter 4, my research stance was explicated as a basic set of political and professional persuasions. These involved a democratic aim to give pupils more of a say in their own education and a collegial aim to respect the autonomy of teachers. I wanted to show how listening to the pupil voice (Rafferty 1996; Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace 1996; Rudduck and Flutter 2000; Quicke 2003) can help us to shape education to pupil needs, and to offer my colleagues in the teaching profession not fixed prescriptions but possibilities for change to be tested in practice (Elliott 1991, 1997, 1998). Describing my findings as indications of possibilities for change was also an epistemological escape from the twin traps of positivist certainty (Gorard 2003) and post-modern relativism (Stronach and McClure 1997). My action research framework,

dependent on ethnographic monitoring methods (Davies 1999), was developed with all of these aims in mind. Following my field study and subsequent analyses, I can now reflect back on the application of my methodology over four cycles.

Firstly, mine has proved to be a revealing study of the power of the pupil voice. At the close of chapter 8 I could report that my interview data contained very much that should be of interest to RE teachers, concerning what is likely to motivate pupils in lessons. I also recorded my impression that once the pupil voice became a given presence in the organisation of our lessons, the project took on a momentum of its own and a degree of motivation was gained just through the pupils' confidence and power. A related emergent feature was the fuzzy edge between teaching and research. The questionnaires and especially the interviews worked as far more than data gathering devices. The interviews were rich educational exchanges in their own right, and my research diary records the pupils' habit of viewing lessons and interviews as continuous with one another. Although the interviews were intended to be opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning, what we see is that reflection on learning cannot be separated from learning. This matter is revisited below, in the discussion of action research and pedagogy.

Secondly, if the repeated cycles of teaching, learning and reflection helped to engage and empower the pupils, they also sensitised and challenged the teacher. It is an excellent experience to plan on the basis of pupils' words. They have an immediate and fresh quality that is necessarily absent from syllabus documents;



they contain pupils' own constructions of events and they relate to the teacher's recent work. This is not to say that statutory documents should be abandoned, but that their provisions should be seen as such. In a curriculum for adolescent agency and creativity, statutory arrangements must be provisional. We cannot predict, but must be sensitive to, pupils' responses and enthusiasms. There is no reason why this principle should not be included in RE locally agreed syllabuses, except where there is too prescriptive an emphasis on covering religious content or meeting attainment targets. Again, I am not saying that there should be no emphasis on these features, but that there should be plenty of room for dialogue and creativity.

Thirdly, the use of my term *possibilities for change* is intended to create similar freedoms. I am confident that the recommendations offered below are true to the content of this thesis, but I also recognise that my research has operated within a specific set of conditions. Therefore, my findings do not have the status of fixed facts or recipes for success. At the same time, other RE classrooms will be comparable to mine, in terms of pupil age, syllabus guidelines, contemporary culture and other variables, and so my findings are not trapped in the context of my own teaching. My first hope is that the recommendations below will be useful objects of reflection for other RE teachers. They cannot be understood without investigation in one's own context, except as the theoretical propositions they are not intended to be. We still have a shortage of classroom-based studies of RE pedagogy. My second hope is that this study might influence other RE teachers to undertake similar action research studies of their own classrooms. We might then expand the language of reflection and have a growing basis for future

work. My data cannot be generalised through larger-scale quantitative work, being of a kind that depends heavily on the direct relationship between teacher and pupils.

This leads fourthly to some consideration of the possible contribution of action research to RE pedagogy. In chapter 9 Elliott's concept of the dynamic curriculum (1991) was employed in a critique of Wright's three-stage pedagogical strategy (2000). Examples from my field study were used to substantiate the point that the engagement of pupil with religious horizons is an unpredictable process, and that teachers must be ready to adapt to unexpected outcomes, shaping future foci and activities to emergent pupil motivations. I argued that Wright has no real strategy to do this but that he can take one from action research. Because of his new hermeneutical concern for alterity, Wright's more recent theoretical position (2004) moves him closer to Jackson (1997, 2004). It could be argued that any hermeneutical pedagogy needs a strategy to manage the unpredictable outcome of a fusion of horizons. New third factors emerge in a manner analogous to the birth of a person, whose character can only be partly foreseen in those of the parents. As I said at the outset of the thesis and have repeated at various points since, Jackson's interpretive approach is a hermeneutical method that fundamentally guides my own research. What has my action research added to Jackson's interpretive approach?

