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Religious Observance  
and  
Spiritual Development  
within Scotland's  
'Curriculum for Excellence'

## Abstract

This research examines the current requirements and practices of Religious Observance (RO) and spiritual development within Scotland's 'Curriculum for Excellence' (CfE). The research is focussed on the non-denominational school sector - approximately 90% of Scottish schools. The CfE has brought a shift in focus from solely curricular content to greater emphasis on character formation. Four key descriptors, termed "capacities", are used: responsible citizens, effective contributors, successful learners and confident individuals. A number of supplementary programmes are being promoted to achieve this through schemes such as the 'Rights Respecting School Award', 'Inspire-Aspire', 'Peer Mediation' and 'Restorative Justice'. The CfE details certain age-appropriate experiences and outcomes which pupils are expected to attain across eight core curricular subjects. In contrast, RO and spiritual development are outlined very differently by six key 'Sensings' in the 'Report of the Religious Observance Review Group' (2004), referred to in this thesis as the RORG. These Sensings have minimal descriptions, no exact definition and do not have detailed age-appropriate experiences and outcomes. The Sensings are: sensing mystery, sensing values, sensing meaningfulness, sensing a changed quality in awareness, sensing 'otherness' and sensing challenge.

This thesis addresses a number of questions: defining 'spirituality' in a way that can sit comfortably within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE); how RO events and these Sensings are perceived by pupils in particular - their voices are given especial prominence throughout; where RO and spiritual development are perceived as 'belonging' or 'fitting' within the CfE; how the 'success' of Sensing-rich RO events can be assessed and measured; crucially - what the children and young people think of the RO they receive; the validity and 'completeness' of the Sensings; how to train school staff and school chaplains in delivering spiritual development.

The research involved participant observation and interviews with policy-makers (advisors, consultants, Education Scotland staff, Religious Representatives on local Council Education committees, and members of school senior management teams), practitioners (chaplains and youth workers tasked with the actual delivery of RO events), parents of Primary school and Secondary school pupils, and - crucially - pupils (from Primary 3 to Secondary 6). The goal

was to record and analyse their principles, practices and lived experience of RO and spiritual development. In total qualitative data was gathered in thirty-four interview sessions from nine policy-makers, eight practitioners, nine parents, seventeen Primary school pupils and thirty-five Secondary school pupils. The practitioners, parents and pupils between them were connected to non-denominational schools covering seven Councils: City of Aberdeen, Dumfries & Galloway, Fife, City of Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire. The pupils between them came from four different non-denominational Primary schools, three non-denominational Secondary schools, and one independent School (Christian faith-based, fee-paying). This gave a reasonable sample of Scottish schools.

The definition of ‘spirituality’ that I developed (p 44) is that “Spirituality is that uniquely human capacity and need for a sense of identity and of integrity, of place and of purpose, which can only be fully satisfied in relationship with others and with a transcendent Other.” A full explanation for this definition is given in the text. The pilot study showed that pupils of all ages did not grasp the language and vocabulary of the Sensings as given in the RORG and in conclusion I offer an alternative “child-friendly” re-titling as follows: sensing mystery (the “Wow!” moments), sensing values (the “Now...” moments), sensing meaningfulness (the “How...?” moments), sensing a changed quality in awareness (the “Aum” moments), sensing ‘otherness’ (the ‘Narnia’ moments) and sensing challenge (the “Ow!” moments) (p 54). Once reworded and explained all pupils were quick to grasp most of the Sensings though ‘a changed quality in awareness’ and ‘otherness’ - perhaps requiring higher order thinking skills - were only accessible to older pupils (though they could not always discern or define the distinctions between them). I found that Policy-makers had a clear perception of how RO fits within CfE but that the actual practitioners (many of them from faith-based backgrounds) frequently struggled to achieve clarity on this point and were often unable to articulate a clear educational purpose to their RO input (p 113). A lack of contextual awareness, of training, of time, and of ability to think beyond their theological frameworks often hampered them.

Clear and positive and fruitful metaphors for RO emerge from the research: RO provides an important ‘space’ within CfE (p 119), and a place for ‘exploration’ and for ‘questioning.’ A consistent conclusion from my data reflects on how both practitioners and participants in RO events viewed them

and constructed meaning from them: this was frequently done by offering opposed pairs and, almost literally, placing themselves or their RO events at some point on the continuum between two poles (p 124). A whole spectrum of opposed pairs were found: from indoctrination (RO) to education (RME); from collective (RO) to individual (RME); from emotional (RO) to intellectual (RME), though practitioners were frequently at pains to make clear that this did not mean RO was inferior or in any way anti-intellectual or lacking in intellectual rigour; from experiential (RO) to explorative (RME); and from inspirational (RO) to informational (RME).

My findings were that practitioners offered a range of measures for assessing the ‘success’ of their RO events (p 139) which are critiqued: “an RO event is successful” - when I think it is, if it was enjoyed, if a school is “happy with it”, if there is pupil engagement, if pupil feedback says it has been, if your chosen quantifier says it has been, and if there are no complaints about it. I follow this with a discussion on the issues of getting RO ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ (p 152). The view of parents on the qualifications for those delivering RO to their children were also explored at this point, with the great majority strongly favouring faith-based practitioners (p 162).

A major feature of this research has been to seek and to summarise the first-hand views and the authentic voices of the children and young people within CfE. Their main reactions are summarised (p 172) as “Don’t make it [RO] a policed endurance test”; “Don’t make it so boring”; “Don’t tell us what to think”; “Let us ask our big questions. Help us find some answers”; and “Don’t exclude us. Let us have a say. Let us help you.”

In the light of the research two additional Sensings are strongly indicated: Sensing Stillness (p 192) and Sensing Community (p 200). Sensing Community in particular was identified as offering significant potential benefits for RO (p 206): creating a beneficial group identity or ethos for the school community, building pupil capacity as responsible citizens able to take their place in the wider community beyond the school gates, enabling individual and group resilience in the face of crisis, sharing emotional and spiritual experiences that could enrich the lives of all the participants, and the acquisition and exploration of values together in a safe and protected environment.

The final section (p 210) explores the creation and use of a tool for teaching practitioners to identify and explore the Sensings: the ‘Spiritual

Moments' box. In Educating school staff to experience and deliver the sensings (p 223), it merged that the issue is one of helping secular staff in particular to find a spiritual context for exploration and development of the sensings. In training faith representatives to experience and deliver the sensings (p 227) the issue is one of helping faith practitioners to explore and develop the sensings in the secular educational framework.

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'Spiritual Moments' Box and contents

'Spiritual Moments' Guide booklet

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Researching the spiritual development of pupils and students within Scottish non-denominational schools has been a privilege. I have long suspected that we underestimate the creativity, the curiosity and the depth of spirituality of young people. Now I am convinced of it. I am so grateful to them for allowing me a glimpse into their souls. From Primary 4 to Secondary 6 they have been the co-creators of this Thesis.

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## Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Stephen Younger

## Definitions and Abbreviations

ASPIRES ..... the ‘Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments’ measurement scale used within the medical professions

BERA ..... British Educational Research Association

CfE ..... Curriculum for Excellence

C of S ..... the Church of Scotland (the ‘National Church’ and the denomination of the majority of School chaplains in the non-denominational sector)

CLPL .... Continuous Learning, Professional Learning (the continuing professional registration and development scheme for teachers registered with the General Teaching Council, Scotland)

CN ..... a measurement within ASPIRES

ESO’s ..... Education Support Officers

FINs ..... the ‘Findings of Inspection’ summary given to schools following an HMle visit

HMle ..... Her Majesty’s Inspector of Education

NCC .... National Curriculum Council

PAR ..... Participatory Action Research

PF.... Prayer Fulfilment (a measure within ASPIRES)

PLS ..... Plain Language Statement

PVG ..... Protecting Vulnerable Groups (the vetting scheme for Scotland, replacing ‘Disclosure Scotland’)

QIO ..... Quality Improvement Officers

RE ..... Religious Education (a core curriculum area within Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence)

RME .... Religious and Moral Education

RO ..... Religious Observance (the requirement dating to the Education Act (Scotland) 1872 for spiritual development within Scottish schools)

RORG ..... Report of the Religious Observance Review Group

SCAA ... School Curriculum and Assessment Authority

SHANARRI .... an acronym for the 8 indicators of 'Health and Wellbeing' within the Curriculum for Excellence (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included)

SLC ..... South Lanarkshire Council (one of Scotland 32 unitary authorities with a responsibility for Education)

SMT ..... Senior Management Team

SRI ..... Special Religious Instruction (the name for the RO requirement in schools across Victoria, Australia)

TfR ..... Time for Reflection (an alternative title for RO used by some of Scotland's Education authorities)

UN ..... Universality (a measure within SPIRES)

WALT .... 'We are learning together' (acronym used by teachers)

WILF.... 'What I'm looking for' (acronym used by teachers)

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION - questions and definitions



**“I’ve never held a frog before”**

Picture © Steve Younger

**Preamble**

In the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872, Religious Observance (RO), that part of education which related to spiritual development, held an anomalous position within non-denominational schools: a legislatively protected, mandatory element that was exempted from the normal curricular and content controls applied to all other subject areas. It was effectively delegated to and delivered by local Church of Scotland (C of S) Parish clergy and was not seen as an appropriate area for examination by School Inspectors. In a society in which Church and School were integrally linked and in which the local Parish Minister was often deeply involved in the management of the local school this appeared unexceptional.

In 2004 the 'Report of the Religious Observance Review Group' (RORG) redefined 'religious observance' and 'spiritual development' for 21<sup>st</sup> century Scottish non-denominational schools. The legacy of the 1872 Act however has been a set of un-written assumptions that still shape the contemporary practice of RO and appear largely unaltered by the 2004 report:

- that character formation/citizenship education/values acquisition/moral education in general are not a legitimate part of a school's curricular remit but a desirable or fashionable "add on"
- that RO in general and spiritual matters in particular are mandatory burdens but not part of a school's curricular or educational remit
- that many Headteachers feel they have no effective control over the content delivered in RO events
- that Christian RO appears to be 'privileged' in non-denominational schools and that its place should never be challenged or altered

- that RO is the preserve of the ordained clergy, specifically of the ‘National’ Church, the Church of Scotland (C of S)
- that the C of S clergy within whose Parish boundaries a school building may find itself have a ‘right’ to the Chaplaincy of that school and to determine the RO input
- that Chaplaincy is accessible to clergy with ulterior motives and agendas (e.g. para-church evangelicalism, secularism, indoctrination in religious beliefs)
- that RO delivery is frequently divorced from the school context and ethos
- that RO has no clear educational purpose and therefore no place in a modern, secular society and liberal education
- that RO content is completely unrelated to the current Curriculum for Excellence
- that pupils are passive consumers of RO events
- that RO content and delivery may have no relevance for the target audience
- that the RORG remains widely unknown and un-implemented.

The place of religious observance in non-denominational Scottish schools in 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland is increasingly contested. The external grounds for challenge are that it no longer holds any cultural relevance. The internal grounds, within schools, are that it has no educational justification in the contemporary Curriculum for Excellence. This thesis begins with these assumptions and seeks to test them and offer appropriate recommendations.

The widespread perception is that where Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education shows any interest in RO it is mainly to check compliance with Guidelines on the frequency of RO events rather than the educational quality of those events or their purpose and content. Inspectors are tasked with accumulating evidences of compliance such as completed RO templates for events and with ensuring that accurate information on the parental opt-out is given in school handbooks. Modules in the delivery of RO as a part of the initial training of teachers or of Career-long Professional Learning (CLPL) are scarce or non-existent. Only the University of Glasgow - in partnership with the Church of Scotland and Scripture Union Scotland - has offered a Masters level module in 'RO: Design and Practice.' This had the advantage of being accessible to school staff and to chaplains. Current training for Church of Scotland Ministry does not include a module on Chaplaincy in an Education establishment during theological study or practical placement/probation schedules, despite the C of S providing by far the largest number of School Chaplains to the non-denominational sector. The C of S also provides religious representatives on every Local Authority Education committee but does not specifically train them in RO. None of Scotland's present Theological Training Colleges currently teaches a module on Education chaplaincy<sup>1</sup>. When conducting the initial literature review for the proposal for this PhD I identified a single research paper on the pupil experience of RO within non-denominational Scottish schools. In England the University of Chichester offers a full three-year MA in School Chaplaincy and Bishop Grosseteste University in Lincoln hosted the International Association of

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<sup>1</sup> Until it closed in 2014 the Glasgow-based 'International Christian College' offered two related modules as a part of its BA in Youth and Community Work: one on 'Working with Schools' and 'Supporting Children with Additional Support Needs'. The Scottish Baptist College (University of West of Scotland, Paisley campus) is developing a module on Chaplaincy in general but currently (June 2016) focussing only on Health Care and Workplace Chaplaincy.

Children's Spirituality under the leadership of Professor Kate Adams<sup>2</sup>. The Stapleford Centre in Nottingham produces regular material related to spiritual development within the English curriculum.

While Religious Education (RE) in Scotland has gone through a number of metamorphoses from catechetical examination to 'Religious Instruction' to 'Religious Education' to 'Religious and Moral Education' (RME), RO has a far more muddled track record. RE is a recognised part of the Curriculum; one of eight detailed core curricula, clearly placed within the remit of a Curricular Head alongside Philosophy. Accountability for RO is held within the same remit though with an allocation of 10% of the Curriculum Head's time. While RME has a full range of age-graded and precise 'Experiences' and 'Outcomes' within key Scottish education documents, there is no similar breakdown for RO. Given the difficulties in defining spirituality, spiritual development, religious experiences, etc. this is unsurprising in some ways. The seminal 'Report of the Religious Observance Review Group' (RORG 2004) is the closest the Curriculum for Excellence and Scottish Education come to defining RO. The end result is that RO is frequently sidelined, omitted, misunderstood, and contested.

The position found in the 1972 'Moral and Religious Education in Scottish Schools' (Scottish Education Department, HMSO) was broadly an inability to distinguish between RO and religious indoctrination; a confusion of RO with RE; chaplains who could not differentiate between school and parish settings; widespread failure to provide quality RO in secondary schools; and disengaged pupils. Interview transcripts for this thesis suggest the situation does not appear to have significantly improved. The key 'Report of the Religious Observance

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<sup>2</sup> Who accepted a new post in September 2017 as Professor of Education and Childhood, Winchester University

Review Group' (RORG) which should shape current practice within Curriculum for Excellence remains widely unknown, poorly implemented and only observed in the breach. As an initial impression, the Education Committees of Scotland's 32 Unitary authorities appear to be broadly reactive when it comes to RO - only drafting clear RO policies when challenged (e.g. from organised Secularist or Humanist interventions) or in crises (e.g. inappropriate actions by chaplains). At the early stages of this research I wrote to a dozen Education committees asking for copies of their RO policies and scoured Council websites and search engines: only Glasgow and the Highlands and Islands produced clear and readily accessible RO policies. Two other Education Committees signposted me to RME policies rather than RO policies. The remainder did not respond or RO proved to be invisible within their search parameters. Each Education authority has 'Quality Improvement Officers' (QIO) or equivalent positions and sometimes short-life working groups that take on a remit for RO policy production but these also vary widely. At the time of research South Lanarkshire Council, Glasgow City, Highlands and Islands, Dumfries and Galloway excelled. Dumfries and Galloway's QIO organised comprehensive training opportunities for staff to explore RO. The role of the 'Religious Representatives' on each Council's Education committee is the most significant factor in how pro-active Councils are. These representatives vary widely in their expertise, experience and commitment. A key issue in how to deliver RO fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in how to deliver spiritual development and values acquisition compliant with the Curriculum for Excellence is that the key term - *spiritual* - is ill-defined. I now turn to resolving this issue.

**Definition: Spirituality**

‘Spirituality’ has been termed “a weasel word” (Brown & Furlong 1996:4), “more easily described and observed than defined” (Ota & Chater 2007:24).

Laying hands on the legendary pot of gold at the end of a rainbow seems more achievable than reaching an uncontested definition of spirituality that would be acceptable to all comers:

“... of all experiences, it is the spiritual which, it seems, is most resistant to operational definition. At its worst, attempts to pin it down lead only to a greater awareness of its intangibility and pervasiveness” (Best 2000:10)

A part of the problem in defining this word is this numinous quality and the sense of encountering a multi-layered phenomenon that permeates human experience. Defining spirituality is much more than a linguistic or grammatical task: it must also engage emotional and affective layers. This makes examining and classifying spirituality feel like Daniel Scott’s childhood reaction to a museum visit:

“As a child, I visited the old National Sciences Museum in Ottawa where there were rows of display cases of dead butterflies, all pinned down and well lit. It was a horror for me: beautiful creatures pinned, specimens defined by tags.” (Scott in Ota & Chater 2007:89)

Creatures that in life were delicate and beautiful were reduced to fixed and fading exhibits. Attempting to define spirituality is analogous. Dissecting lived experiences risks turning those experiences into corpses for lifeless displays. There are many examples of this ‘butterfly-collecting’ museum approach applied to spirituality. Thinking in terms of categories reduces spirituality to a relatively straightforward and clinical list of markers or indicators: for example Beck’s 14 “characteristics” (Best 1996:48f) such as wonder, gratitude, hope, courage, energy, detachment, acceptance, love,

gentleness - or Evans’ 8 “attitude-virtues” (Best 1996:49f) including humility, self-acceptance, friendliness, concern, contemplation. The problem with this approach is that the indefinable is being defined by a list of other indefinable terms, fragmenting spirituality into a fractal puzzle of meanings beyond meanings within meanings. This approach also fails to grapple with the dynamism, fluidity and nuance of spirituality as a lived experience. The end result is a grammatical post mortem that leaves a messy corpse of spirituality on an inspection table to be argued over by philosophers, psychologists, artists and linguists. The listing of markers also has a reductive effect on ‘spirituality’, making it equivalent to a solely “human” experience which oscillates between the ordinary and the extraordinary. It runs the risk of turning spirituality into an exercise in subjective and individualised mapping. If one person’s djibou is another’s houlet and another’s owl, then one person’s “spirituality” is another’s “peak experience”, “delusion”, “transcendent moment” or “epiphany”. Conversely the effect of mapping spirituality against a series of human traits could have an elevating effect rather than a reductive one: the utterly mundane might be given a significance it really doesn’t have. ‘Spirituality’ does seem to imply an extra layer or dimension is present that is somehow above and beyond the ordinary processes of being human and the universal experiences of humanity.

An alternative route to pursue is to take the definition of spirituality in the direction of describing what might be universal rather than particular about being human. Care needs to be taken that this does not become more a philosophical exercise than a descriptive one. Equating spirituality with “being human” too easily slides into a sort of self-fulfilling tautology and a circular argument that to be ‘human’ (rather than to be ‘animal’ or ‘natural’) is *ipso facto* to be ‘spiritual’ which is then defined as having these characteristics or

attitude-virtues that define humanity. It makes ‘spirituality’ feel like nothing more than a framework for what has been called:

“some conception of the good life (possibly, but not necessarily, related to a supreme will and agency), which informs (implicitly via a network of unexamined assumptions/prejudices or explicitly, via rational justification), but may not determine, all action.” (Mott-Thornton 1996:78)

De Souza & Chater offer a more subtle approach,

“spirituality as an essential human trait that can be identified through expressions of connectedness that an individual displays to Self, to the Social Order, the Physical Other and the Transcendent Other” (de Souza 2007:167)

Those writing within the medical fields seem particularly partial to definitions which attempt to uncover this greater depth or extra dimension or supra-human experience to spirituality. For example:

“Kenetzky (1979) ... defines the spiritual dimension in terms of its three component parts: the need to find meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life, suffering and death; the need for hope/will to live; the need for belief and faith in self, others and a power beyond self/God as defined by the individual.” (Ross 1996:38).

It is the emphasis on spirituality as inclusive of a relationship with a ‘Transcendent Other’ or a ‘Deity’ that troubles some as this seems to equate spirituality and religion. The two certainly overlap and cannot easily be seen as mutually exclusive. A sense of the Transcendent seems common to the experience of being human yet not all will express that in terms of a ‘god’ or ‘deity’.

A more neutral sense of spirituality is possible. One of the most recently developed scales for use within the medical field has been called ASPIRES, “Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments” and is designed as a tool to help in mental health. This 35-item scale attempts to give precise measurement

of the transcendent or numinous without necessarily linking it to a religious faith or to a concept of deity:

“Spiritual Transcendence is measured by three correlated facet scales: Prayer Fulfilment (PF), the ability to create a personal space that enables one to feel a positive connection to some larger reality; Universality (UN), the belief in a larger meaning and purpose to life; and Connectedness (CN), feelings of belonging and responsibility to a larger human reality that cuts across generations and groups.”  
(Brown, Chen, Gehlert & Piedmont 2012:4)

One way to move definition of spirituality beyond the solely ‘human’ is by postulating this other “dimension”, the transcendent. Many writers walk this path, even if their vocabulary varies significantly.