Jackson's core principles have already been stated in chapters 1 and 6, but for clarity let us re-present them here. In studying religious traditions pupils should not be expected to set aside their own presuppositions, but should compare their



own concepts with those of others; through their studies of religious traditions pupils should re-assess their own ways of life; they should be constructively critical of the material they study; and they should maintain an awareness of the development of the interpretive process, reflecting on the nature of their learning (Jackson 2004, 88).

In one sense the same criticism of Wright can be offered to Jackson, that he does not foresee that unexpected ideas and possibilities may emerge through the comparison of pupils' concepts with those of others or through their constructive criticisms of the material they study, and that he has no strategy to monitor and respond to such developments. However, Jackson does say that pupils should maintain an awareness of the interpretive process and reflect on the nature of their learning. But he does not say how they should do so, nor does he charge the teacher with the responsibility to shape future curricula to this awareness and reflection. Perhaps my action research method illustrates how this can be done. I am not fundamentally altering Jackson's pedagogy, but my work suggests ways in which teachers might manage the element of monitoring and responding to emergent ideas. It extends the interpretive approach to embrace the ideas of the pupil voice and the dynamic curriculum. These are necessary elements of a truly hermeneutical or dialogical programme. As was argued at the close of chapter 9, for these reasons, my action research approach can be viewed as an original contribution of this thesis to debates on RE pedagogy.

The need for action research may not help with a problem identified at the start of the thesis whilst looking back on my MA research, namely that teachers

cannot realistically make a formal collaborative study of every class's work. Yet perhaps my methods can be used on smaller scales. Pupils could record their views of RE as part of end-of-topic assessment tasks, giving the teacher a briefer amount of feedback to manage say three times a year. Interviews could be held more occasionally with smaller samples of pupils. These smaller interventions would lack the force of a full study but still be a step in the right direction. Teachers could undertake more detailed research studies at different career points. As was suggested above, we would all benefit from a network of action research studies and an expanded language of reflection, to which teachers would contribute according to time and capacity. During the latter stages of the production of this thesis, such a network had begun to take shape, under the auspices of the project Religion in Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries (REDCo) (Jackson 2006; see also <http://213.131.236.148/web/3480/3481/index.html> ). The English strand of the project is the Warwick REDCo *community of practice* ([http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wie/wreru/aboutus/research\\_projects/current/redco/communityofpractice.doc](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wie/wreru/aboutus/research_projects/current/redco/communityofpractice.doc) ). There, eleven researchers pursue various aspects of RE practice, including assessment, meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils, philosophy for children, community cohesion and initial teacher education. All the studies are guided by Jackson's interpretive approach and by the action research approach set out in this thesis.

### **Key Findings**

The preceding sections of this chapter (especially those on adolescence and creativity) have already revisited my key field study finding, gained over



chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, that there are three central factors in pupils' motivation to learn in RE: dialogue with difference, existential or ethical interest and personal significance. It is also worth recalling the discussion at the close of chapter 8, where I resisted further analysis of these categories into a hierarchy or pattern of significance. My view is that the categories are interlinked and of equal importance. Thus, there is little value in a dialogue with an unfamiliar religious tradition over a matter of slight existential or ethical interest or personal significance. Again, this recollects the discussion of significance in the above section on creativity (Bailin 1994). Pupils will not engage in a dialogue with difference for its own sake. This has repercussions for content selection in secondary RE. Items of religious significance must be weighed educationally, in terms of their promise to stimulate thought on issues of adolescent identity. And again, as has been suggested above under Research Methodology, it seems important that statutory guidelines for RE should be sufficiently flexible to allow pupils' concerns and enthusiasms to emerge and be investigated.

### **Critical Discussion**

In the course of chapter 9 I developed a critique of the religious literacy pedagogy of Andrew Wright (1993, 1996, 1997, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2004) in relation to my field study data and to the thought of Ninian Smart (1968, 1996) and John Dewey (1961). My data show that whilst he is correct to emphasise the importance of religious language and concepts to pupils' progress in RE, Wright need not and should not oppose language and concepts to experience: my data are rich in instances where pupils see the worth of religious language and concepts in terms of their utility as tools to interpret personal experience. The

data on the pupils' interest on a Hindu creation myth also show that their motivation can sometimes be driven philosophically and theologically in a way that owes much to the intrinsic character of the material. Still, according to my study, the central factors in pupils' motivation to learn in RE are dialogue with difference, existential or ethical interest and personal concern. As has been argued in the above sections on adolescence and creativity, religious words and concepts are not usually powerful in their own right, but when effectively addressed to pupils' life-worlds. Smart's dialectical dimensions theory of religions is useful in this regard, as a corrective to Wright's polarisations and as a reminder that teachers can move backwards and forwards between linguistic, conceptual, experiential and other foci.