“Spirituality pertains to an awareness of the ultimate meaning and purpose in life and a belief in a power operating the universe that is greater than oneself.” (Neely & Minford 2008:178)

Others fight shy of this approach. A transcendent dimension does not sit easily in the educational context with its heuristic of politically correct language (not talking about ‘God’ in case it offends those of other faiths or those of no faith) and even-handed liberalism (not favouring any interpretation or liturgy or theology or faith above another). The risk is that in trying to find a vocabulary and definitions of spirituality that are acceptable to everyone one ends up with non-words, chameleon concepts and shape-shifting values that can “mean” whatever one wants in whatever setting one finds oneself. Scotland’s ‘Report of the Religious Observance Review Group’ (2004:13) balances delicately on the cusp of this dilemma by proposing that the spiritual dimension of human formation can be expressed through six “sensings” and through shared “values”. I turn now to explore this notion of ‘Sensings’ as a way to distinguish religion from spirituality in a school setting.

**Definition: Sensing**

The 'Sensings' listed in the 'Report of the Religious Observance Review Group' are sensing mystery, sensing values, sensing meaningfulness, sensing a changed quality in awareness, sensing 'otherness' and sensing challenge. These 'Sensings' are not defined precisely in the report. The Report also refers to "shared values" which could be drawn from societal norms and aspirations or from an individual school's ethos but are also left undefined. There are no specific experiences and outcomes to fix their meanings. The word "sensings" in particular is a wraith and it is not clear if the Group mean readers to see the 'sensings' as nouns or verbs or processes. If the 'sensings' are meant as nouns then they lack form, substance and quantification. If they are meant as verbs or processes then they lack sufficient description to enable teachers and inspectors to know when they have occurred.

The use of the word 'Sensings' in the RORG needs examination. The authors clearly intend the word to differ from 'Values' but it is not clear what they understand by 'Sensings'. No etymology of 'Sensing' is offered. The differences between a value and a moral imperative are not explored and 'Sensings' are described briefly but not delineated. Sensings, values and morals most likely form a continuum but it would be helpful if the RORG indicated at what point one shades into another. Since the requirement within the Curriculum for Excellence relates to spiritual development it is also necessary to be clear on when a moral or value or sensing becomes 'spiritual' and in what sense. Nevertheless, I will contend that 'Sensing' is a useful word to describe those "values" which are specifically "spiritual" and will adopt that usage here.

In thinking about ‘Sensings’ they need to be distinguished clearly from the ‘natural’ or ‘physical’ senses:

“When one talks with children about the senses it is all too easy to fall into the trap of the factual: that there are five senses, based on experiencing the physical world through taste, touch, sight, smell and sound. [...] these are only five of the senses, and [...] there are also myriad abstract senses which enable us to engage with and to interpret the world around us. ...Helping children to understand that it is important to sense these feelings - as they help us to interpret the world, sometimes enhance our enjoyment of it and often keep us from danger - is an important part of their development.”  
(Adams/Hyde/Woolley 2008:73)

My impression is that those who would term themselves as non-religious still recognise the existential truths of lived human experience that a part of being ‘Human’ is an instinctive feeling that humans are in some way “more than the sum” of their physical parts. This is such a distinctive part of what it is to be human that I think we can refer to it as ‘spirit,’ without needing an explicit religious dimension to it. White refers to

“...the spiritual dimension. In the task of trying to identify some of the things we all hope to foster, it is hoped that these items listed in the BHA’s [British Humanist Association 1993] leaflet, *The Human Spirit*, will find general acceptance: ‘moral sensibility; response to natural and human beauty; appreciation and wonder at the natural world; the quest for meaning and values by which to live’.” (White 1996:36)

The Humanist Association’s ‘*The Human Spirit*’ shows a remarkable congruence with what Kessler called “*Gateways to the Soul in Education*” (Kessler 2000). She specifically identified seven:

“1 The yearning for deep connection. 2 The longing for silence and solitude. 3 The search for meaning and purpose. 4 The hunger for joy and delight. 5 The creative drive. 6 The urge for transcendence. 7 The need for initiation.” (Kessler 2000:17)

Her experience of a North American context is paralleled in the UK context. Hay with Nye's (1998, 2006) extensive research in the UK "on the spirituality of people who don't go to church"

"suggests that probably a majority of our contemporaries ...have strong spiritual intuitions but want nothing to do with the religious institutions." (Hay with Nye 2006:35f)

They write of "categories of spiritual sensitivity" that can be regarded as universal:

"Awareness-sensing - Here and Now, Tuning, Flow, Focusing. Mystery-sensing - Wonder and Awe, Imagination. Value-sensing - Delight and despair. Ultimate goodness. Meaning." (Hay with Nye 2006:65)

I now clarify the link between the 'Sensings' referred to in Curriculum for Excellence and the 'Religious Observance Review Group Report' and the discussion of spirituality.

### **Distinction: when Sensing becomes Spirituality and what makes values 'spiritual'**

Others see a link between sensings and spirituality and speak approvingly of:

"...strands that contribute to an emerging sense of what spirituality is all about: Inclusiveness, a sense of the unity and interrelatedness of all things; Assurance, concerning the way things are and the reason why we are here; Inspiration, gaining a sense of being channels rather than engines; The acceptance of mystery, glimpsing a power beyond and other than ourselves." (Adams & Hyde & Woolley 2008:112f.)

In other words, humans are physical beings but with more than an animal curiosity about themselves and their environment. Humans have a capacity for emotional experiences and perceptions that they appear to 'place' in their understanding in a different realm, beyond the merely physical. Humans have an

impulse to make meaning and sense and purpose for their lives. That meaning-making may start with the physical senses but leads on to matters far harder to define and quantify e.g. altruism. Educators have long seen schooling as about far more than the training of the body and the mind. It is also about character formation, values acquisition, morality, socialisation, and being distinctively human. Curriculum for Excellence fully endorses this with its focus on capacity building: everything in the curriculum is about forming Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens, and Effective Contributors. The measures of the Curriculum’s successful implementation are not found in providing the curricular ‘Experiences and Outcomes’ alone but also in terms of “the shared vision and common goal” of Wellbeing. The indicators of this wellbeing are outlined by the mnemonic SHANARRI - Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included. (CfE All Experiences and Outcomes p.10)

This is a focus more on what kind of person one becomes rather than what sort of things a person knows. Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence consciously works to create students whose character will reflect the core values inscribed in gold into the head of the Mace held in the Scottish Parliament: Wisdom, Compassion, Justice and Integrity. These can be matched closely to the “four pillars” of Jacques Delors’s seminal work on European Education

“...learning to live together [...] learning to know [...] learning to do [...] far from least is the fourth pillar: learning to be.” (Delors 1996:22f),

with “living together” rooted in compassion, “knowing” related to “wisdom”, “doing” to “justice”, and “being” to “integrity.”

From Aristotle's focus on the purpose of education as the creation of moral human beings, to the present day, there has been an awareness that Education must address the spiritual, moral and emotional development of pupils as much as their intellect and their physicality. From the US's carefully secularised curricula comes the same recognition:

“In my work with teachers, principals, and parents, I’ve asked hundreds of groups in the United States and other countries, If you could go to bed tonight and wake up in the morning with the power to ensure that you could teach one thing to all the children of the world, what would it be? The responses are similar no matter where I am or whom I ask: that children feel loved; that they know they have a purpose; that they learn tolerance and compassion; that they have a sense of their interconnectedness with other people and with the natural world.” (Lantieri 2001:11)

UK research on spiritual awareness and development reaches broadly the same conclusion and poses the question:

“...are we open to the transcendent, acknowledging that there is more to life than meets the eye and making time and space for awe and wonder? Do our actions lead to justice, peace and care for the earth?” (Burns & Lamont 1996:xxi)

The English Curriculum has long recognised that values, morals and spiritual development are a legitimate concern for schools and an important part of Education's purpose. Their National Curriculum Council (NCC) produced “Spiritual and Moral Development - A Discussion Paper” in 1993, complemented by “Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development: An Ofsted Discussion Paper” a year later in 1994. This was followed in 1997 by a paper on the same subject from the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA).

The NCC paper took the approach that “Spiritual development is an important element of a child's education and fundamental to other areas of learning” and offered several "senses" as markers of spiritual development:

“A sense of awe, wonder and mystery [...] feelings of transcendence - feelings which may give rise to belief in the existence of a divine being or the belief that one’s inner resources provide the ability to rise above everyday experiences; Search for meaning and purpose [...] Self-knowledge [...] Relationships [...] Creativity [...] Feelings and emotions - the sense of being moved by beauty or kindness; hurt by injustice or aggression; a growing awareness of when to it is important to control emotions and feelings, and how to learn to use such feelings as a source of growth.” (NCC 1994)

The Ofsted paper identified “the idea of the spiritual quest, of asking who you are and where you are going” (Ofsted 1994:8) and said that spiritual development is about how a school helps,

“...individuals to make sense of these questions, and about what it does to help form pupils’ response to life and various forms of experience, or even to questions about the universe.” (Ofsted 1994:8)

The SCAA paper is even more explicit, defining spirituality:

“as some or all of: ‘the essence of being human, involving the ability to surpass the boundaries of the physical and material an inner life, insight and vision; an inclination to believe in ideals and possibilities that transcend our experience of the world; a response to God, the ‘other’ or the ‘ultimate’; a propensity to foster human attributes such as love, faithfulness and goodness, that could not be classed as physical; the inner world of creativity and imagination; the quest for meaning in life, for truth and ultimate values; the sense of identity and self-worth which enables us to value others.’ (SCAA 1997)

The paper also recognised the important link between spiritual development and learning:

“A spiritual sense can be seen as a prerequisite for learning since it is the human spirit that motivates us to reach beyond ourselves and existing knowledge to search for explanations of existence. The human spirit engaged in a search for truth could be a definition of education, challenging young people to explore and develop their own spirituality and helping them in their own search for truth.” (HMI 2004:8)

Scotland’s ‘Report of the Religious Observance Review Group’ (2004) clearly builds on this background and adapts for the Curriculum for Excellence, giving a definition of Religious Observance that is similar to the spiritual quest

and spiritual development referenced in the English documents. 'Sensings' are clearly seen as being related to yet exceeding and being distinguishable from the acquisition of values, character development and measures of a state of wellbeing. Dorr's distinctions are helpful -

“The soft values can be categorised into five different types. First, there are those that have to do with a person's desire to achieve personal authenticity ...Second, there are values associated with promoting better human relationships ...Third, there are the values concerned with stimulating management and workers to greater creativity. Fourth, there are such moral values as respect for the environment and protection of the poor people who harvest primary products such as coffee or tea. Finally, there are more overtly spiritual values, such as a sense of inner peace and serenity, as well as a sense of meaning in life in general and a sense of personal purpose or vocation.” (Dorr 2006:51)

The RORG outlines 6 Sensings. It is time to take a closer look at these.

## The Key Sensings

### 1 Sensing Mystery

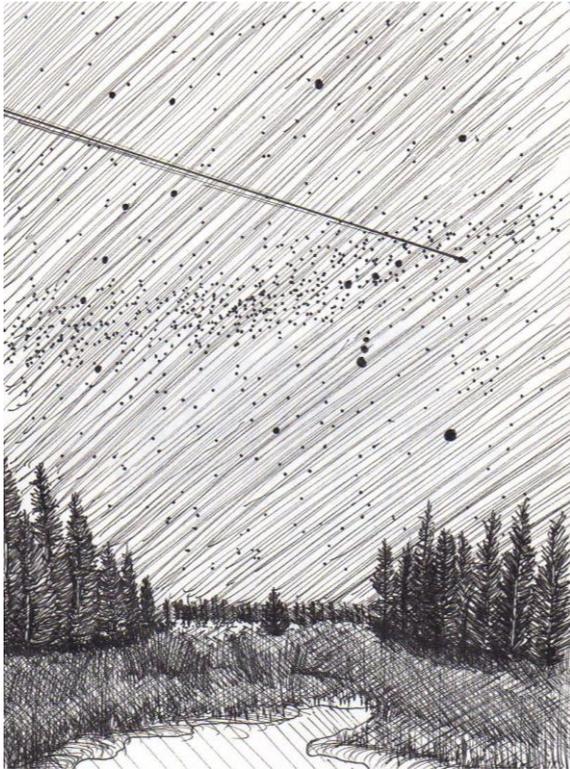
The RORG summarises this as " experiences of awe, wonder and mystery about the natural world, human achievement and for some a divinity" (RORG 2004:13). After thirty years of practice as a school chaplain in the non-denominational sector I term these the “Wow!” moments. *(More detailed reasoning on my choice of alternative terms is given in chapter 2 in the discussion on the small pilot study)* My research suggests that practitioners often aimed at creating the conditions for ‘Wow!’ moments though the responses of participants suggested a more common outcome was boredom or resentment or disengagement. To aim as practitioners at Mystery risks hitting schmaltz instead. This is unsatisfactory and alienating for those with a clear faith stance and offensive to those who profess no faith position. It leaves others untouched and

puzzled by the whole endeavour. Yet some who declared themselves to be ‘atheists’ and who eschewed any religious stance still expressed a sense of Mystery and a wish to embrace such experiences.

Creating those “Wow!” moments may be achieved better outside of school classrooms and assembly halls. My formal and informal participant observation on numerous residential trips with Primary School children have often led to “Wow!” moments of Sensing - almost all of them accidental rather than planned or engineered. These moments are situated in that liminal space between the formal and informal curriculum. In the encounters with nature and in the physical challenges there are little moments of spontaneous “wow!” stimulation. Often these are urban children and young people having their first ever encounters with star-lit skies un-obscured by street-lighting, with the sights and sounds of sunlight and wind through a forest where there are no man-made noises, with the complexity and intricacy of a living world from minute ants to majestic mountains. A first walk through a forest with nine and ten year-olds is a pilgrimage into a whole world of wonder: comments observed have included

“I’ve never held a frog before.” “That’s the first time I’ve walked the length of a fallen tree.” “That’s the first time I’ve seen a mountain for real.” “I’ve never seen so many trees and such tall trees.” “What is that bird? I’ve never seen or heard anything like that before.”

The greatest moments of individual and collective wonder, the heart-stopping moments that brought smiles and delight for one group, were the simplest sights: a red squirrel scampering across the trail in front of us, a red deer hind running from us through the trees, a frog on the shore of Loch Garten, a wood ant nest, dappled sunlight through living and swaying and breathing trees, the track of a meteorite across the night sky.

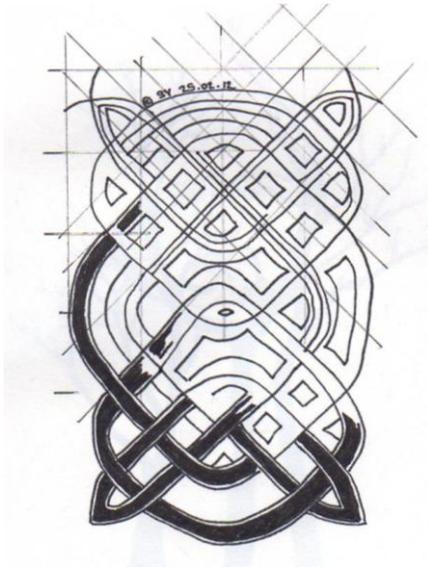


**Figure 2 - Sensing Mystery: a shooting star crossing the night sky**  
© Steve Younger

## **2 Sensing Values**

The RORG describes this as "attitudes and feelings about what is really important, what really matters" (RORG 2004:13). I term these the "now..." moments. These are the moments of situational ethics and encounters with new situations in which a person wonders "now...what do I do here?" These are the moments when one searches for internal values that help to understand a situation or resolve an issue. Frequently these "now" moments occur in the context of relationships and in moments of reflection on significant events.





**Figure 4 - Sensing meaningfulness: Celtic pattern**  
© Steve Younger

#### 4 Sensing a Changed Quality of Awareness

The RORG describes this as "the feeling of being 'at one' with nature, oneself and others" (RORG 2004:13). I term these the "Aum" (also frequently referred to as "Om") moments. Aum is reckoned as a sacred sound with deep spiritual and symbolic significance in Buddhism and Hinduism. It typically brackets spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer or Scripture reading; it functions effectively as a doorway into and out of changed states of awareness. A 'Changed Quality of Awareness' is difficult to define. Definition appeared to depend on an individual's personal interpretation, life experience and faith position. In such moments of changed awareness one might sense a life-changing self-revelation or feel oneself in a different quality of relationship to some phenomenon that one had previously felt one understood or had constructed meanings for. In my interviews practitioners frequently struggled to define what RO is and how they would judge the success or failure of an RO event. Of all the Sensings this one is the most illustrative of that problem. My interviews suggest

that this sensing also requires significant thinking skills and may be experienced less by those who are younger or who think more literally.

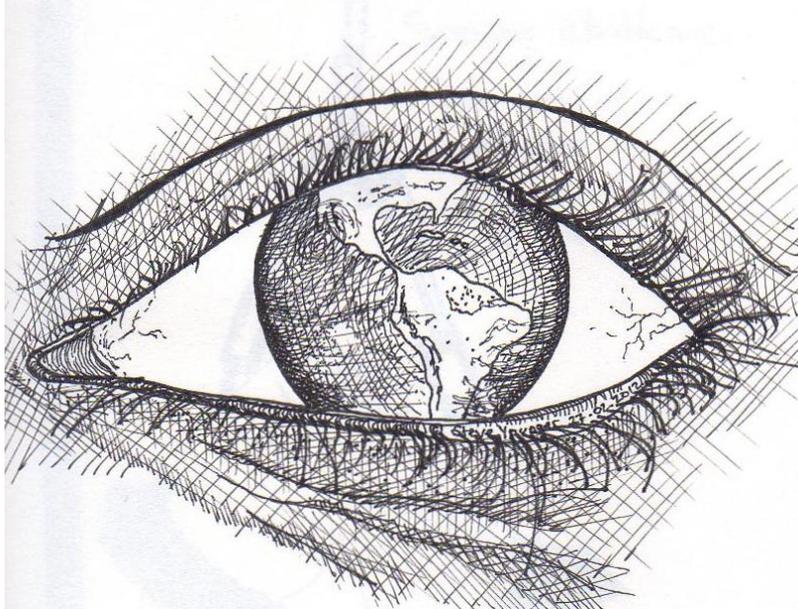


**Figure 5 - Sensing a changed quality of awareness: face/tree**  
© Steve Younger

## **5 Sensing Otherness**

The RORG unpacks this as "the sentiment that humans are more than their physical elements" (RORG 2004:13). I term these "Narnia" moments referencing the septet known as 'The Chronicles of Narnia' written by C. S. Lewis in which he imagines an alternative world paralleling our own into which humans are sometimes drawn without intentionally having sought such experiences. The "Narnia" moments come when one is aware of straying into an 'other dimension' or realm of experience in which experiences cannot be fully and adequately defined by familiar patterns or by five physical senses alone. These are not

necessarily ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ experiences although some interpret them in relation to a transcendent other or a deity.



**Figure 6 - Sensing otherness: the feeling that we are more than the physical: eye/world**  
© Steve Younger

### **6 Sensing Challenge**

The RORG explains this as "being challenged and moved by experiences such as love, beauty, goodness, joy, compassion, injustice, evil, suffering, death." (RORG 2004:13). These I term as the “Ow!” moments when one’s emotional responses to experiences bring moments of cognitive or moral clarity. Such moments of disturbed equilibrium bring a morality or value-based compulsion to act. For instance one might be moved to intervene in a situation by witnessing an injustice or might have an emotional reaction to unexpected beauty.