During chapter 9, examples from my field study were revisited to demonstrate that Wright's pedagogical strategies, though untested empirically, are basically sound. In the above section on research methodology, I have already recalled the argument from chapter 9 that Wright should look to action research for ways to handle the possibilities that emerge through the engagement of pupil and religious horizons. Regarding Wright's post-2004 work, I believe that his new concern for alterity is significant. Where I had previously criticised him for too hard an insistence that pupils confront issues of truth (O'Grady 2005b), I now find that he has a more gradual approach where progressive attention to the beliefs and values of others places pupils in an ongoing clarification of their own stances. In practice this makes his pedagogy hard to distance from Jackson's. A convergence between leaders around the hermeneutical nature of learning in RE is a positive sign for the subject's future.



I have voiced a confident assessment of my own pedagogy in the light of Wright's four virtues of honesty, receptivity, wisdom and truthfulness (2004, 221). I accept these as strong pedagogical values but I have rejected Wright's idea that RE has intrinsic value in a predominant or exclusive sense. My discussions of the nature of value (Lemos 1999), of an example from my field study and of Deweyan thought on the purpose of education have indicated that the idea is misleading. The need for action research, as a condition of hermeneutical teaching and learning in RE, should be re-emphasised at this juncture. In weighing the outcome of the match of Wright's thought to my data, I was able to argue that through the identification of this need, this thesis had contributed an original perspective to RE theory.

### **Recommendations for Professional Practice in Religious Education**

By the close of chapter 8 I could argue that my field study findings did not change the recommendations for professional practice last itemised at the conclusion to chapter 3, but lent empirical substance to them. The fundamental principles that RE should address adolescent needs for agency and identity and give scope for the creative investigation of beliefs and values were enhanced by the emergence of the categories of dialogue with difference, existential or ethical concern and personal significance. Since completing my critical discussion and finding my conclusion, I have had more material to consider and more time to consider it. The programme of professional recommendations should now be reshaped, in order to place my central categories at its head, to take account of the importance of action research and to reflect Andrew Wright's four virtues for RE. Thus:

- RE should develop a hermeneutical pedagogy where pupils experience a dialogue with difference. In such a dialogue, the pupils' responses have equal status to material from religious traditions; a dialogue is an equal relationship. The aim of a dialogue with traditions different from the pupils' own, or with others who have different viewpoints on the pupils' own traditions, is to expand the pupils' intellectual, spiritual and moral horizons.
- RE should place pupils in a dialogue with difference over matters of existential or ethical concern to the pupils or matters of personal significance to the pupils.
- RE should include opportunities for pupils to evaluate the curriculum for its relevance to their existential or ethical concerns or to matters of personal significance to them. Teachers should build pupils' evaluations of the curriculum into future planning.
- RE should develop pedagogies of active enquiry, enabling pupils to develop qualities of responsibility and participation. Methodologically, a balance should be sought between interaction with the teacher and interaction with peers.
- RE should also develop pedagogies of creativity, through which should be sought unique and significant learning outcomes: a classroom climate of recognition and mutuality is essential to this end.
- RE's distinctive content should be beliefs and values in the context of cultural plurality, and the social and geopolitical issues of justice which are reflected by those beliefs and values.



- RE should aim to assist pupils in a lifelong search for personal identity. Though there is consensus that the search may begin in adolescence, adolescence itself is a variable construct. This search for identity has childhood antecedents and includes aspirations for future adult life. Material from religious traditions should be used in the service of the search, and opened to interpretation, criticism and response. In this way, pupils may be helped to develop their own flexible and reasoned beliefs and values.
- The role of the RE teacher should be to collaborate with his or her pupils in the search for identity. The responsibility of the RE teacher is to model the criticism, creativity and responsiveness of the mature enquirer, and to be alert to the pupils' developmental needs as they change.