**Figure 7 - Sensing Challenge: being moved by our experiences of justice/injustice, good/evil**  
© Steve Younger

*(In Chapter 5 I will argue from my research and participant observation that the RORG list of Sensings is incomplete: a seventh and eighth Sensing are warranted. Sensing Stillness and Sensing Community need to be included. This is because children of all ages described moments that could be described as Stillness and practitioners frequently identified this as a marker of 'success' in assessing RO events. In terms of Sensing Community, the RORG does explicitly define RO events as "community events". However my interview data strongly suggests this Sense of Community was far more prevalent and desirable than the authors of the RORG could have anticipated. I will argue that it needs to be*

*upgraded as a Sensing in its own right and explicitly included in the list of key Sensings.)*

### **Differences: Sensings, Values, Spirituality**

Research in other fields such as mental health and health care chaplaincy suggests attention to these innate Sensings in the human psyche have important health and wellbeing benefits:

“Studies on existential well-being, which overlaps significantly with the spiritual experiences scale used in this study, have found that higher levels of existential well-being are significantly associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing and better physiological functioning (Ironson et al., 2002)” (Maselko, J. & Kubzansky, L. D. 2006:2857-2858)]

The RORG document’s use of “values” is similarly imprecise. It is unclear if the authors are thinking of ‘human’ values or ‘spiritual’ values - and how they would distinguish the differences. Those values they refer to could be drawn from the international arena such as the educational “pillars” of Jacques Delors’ vision for European education (Delors 1996) or governmental level (such as the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence) or national aspiration (such as the values chosen for the Scottish Mace by the Scottish Parliament: Justice, Wisdom, Integrity, etc.) or on the carefully-crafted core values of an individual school such as Calderside Academy’s four ‘R’s: Responsible, Respectful, Reliable and Resilient (though the values acceptable to one school community may not find acceptance in another). Even if one settles on what one means by Sensings and values, it cannot be assumed that these define ‘spirituality’. Alternatively the case can be made that expression of “real” spirituality might not be found in

the celebration and expression of shared school values but in actively challenging a school’s values and values-assumptions:

“One function of school worship could be, as we have already seen, to challenge the inherent and unquestioned values within a community.” (Copley 1989:11)

An anti-definition of ‘spirituality’ could also be more feasible ... a declaration of what it is not: so, for example, it is emphatically not

“a benign sense of liberal well-being and charitable giving: awe and wonder and Mother Theresa.” (Erricker 2007:138)

Nor is spirituality to be equated to citizenship education as values acquisition. The current Scottish focus on creating ‘Rights Respecting Schools’, with values shaped by the UN Charter of the Rights of the Child, might overlap significantly with many ‘religious’ values and with some aspects of ‘spiritual and moral development’ but the Charter is not inherently or intentionally “spiritual”.

In the background of the RORG there are traces of the more precise definition of spirituality which was attempted for the English educational context a decade earlier:

“Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal experience which are of enduring worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life and intimations of an enduring reality.” (HMSO, 1994:86)

This definition was then explored further in an Ofsted discussion paper in 1994 which added that spiritual development

“is about how individuals acquire personal beliefs and values, determine whether life has a purpose, and behave as a result. It is about how pupils address ‘questions which are at the heart and root of existence’” (Ofsted 1994:8)

Interestingly, in the US, there is a growing corps of educators who seem to begin at precisely this existential point when exploring the spiritual aspects of life in the North American schools’ context. They construct an entire spiritual curriculum and meaningful moments of personal and spiritual development from the “big questions” that arise across cultures whenever people search for meaning and purpose to life. Attempting to answer the “big questions” highlights a need for paradigms or values that will help one to become spiritually aware or to experience some notional sense of personal equilibrium or spiritual stability.

Some of them start from a consciously limited palette, such as Rachel Remen’s deceptively simple three questions “What surprised me today? What moved me or touched me today? What inspired me today?” (Remen 1999:44). Others expand the list: for example Kessler’s ‘big questions’ -

“Why am I here?” “Does my life have a purpose?” “How do I find out what it is?” “What is life for?” “What is my destiny?” “What does my future hold?” and “Is there a God?” (Kessler 2000:17).

Needleman offers what he calls “the ten great questions of philosophy - and of life” and adds his own eleventh question: “The eleventh question is, ‘What is love?’ ” (Needleman 2001:92).

These writers appear to define spirituality as the experiences and explorations which give us answers to the “big” questions. What some of these writers move towards is what might be termed a “God” factor as the marker that lifts these questions out of the realm of the philosophical. Their reasoning for this seems a little specious at times and may be due more to their own inherent notions of what constitutes spirituality. However, it is worth noting that:

“While the spiritual questions may be associated with God, they are also the everyday questions that drive the search for meaning in life, for the gifts and needs, for trust, for understanding suffering and fear,

and for questions about death. Failure to ask these questions may lead to technical triviality, cultural banality, and a desperate cry for meaning.” (Earl 2008:60)

In trying to summarise this discussion and create a personal definition of spirituality, two further statements offered in Ota & Chater (2007) have been particularly formative in my own thinking: Ping Ho Wong’s “disposition to transcendence” (2007:76) and de Souza’s “connectedness to the Other” expressed as -

“movement through varying circles and layers of connectedness which [give] ... people a sense of self and place within their world, and which [promote] a sense of resilience. [And] a sense of meaning and purpose, so that they [are] able to gain some direction to their lives.” (2007:168).

These two comments have led me to strengthen the importance of relationship as a part of any definition of spirituality - relationship with "other" whether that "other" is human or deity.

In considering all these definitions and their underlying assumptions, I suggest the following as my working definition of spirituality which will underpin this paper’s discussion of spiritual development and values acquisition:

Spirituality is that uniquely human capacity and need for a sense of identity and of integrity, of place and of purpose, which can only be fully satisfied in relationship with others and with a transcendent Other
--

Table 1 - Definition of Spirituality

**Definition of Spirituality: synthesis and resolution**

By “Identity” in my definition I aim to incorporate my conclusion that questions of self-awareness and identity fundamentally shape a sense of the ‘spirituality’ of being human as opposed to being ‘animal’. The basic questions of existential identity seem to be common to all people in all cultures at all times: “Who am I?” “How did I get here?” “What makes me, me?” That striving for self-realisation is found in many religions, faiths and spiritualities. The unique combination of an individual’s morals, principles, instincts, needs, personal observations and experiences are a key part of moulding one’s spirituality. Many factors of identity affect one’s spirituality: class, parenting, upbringing, societal position, rank. Suggestions that gender is a significant factor in one’s perceptions of spirituality are not confirmed by any research I have traced:

“Men and women’s religiosity are more alike than they are unlike. Although concerns may demonstrate gender/sex differences, both women and men make recourse to superordinate beings (singular or plural), both use ritual to imaginatively interact with these beings, and both have central myths that organise the system of belief and practice.” (Juschka 2009:253).

By “Integrity” in my definition I refer to humans as thinking, rational beings with a sense of self-identity. Some begin to believe that - as human beings - they are more than the sum of their physical constituents. Thoughts, feelings, emotions, moods, perceptions and experiences combine to make us more than material beings alone. The philosophical and philological divisions of human beings as body and soul (or spirit) are to take account of the emotional and the visceral, the emotional and the factual, the physical and the intellectual aspects of being human. Yet, to live life satisfactorily, one does not consciously separate these: it is the integration of them that makes one uniquely ‘spiritual’.

When body and soul (or spirit) are fully integrated spiritual perception takes place. Integrated beings - of body and soul - have transcendent moments.

“Place” in my definition is also integral to an understanding of spirituality. ‘Place’ can have so many levels and meanings and associations. In spirituality the physical ‘space’ matters - the notion that one often connects one's spiritual experiences and expressions to places or locations that have some ritual significance or which, because of meaningful events, assume an aura of sacredness or “specialness”. ‘Holy Places’ and sites of pilgrimage become the loci of spirituality as well as the catalysts for spiritual moments. Ingold observed that

“For the wayfarer in the landscape, as in the scriptural text, particular sites marked by recognisable features would serve as place holders for Biblical characters and stories - for the characters, in effect, *were* their stories. By visiting these sites one would recall the stories and meet the characters as though they were alive and present, harnessing their wisdom and powers to the task of crafting one’s own thought and experience, and giving it sense and direction.”  
(Ingold 2011:199)

This identification of a ‘space’ or ‘place’ as “holy” or “sacred” can be about locations that matter not only to a single individual but also to a collective group, both temporally and across generations. A connection to a significant religious character can create a sacred ‘place’ (e.g. the birth-places of Jesus Christ, Buddha, Mohammed) or the central focal point of a faith group (e.g. the Kabah in the centre of the Mosque at Mecca). One marks such places by unusual physical features or by deliberate structures (stone circles, standing stones, enclosures, mounds, etc.). Often these are liminal places such as hilltops (the borders between earth and sky) or caves (the crossing point between air and earth) or promontories (where land and water touch). At other times the ‘places’ that enhance one’s sense of the spiritual are metaphysical rather than physical. The ‘places’ might include liminal “periods” such as the time between

childhood and adulthood. And at times the ‘place’ of one's spirituality is determined by one's place in a cultural context: roles and expectations. So, for example, society ascribes certain assumptions to monks and nuns, yet no-one is “born” to Religious Orders.

“Purpose” in my definition is about the universal questions that take one beyond one's own identity and self-awareness - not so much the ‘factual’ questions (“Who am I?”) as the ‘philosophical’ ones of relationship to the worlds one lives in (“Why am I here?” “What purpose or meaning does my existence have?”) The “big” questions of life can be answered on the basis of chemistry or science or biology but the “so what?” or the sense of purpose, is often answered by a different kind of thinking: spirituality. Our spirituality is often about finding answers - to the questions of life and death and existence - that satisfy us. While some speak of spirituality being locatable in some area of the human brain one's need for a sense of purpose and meaning in life never seems to settle on an indisputable chemical formula or a precise set of neurons. The discovery of the ‘god-particle’ would not rationalise away that human impulse to find purpose and meaning: it only intensifies and sharpens it.

Regarding the inclusion of the word “Others” in my definition I contend we may have an individual element to spirituality (the questions of personal identity), but a common feature of humanity is the move beyond personal search to form relationships with others and find a corporate or communal identity. Our sense of personal identity may relate to one's own character and experiences but always includes a sense of oneself as in part defined by membership of a group or partly by one's sense of difference from a group. “No man is an island, entire

of itselfe....”<sup>3</sup> and so one's sense of self is significantly shaped by ancestors, cultural context, family traditions, membership of sept or clan or tribe or nation. Spirituality is as often a communal experience as a solo one too. Even when alone we seek out mentors and guides and teachers who can interpret for us. Spirituality frequently seems to give a sense of and a need for connectedness to those who are like-minded and who have shared similar experiences. Fellowship and community are often the context for some of our most precious and meaningful spiritual moments.

I include “Transcendent Other” in my definition because I contend that any definition of spirituality that celebrates and delineates only the ‘human’ elements and levels of spirituality is really only a phenomenology or classification or description of what it is to be human. This raises the question whether spirituality is about what it means to be “more than” human. The classic existential questions are often framed as “is there nothing “more than” this? What (or Who) is out there, “more than” the human and physical, that I get glimpses of in dream and vision? How do I explain the sense of there being “more” to life than those things which can be touched, tasted, seen, smelled and heard?” Defining spirituality by sensings (mystery, values, meaningfulness, changed qualities of awareness and challenge) may be found in the rich experiences of a shared humanity: in the common denominators of the experience of being human. But it is that ‘extra’ dimension - sensing otherness - that moves us from the realm of humanity to the realm of spirituality.

*In this chapter I have outlined the basic research questions focussed around the place and practice of Religious Observance in Scotland’s non-*

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<sup>3</sup> John Donne 1624 Meditation 17 of Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions

*denominational schools within the new Curriculum for Excellence. I have established my definitions of ‘spirituality’ and ‘sensing’ by which these research questions can be tested. The next chapter describes a small pilot study which helped to clarify the research.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### FIRST STEPS - a pilot study



**"I've drawn a man with a big beard. And I drew him with a white cloak as well."**

Figure 8 - 'Internet Addict' draws a picture of 'God'

My research into RO within the Curriculum for Excellence being implemented across Scottish Education at the Primary and Secondary School levels began with a small-scale study of pupils’ experiences in a non-denominational Primary school where I serve as school Chaplain. The responsibility for RO in the school is devolved to me from the Head teacher and takes place as part of their weekly assembly. Scottish Education still has a statutory requirement to provide RO in both the non-denominational and denominational sectors and in most Primary schools this takes the form of whole school assemblies. Existing legislation and guidelines determine the frequency of these RO events and specifies their purpose as:

“community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community” (RORG 2004:12)

A fundamental feature of the ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ is the specification of key “experiences” and “outcomes” for each subject area and for other cross-curricular strands (such as ‘Health and Wellbeing’). No experiences and outcomes have been listed for Religious Observance. Instead the key documents, affirmed in mandatory guidelines offers six sensings. The origin of these six Sensings was traced in chapter 1. These Sensings are as yet untested for applicability, unverified for validity in a Scottish school context, undefined in detail, and increasingly contested.

### **The Pilot Study experience**

The pilot study aimed to test the validity of the Sensings (matching them to the lived experience of Scottish school pupils) and the vocabulary of the Sensings (determining how school pupils verbalised their experiences of RO events). As a part of one School’s compliance with guidelines relating to RO, a

small RO team (consisting of the Headteacher, myself as the school chaplain, and two members of staff on a termly rotation) had been formed at the beginning of the 2012-13 academic year. This team met for an informal discussion between the Headteacher, Chaplain and twelve pupils from the School Council on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2012 to introduce to them the ‘sensings’ specified in the RORG. This was an open discussion about these sensings and how they might shape future assemblies in the school. The pupil representatives comprised an equal number of boys and girls chosen by classmates to serve on the School Council. Suspecting that the vocabulary of the legislation would have little relevance for the children, the team used the 6 line drawings which illustrate chapter 1. These were made by the chaplain to supplement written descriptions of the sensings.

Each of the pupils was given an A4 sheet with the six pictures and brief text summaries of the 6 ‘Sensings’ taken from the RORG. It was immediately clear that the formal vocabulary held no meaning for them without extensive supplementary definition and explanation. None of the RORG terms elicited any recognition or understanding. Once their initial questions and clarifications were answered and some explanation was given, the children were asked if they had ever felt or experienced any of these ‘Sensings’ in an Assembly at school. At this point the school’s only identifiable RO compliance was through the weekly Assemblies. The initial analysis of the pupils’ comments, narratives and drawings were made in discussion afterwards by the Chaplain and Headteacher.

Asked about specific memories of assemblies that had made them “want to do something” or had made them “feel or think differently”, the emphasis in their answers was on practical actions and outcomes. These were often centred

on relationships. Emotional responses also featured;

“The Harvest Assembly made me want to share”

“The Assembly showed me I should treat others good”

“I thought when I heard that (unspecified) ‘we should encourage others’ ”

[In response to an Easter Assembly] “I thought about how Jesus makes us happy”

“Helping makes you happy. It makes me happy when I help”

Asked what they especially liked about Assemblies, there was an immediate and enthusiastic list of things with each child contributing at least one response. The most frequent positive responses were to visual material (pictures and videos), to singing (the majority), and to story-telling (right across the age-range):

“I like it when you get a certificate”

“When you are called out and you get an egg or something”

“When you are in front of everybody and you get praise”

“When you [the Chaplain] play the funny video clips”

“I like the story-telling about God”

“I like the songs ... the singing ... we celebrate and they make us think”

Asking about dislikes brought a quiet moment of thoughtfulness. The children were eager to please as most said they “like everything”. Only one specific ‘dislike’ was given by one pupil: “singing”.

From the ensuing discussion generated by their drawings connecting their responses to the ‘Sensings’, the commonest or most easily and readily expressed answers related to Sensing Mystery e.g. “The stars make me happy. Seeing the stars and the world around makes me smile”; Sensing Challenge e.g. “We are lucky. It made me appreciate what we’ve got. Some children don’t have even a school or food or a house”; and Sensing Meaning e.g. “I like being with my friends at assemblies and thinking about friendship”. Hardest to grasp and least frequently expressed in any shape or form were the more “transcendent”

Sensings. ‘Values’ as defined by the RORG were hard to discern and we could not agree on a clear instance. ‘Otherness’ and ‘A changed quality of awareness’ did not feature at all. Our initial reaction to this was to wonder amongst ourselves if a group of adults would be any more articulate or have a quicker understanding of the vocabulary.

### Renaming the Sensings

While emotional literacy is taught in Scottish schools, an equivalent "spiritual" literacy or vocabulary is absent. The children struggled for any words and concepts to express responses to the Sensings. They identified mostly with experiences which focussed around only three of these Sensings: mystery, meaningfulness and challenge. Their language did not encompass any of the vocabulary of the formal guidelines or legislation. In analysing their responses I summed up their main expressions of sensing as:

“Wow!” moments - experiences and encounters, usually in the realm of Nature, which made them literally go "Wow!". I interpreted this as expressing a sense of awe. This most closely matched the Sensing of Mystery.

“Ow!” moments - events, experiences and things they had observed in the world which they felt had challenged them to act. This most closely matched the Sensing of Challenge.

“How?” moments - what might be termed the ‘Big’ questions that arose for them. This most closely matched the Sensing of Meaning.

### Table 2 - Summing up three sensings

Out of this arose a clear desire in the RO team for a more formal, in-depth piece of qualitative work to apply and test out the language the pupils had generated for describing moments of Sensing and spirituality: the ‘Wow’, ‘Ow’ and ‘How’ trilogy. We also wanted to explore the pupil understanding of a key component of the school's practice of RO: prayers addressed to ‘God’ and assuming a belief in ‘God’.

Following this piece of action research it became apparent that some form of renaming the Sensings would be a more fruitful and effective way to elicit responses from children, particularly those of Primary School age. “Sensing Mystery” readily and easily transformed into “Wow!” moments; “Sensing Challenge” fitted comfortably into the “Ow!” describer; and “Sensing Meaning” readily transmuted into “How?” The other three Sensings were harder to place but “Sensing Values” became ‘Now’ moments (as in “Now...what do I do about that? Now what do I do here/say here? Now, how should I respond to that? Now, what principles and previous situations help me deal with this?). “Sensing Otherness” I referred to as the ‘Narnia’ moments i.e. those moments when you realise there are other possible dimensions and more to life than can be accessed by the traditional five senses. “Sensing ‘a changed quality of awareness’” became ‘Aum’ moments. This is the least satisfactory renaming though as in itself it often requires further explanation. I have struggled to find a clear parallel for this last sensing. My impression is that there is an age factor or an age-related cognitive development aspect to the perception of the Sensings: for example, even young children can readily identify Mystery Sensing but ‘Otherness’ possibly works at a higher conceptual level. I will comment on this again later. The research of Coles (1990) in the US and Hay with Nye (1998, revised 2006) in the UK affirmed this initial impression.

The nature of the data being sought clearly situated this piece of research in the qualitative realm rather than the quantitative. As issues of spirituality and lived experience relate to immeasurable phenomena and to areas of meta-cognition, quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were eschewed. Determining belief is an interpretive task and therefore better suited to techniques such as interview, focus groups and participant observation. Context

also helped to determine the data collection methods favoured for this study: schools are comfortable and familiar with small group work, teacher-researchers, participant observation and pupil interviews.

While attempts have been made in Health Care to ‘measure’ spirituality and several scales exist such as ASPIRES “The Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments” (Brown/Chen/Gehlert/Piedmont 2012), it remains problematic to define spiritual development and to give it numeric valuations. There are no commonly accepted scales for use in Scottish schools. While the legislation on RO speaks of spiritual development it offers no mechanism for measurement and comparison. Also:

“the limitation of quantitative data analysis is that it cannot begin to provide any insight into why the findings are as they are. Only qualitative data analysis, even with all of its pitfalls, can offer this.” (Opie 2004:140)

This meant that the data collection methods would need to be selected for their potential to uncover texture, colour, affectivity and motivation.

“As a broad rule, we tend to see quantitative data as telling you what happened on a specific occasion and qualitative data exploring why that might have occurred.” (Baumfield, Hall & Wall 2008:22)

### **Study Planning**

A more formal study was planned next to test the alternative Sensing vocabulary and to explore which qualitative methods would yield suitable “thick” data. The formal study was conceived then as a piece of action research. This was chosen for its familiarity within an educational context. The Senior Management Team in the chosen educational establishment (a South Lanarkshire Primary School) was comfortable with the basic ‘Plan - Do - Review’ approach to lesson planning and reflection that underlies action research. The methodology

also allowed for an authentic voice from the pupils themselves. Their own words were digitally recorded and their discourse was manually analysed from transcript.