The likeness of my recommendations to those of Deakin Crick *et al* (2004, 2005) was anticipated in chapter 2 (above). Deakin Crick and her colleagues also call for dialogical learning that is concerned with human values and rights, planned to empower pupils and to relate strongly to their life experiences. They also suggest that the role of the teacher will have to change in order to reflect the higher profile of pupil voice (Deakin Crick *et al* 2004, 2-3; 2005, 3-4). This is in the context of a major review of the impact of citizenship education, conceived broadly, on young people's experiences of school.

However, let me reiterate that my recommendations are intended to be objects of reflection in future studies. For example, one could take personal significance and dialogue with difference as action hypotheses for a study of RE amongst 14-

16 year-olds, investigating the personal concerns of older adolescents and how RE might address these. Or if studying younger respondents than mine, the adolescence framework would be replaced by material on childhood and the action research and ethnographic elements would be adapted to the changed environment. Here are implications for the continuing professional development of teachers: my studies (MA and PhD) show that action research can be a powerful professional instrument for developing teacher knowledge and agency. Our Warwick REDCo community of practice will test this claim (see above, section on Research Methodology in this chapter).

Thus, my research should be judged successful if it provides theoretical and methodological reference points for teachers to study different settings. An action research element is a necessary condition for pedagogical effectiveness in RE. I will give two summary justifications for this claim. Firstly, this thesis reports one study (and its MA pilot study). The situated and in many ways limited quality of my study is well recognised and that is exactly why I call for further studies. Secondly, part of RE's self-understanding is rightly that pupils' personal development is assisted, but this is inconceivable without attention to pupil voice. Agreed RE syllabuses and other subject planning documents should emphasise that pupil personal development and voice are central to the subject and should - as has already been suggested in this chapter - include religious material that promises transferability to pupils' own life-worlds. The motivation factors identified in these pages (dialogue with difference, existential and ethical interest and personal significance), though subject to ongoing research, might provide useful criteria for such transferability. As a key driver of RE's future



development, there should be regular re-identification of factors in pupils' motivation.

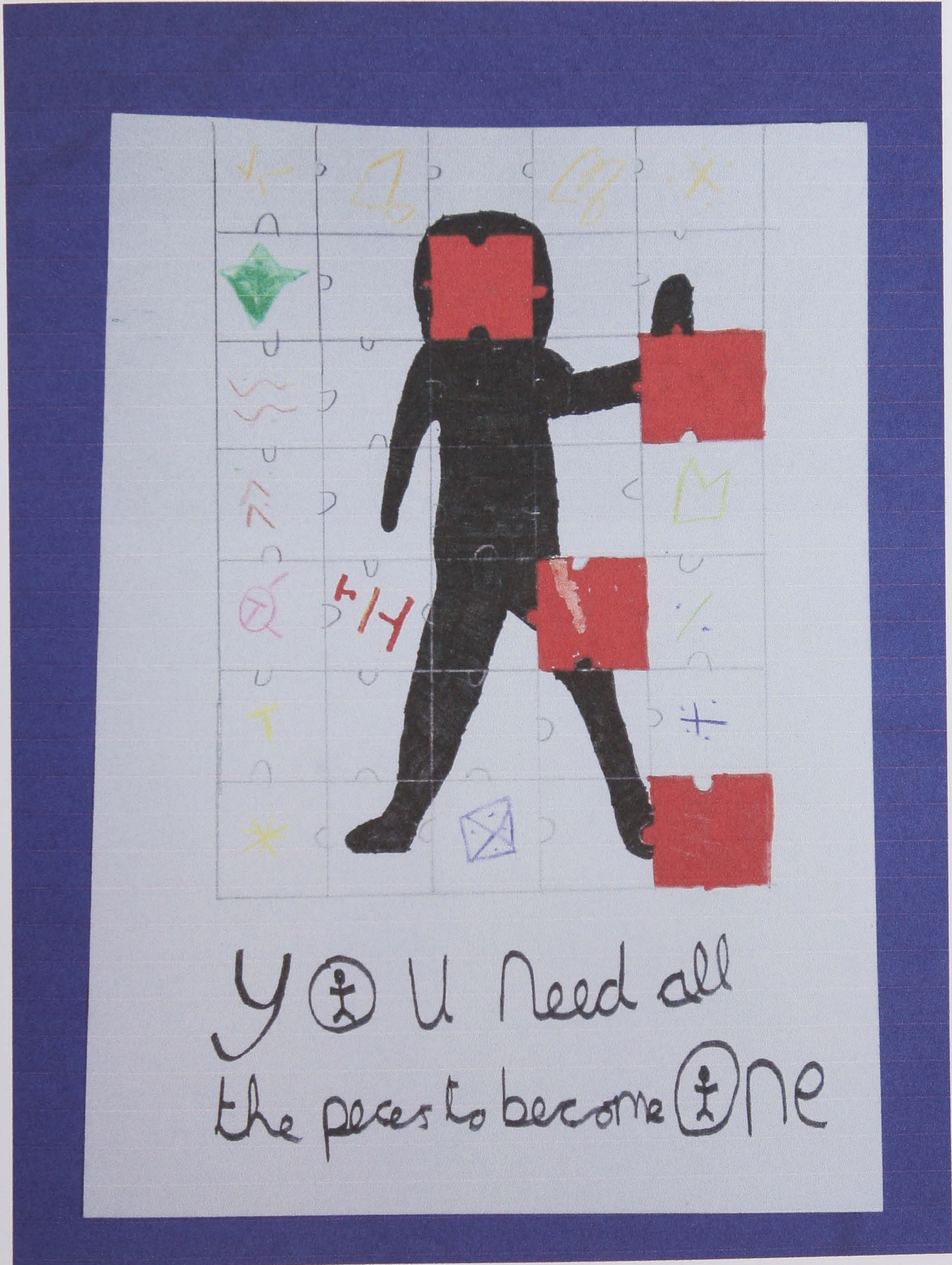
**Appendix 1: A Tabular Representation of the Process of Category Formation over the four field study cycles and the Relationship between Categories of different types**