Research permission was sought and obtained from the School’s Education Authority and the Headteacher’s agreement to participate was obtained in advance. The study used a small group interview with a sample of 6 children from P6 and P7, selected by the Headteacher as those whom she thought would be articulate and whose parents would give permission for them to take part. Those picked were, naturally, amongst the more able and confident of pupils. No attempt to randomise the selection was made. No gender balance was requested. I fully recognise that this is a heavily biased sample but it allowed clear testing of the methodology. During the session each child chose their own pseudonym or “made up name” for their drawings and responses. Everyone was told that they could leave at any time they wanted and that they did not have to answer a question unless they were happy to. No reward was given for participation though small chocolate bars and bottled water were made available for the children during the session. The session was held in the last week of the school term before the Spring Break. This was to minimise disruption to teaching time and to obviate the need for extensive staff cover arrangements. To allow the freest possible response from the children the Headteacher opted not to sit in the room during the interview process and did not place a staff member in the room. Her reasoning was that the pupils would not feel intimidated or inhibited by her presence and would not look to her to ‘approve’ their answers. The session took place in the Parents’ Room of the school which has a glass wall looking on to the main corridor from which staff members could safely and easily monitor the process without affecting it. The

door was also left open so that staff members could enter or intervene at any point if they felt it necessary.

An explanatory letter was given a week before the study to the parents/guardians of the children selected. It was modelled on the standard PLS used in Ethics applications for researchers at the University of Glasgow. The School’s Headteacher read this and approved it before distribution. Alongside it she issued her Education Authority’s own protocols on consent for research in school. This protocol worked by implied consent: Parents/Guardians only needed to return a form if they did not wish their child to take part. No forms were returned. In order to maintain confidentiality, the children chose their own pseudonyms during the interview and calculated their own ages by “years old on last birthday, and how many months since that birthday”. Their ages ranged from 10 years and 5 months to 12 years (a birthday that week).

The chosen technique was a standard “talk and draw” exercise based on the instruction “If somebody mentions ‘God’ to you, what I want you to do first is draw for me what you see in your mind if the word ‘God’ is mentioned.” Each child was then asked in turn to explain what they had drawn and to talk about it.

A brief group discussion schedule had been drafted with the Headteacher and viewed by her, with copies to parents, during the preparation process. Parents and pupils knew exactly what would be discussed in advance and had therefore had time to think about the responses. The schedule asked

- Draw whatever comes into your mind when you hear the word 'God'
- What feelings do you have when you hear about God?
- What sounds do you hear in your head when God is mentioned?

- What are the things in life that make you go "Wow! Cool! Awesome!?"
- What are the things that make you wonder "How...?"
- How about things that make you go “ ‘Ow! or That’s not right!’ or ‘Oooh: I don’t like that!’?”

The final task was a request that each child write down one “Big question” on the back of their drawings:

- “If you had the chance to ask God one question and you could be guaranteed an answer, what would you ask?”

The children took part enthusiastically and expressed their enjoyment at the end of the session which lasted almost 40 minutes from beginning to end.

### **Reflecting on the Pilot Studies**

In analysing the children's responses it was immediately evident that they readily identified with the three Sensings apparent from earlier informal discussions with the School Council and that they were completely at ease with the language of “Wow!”, “Ow!” and “How?” as a way to generate autonomous response and elicit discussion about the Sensings. On the whole the “Wow!” and “How?” approaches generated the type of information I had hoped to elicit. Reflecting on the transcript and the findings though highlights that the “Ow!” heading needed better support and clarification. “Ow!” was intended to elicit the children’s stories of the challenges posed to their internal values, principles and morals by the experiences and events they encountered in life: e.g. witnessing acts of injustice. It was meant to uncover the processes by which they constructed meaning for situations they found themselves in. In reality they most readily and immediately associated “Ow!” with instances of physical pain, for example

**Button reader:** When people are getting hurt. When like people come into your house and attack you and everything. And stuff like that. I don’t think it’s right.....

**Mucky Miner:** [Interrupting] When there’s like someone in a game. When you’re like playing a game or on the TV. When you’re watching the TV like as if someone’s getting hurt and like it’s in a game and you go ‘Ow!’ Sometimes if you get hurt in a game and you go ‘Ow!’ You’re so into the game....

**Bubblegum:** Uhuh. Taking risks in life. When you have no other choice but you’ve got to do it. You might hurt yourself when you’re doing it.....

When I intervened to explain that I had meant more than physical pain there was an unexpected bonus and the conversation headed off in a different direction with the children combining categories in a way I had not anticipated. They started a messy, confused, creative, imaginative, overlapping and excited discussion on things that make you go “Wow!” *and* “Ow!” at the same time. Their list included lightning storms, being on the Sky Park ride when you wonder if your harness will break, abseiling, coming down zip wires, and what it would be like to get caught in an avalanche. Their combination of two of the targeted effects creates the possibility of a refinement in the categories for future cycles of this research and showed the ways in which the Sensings may overlap and blur into one another. The Sensings are not discrete.

Questions of gender also proved interesting. All the children spontaneously and immediately ‘gendered’ “God” as male in their discussions even though as interviewer I had made conscious efforts to speak neutrally of ‘God’. None of the children reacted negatively to the requests mentioning ‘God’ e.g. disputing ‘God’s’ existence or avowing a non-religious stance. Instead three of the boys in particular opted for similar drawings with no sign that they were copying one another, reinforced by their comments, of a traditional “old-man-with-long-beard-and-white-cloak-floating-on-clouds” image. Only one boy significantly differed, explaining that his drawing in response to the word “God”

showed heaven as a street of houses and “God” as an amorphous shape with a bright yellow blob as its “head”. However in talking about his drawing and explaining it, this respondent completely affirmed the traditional gendering:

**Steve:** What have you drawn for us?

**Budder:** It’s like clouds and it’s like houses, but that’s God [pointing to the blob-shaped area at the right hand side of the picture, drawn in black pencil and with a scribble of bright yellow at the ‘head’] with like a cloak but you can’t see his [gendering ‘God’ automatically as male] face.

**Steve:** What do you think he [responding to Budder’s gendering of ‘God’] would look like?

**Budder:** A beard, a big beard.

When an attempt was made to question the gendering of “God” as male the children exhibited amused self-awareness at their own stereotyping and assumptions (Internet Addict and Mucky Miner are boys, Button Reader is a girl):

**Steve:** How old did you think God is?

**Button Reader:** Millions and millions of years.

**Mucky Miner:** It depends how old the earth is.

**Button Reader:** Yeah.

**Internet addict:** Maybe older.

**Mucky Miner:** Because God created it. He created it.

**Button Reader:** Hmm. He created it.

**Steve:** That’s a good word to use about it. He “created” it. ... And you’re all saying “Him”? Nobody thinks God might be a woman?!

**Mucky Miner:** [Laughs] Hmm. He or she then.

**Button Reader:** A woman. You never know. [The other girl in the group, Bubblegum, is also laughing and nodding at ‘woman’. Budder and Budder are shaking their heads while smiling.]

**Steve:** You never know! So the two girls think God’s a woman and the four boys think God’s a man. Is that right?! [Nods and laughs all round]

The importance of having clear research questions in mind often came up for me as the researcher in this study. Interesting - and potentially distracting - side avenues for exploration kept occurring. For instance an apparent gender difference also emerged in the sensing of “Wow!” moments which would bear further exploration in another cycle of research. The girls all situated their “Wow!” experiences in the natural realm (Nature) and the boys situated theirs in

the man-made realm (Technology). Judging how relevant such an exploration would be is difficult to determine in the heat of immediate interview and pursuing this topic further was enticing but would have added to the duration of the session. Another instance of a related but non-central point of enquiry focussed on the fact that both boys and girls were markedly influenced in their language and concepts of spirituality, particularly of deity, by visual material rather than verbal. And their primary source of this visual material was through TV and Internet:

**Internet addict:** I’ve drawn [sic] a man with a big beard. And I drew him with a white cloak as well.

**Steve:** That’s three of you have picked “man with beard and white cloak”. Why is that? Where did you get that idea? Where did that picture come from?

**Butter:** Television sometimes.

**Internet addict:** Probably, probably, like when you see pictures of Jesus on the internet he’s wearing a cloak. He’s got a glowing white cloak.

**Button Reader:** He’s got a big black or brown beard.

### The Place of Questions

Returning to the schedule meant that we finished at the agreed time though and were able to keep our discussions on track. To finish, the children were asked to write down their ‘Big’ question in the following way: “If you had the chance to ask God one question and you could be guaranteed an answer, what would you ask? What would be the one big question you would want to know about in this world?” The responses of these 10 to 12 year olds were surprisingly ‘adult’ and the majority fell within the range of questions found elsewhere (e.g. Needleman in Lantieri 2001).

The children’s ‘Big’ questions were:

**Budder:** How did you make the world in 7 days?

**Butter:** How did you create the earth?

**Bubblegum:** What age will I die at?

**Internet addict:** How did God create the world? And what did he use but not according to religion, real life?

**Mucky Miner:** Are monsters real?

**Button Reader:** Why does the world have to be crule [sic]?

Only the question concerning monsters appears ‘childish’ at any level and the question about death [“What age will I die at?”] was almost painfully ‘adult’. We underestimate our children if we try to shield them from such questions.

“While the spiritual questions may be associated with God, they are also the everyday questions that drive the search for meaning in life, for the gifts and needs, for trust, for understanding suffering and fear, and for questions about death.” (Earl 2008:60)

The importance of the children’s questions in this brief pilot study, meant as a supplementary activity allowing for some creativity, proved much more revealing than expected. The childrens’ questions reflected the range of the Sensings better than the intentional attempts to elicit their direct responses to particular Sensings. Their questions touched on ‘Otherness’, Values, Meaning, and Wonder. Questions - and the search for answers - can be an important part of spiritual development, acknowledged already within the English Educational system:

“...spiritual development is about how a school helps... individuals to make sense of these questions, and about what it does to help form pupils’ response to life and various forms of experience, or even to questions about the universe” (Ofsted 1994:8)

Questions are a universal doorway to spiritual development and to the kinds of experiences that can be described as moments of Sensing. A unique, almost accidental study into questions worldwide reveals a remarkable similarity across all nations. Candy Chang (Chang 2013) has collated the responses to ‘Before I die’ walls from across the world. An artist, she first stencilled a ‘Before I die’ wall on the sides of a derelict building in her neighbourhood as a part of

her personal response to bereavement. She had lost the woman who “was a mother to me for fifteen years.” (Chang 2013). It had made her think about what mattered most to her in life and what best helped her to cope with death. Her concept was simple: a large hoarding around a development site with the phrase ‘Before I die...’ stencilled on it, a box of coloured chalks, and an unmonitored space where anyone passing could reflect on what mattered most to them. She was uncertain anyone would respond but within 24 hours the first such wall was covered in multi-coloured, heart-felt responses. It became a way that people could explore their ultimate values and their unanswered questions in complete anonymity. She began a project to photograph and record these before wiping the board clean and leaving it blank again. The idea spread and at the point of publication 200+ such walls had been created in 40+ countries across 6 continents. Her individual response to bereavement had become a spontaneous, undirected, unrestricted, unedited, anonymous, global sampling of “big issues” and questions. She had created a space open to the secret and the personal.