<b>Type of Category</b> (interview questions also included in order to help illustrate process)	<b>Cycle 1</b> Islam and Surrender	<b>Cycle 2</b> Interfaith Relations, Peace and Reconciliation	<b>Cycle 3</b> Inspiration, Hajj and Passover	<b>Cycle 4</b> Hinduism and Creation
<b>Broad</b> (emerge through participant observation and diary / questionnaire data analysis)	Drama enjoyable: quiet tasks allow self-reflection: religious ideas and self-reflection link	Collaboration: concrete situations: own ideas development	Personal inspiration task scores highest: activity, creativity: sharing ideas with others	Creation story art and karma drama score highest
<b>Interview questions</b> (framed from broad categories or pursue themes from previous cycle – designed to refine broad categories into fine ones)	Why? Do they? What is the link?	Value of working with each other? Is peace important? What is important in your life?	Why? Family and friends: inspirational? Passover and Hajj: related to what inspires you personally?	Why? (Also, prompts based on previous three central categories – cycle 4 has synoptic function)
<b>Fine</b> (emerge through interview data analysis)	Drama interactive, empathetic: not quiet but conceptual interest: existential reminder	Peer understanding, plurality and ideas development: peace is socially important: family and friends	Personal-creative quality, loved ones encourage safety, self-esteem and individuality, <i>commitment</i> is a motivating focus	Story shows plurality and philosophical and intrinsic interest, karma provokes ethical discussion
<b>Satellite</b> (emerge as fine categories but depend on or can be subsumed under central category)	Drama interactive, empathetic: not quiet, conceptual interest: existential reminder	Peer understanding, plurality and ideas development: peace is socially important: family and friends	Creative quality, loved ones encourage individuality, <i>commitment</i> is a motivating focus	Philosophical interest, intrinsic interest, interest as example of plurality
<b>Central</b> (emerge through researcher reflection as fine category of central importance OR as category underlying fine categories)	<b>Dialogue</b> (all depend on dialogue, whether interpersonal or conceptual)	<b>Existential Interest</b> (all depend on a need to find meaning in life)	<b>Personal Significance</b> (the personal aspect underlies all other fine categories)	<b>Dialogue with difference stimulates</b> (unites fine categories based on story) <b>Ethical interest</b> (stands alone)
<b>Summary or Composite</b> (these are central categories left intact or combined and reflect overall field study results)	<b>Dialogue with Difference</b> (Composite: Cycle 1 dialogue, Cycle 4 dialogue with difference stimulates)	<b>Existential or Ethical Interest</b> (Composite: Cycle 2 existential interest, Cycle 4 ethical interest)	<b>Personal Significance</b> (Central Category Cycle 3)	



Appendix 2: Photographs of two examples of Pupils' Art on *Tawhid* (the oneness of Allah) or Uniqueness (see chapter 5, above).

Drawing (a): A Jigsaw of the Self





**Drawing (b): A Flower of Eternity**





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