Across the world the key issues recorded centred on:

“Well-being 24%, Love 19%, Travel 12%, Helping others 11%, Family 10%, Work 7%, Religion 4%, Wealth 4%, Sex 3%, Celebrities 3%, Fame 2%, Outer space 1%” (Chang 2013:270). The “Top five most common responses globally: 1<sup>st</sup> Love, 2<sup>nd</sup> Live, 3<sup>rd</sup> Travel, 4<sup>th</sup> Be Happy, and 5<sup>th</sup> Help Others.” (Chang 2013:271).

This resonates remarkably well with the six ‘Sensings’ identified as core to RO within the Curriculum for Excellence in the RORG.

Using a question or an open-ended statement to elicit responses centred on spirituality and values seems to be an effective way to initiate an open discussion on matters of values and spirituality. Candy Chang had come to this methodology unintentionally and as a response to her perceived sense of a lack

of space and place to raise such issues. Others, from many cultures, have explicitly expressed the same feeling of needing a place to discuss and explore

‘Ultimate’ issues: e.g.

“I came to understand that the place they called school had no part in answering life’s most profound questions; rather, its main function was to prepare us for ‘real life’ in all its political brutality.” (Pamuk 2005:115)

The United States of America reflects the same separation of spirituality and real life:

“Our society has no place where the ultimate questions are honoured as questions. Every institution and social form we have is devoted to either solving problems or to providing pleasure: the school, the family, the church, medicine, entertainment, our jobs. Even funerals are designed to comfort us rather than keep the questions before us: ‘You too will die - for what purpose have you lived?’” (Needleman 2001:90)

To address this gap some educators consciously pose questions to their students to open up such spiritual exploration. I have also found several instances of Educators who are opening exploration of sensing and spirituality by allowing their students space to generate their own questions and providing curriculum time to seek “answers”, notably Kessler (2000:63) and Palmer (‘An Interview with Parker J. Palmer’ in Lantieri 2001:3).

Recently a secular British publishing company also conducted some marketing research for a speculative new series. As a prompt to a possible new book series they asked over eight hundred parents and children for their “difficult questions” and for the questions children raised that their parents found hardest to answer. A surprising number of the questions related more to theology than philosophy:

“Does God exist? Has God got a beard? Is there life after death? If God made us who made God? What does God look like? Why is the world

here? Who created God? Why are people bad to each other? Why are we here? Am I real or is this just a dream? If God is everywhere why do we have to go to church to see him? Why can't we ring God up? Why does Easter change its dates each year? Why is God all around us? Why is there a world? Why is there so much war in the world? Why do we have wars? Why do I believe in one God while my Hindu friend believes in lots and is my God the same as my Jewish friends? Do you know why Jesus wept? Who made the universe? Does God have a mum?" (Sugden 2007)

It should also be noted that several of these ‘theological’ questions are not answerable in any conventional, academic theological textbook. ‘Has God got a beard?’ doesn’t crop up in any Catechism I’ve ever read. Yet children will ask it anyway.

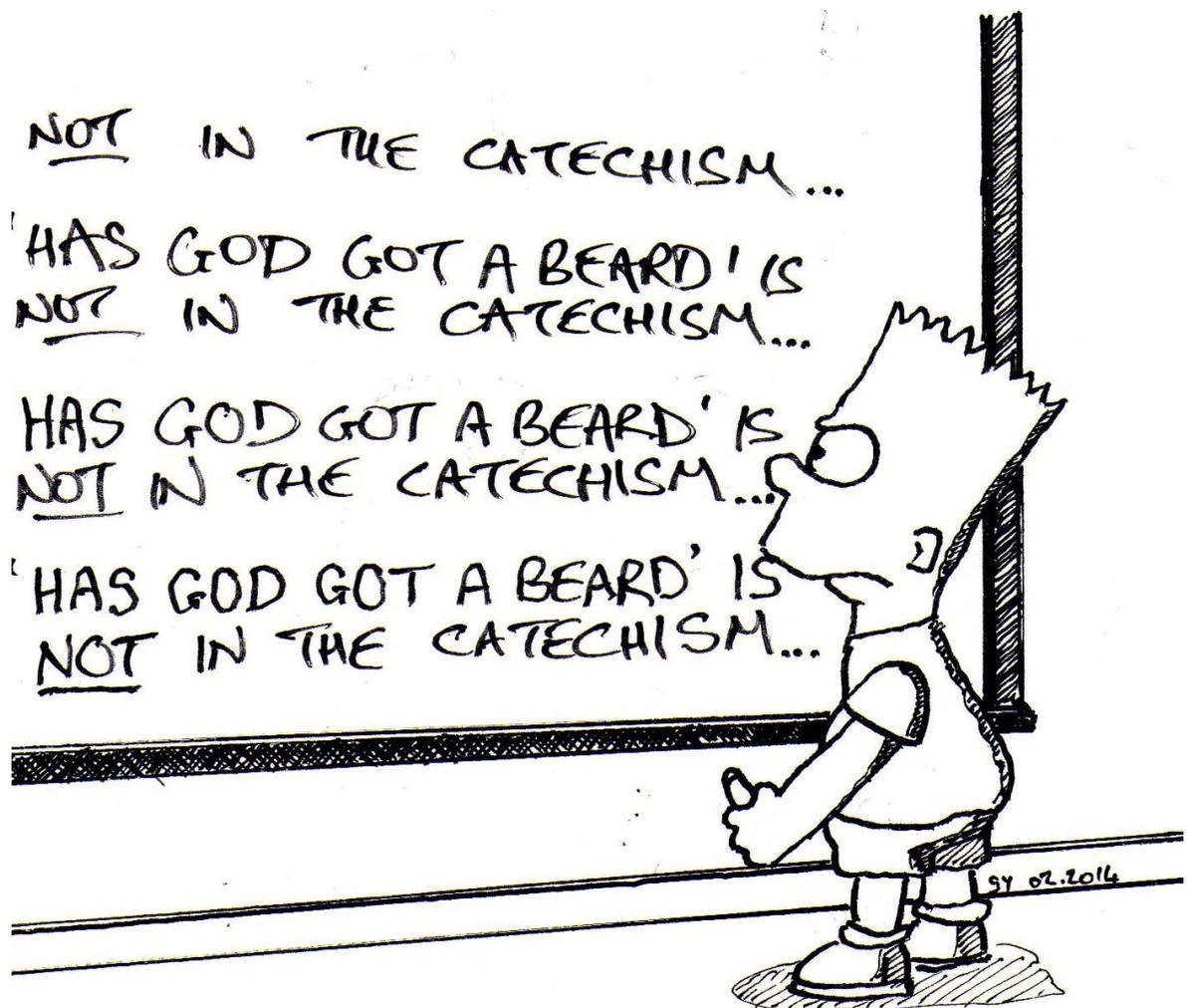


Figure 9 - Bart Simpson considers spiritual questions © Steve Younger

The Publisher which generated this research has yet to produce the book

series to match these enquiries. The Publisher could argue it was beyond their level of expertise or competence though the level of responses argues for it having commercial possibilities. Other factors might explain their reluctance: the practical difficulties of finding writers with the skills and knowledge to produce definitive volumes accessible to children, determining how directive the publisher and/or authors could be, how to guard against proselytism, to name a few. Despite the difficulties, Earl’s comment seems appropriate here:

“Failure to ask these questions may lead to technical triviality, cultural banality, and a desperate cry for meaning.” (Earl 2008:60)

If she is right then we not only need to allow time and space for these questions to emerge in our classrooms, we also need to provide the tools for students to create answers that satisfy them. In the UK Phil Rankin’s work would suggest that it is not just children and young people who need such opportunity:

“I contest that at some point in life, every person of every age and every walk of life has asked spiritual questions and therefore has spirituality. For that reason, we should be creating the time, space and opportunity for people of all ages and all walks of life.” (Rankin 2005:90)

While earlier Scottish Education acknowledged the importance of asking and allowing questions -

“Children and adolescents as they ask questions become aware of the need for standards and beliefs around which they can integrate their lives. They have the right to hear the answers given in the Bible and by the Christian faith as well as by other religions and philosophies.” (HMSO 1972:40)

I could not find more recent equivalent insights or comments. In the English context there has been a more consistent awareness of the value of questions in relation to spirituality within schools:

“... spiritual development is about how individuals acquire personal beliefs and values, determine whether life has a purpose, and behave as a result. It is about how pupils address ‘questions which are at the heart and root of existence’. ... spiritual development is about how a school helps: ‘...individuals to make sense of these questions, and about what it does to help form pupils’ response to life and various forms of experience, or even to questions about the universe’.  
(Ofsted, 1994:8)

Palmer may be right when he suggests that the act of allowing freedom to ask ‘Big Questions’ is in itself an act of spiritual epiphany and awareness and freedom and development (Palmer 2001). The questions do not need to be answered for spiritual development to take place but they do need to be conceived and given the space to be verbalised and explored.

“I don’t see how a teacher or any human being can fail to bring their spirituality into whatever it is they’re doing. And by that I don’t mean the content of one’s religious belief. I mean the way we deal with fundamental questions like “What am I doing here?” and “Does my life have a meaning?” and “Does that meaning depend on how successful I am in whatever I’m doing?” and “What about the fact that I’m going to die one day?” These are the same questions that our students have. We need to find ways to support our students in asking these questions.” (from ‘An Interview with Parker J. Palmer’ in Lantieri 2001:3)

Returning to the formal pilot study, the children certainly had no difficulty in asking such questions and discussing them. They had proved very adept at appropriating and manipulating my alternative vocabulary of Sensing. The only significant difficulties in this pilot study were less to do with the methodology and more to do with the meaning and mechanics of obtaining ‘informed consent’.

### **Issues of Consent**

There was a fundamental difference in approach to consent between the University of Glasgow’s ethical requirements and the Education Authority’s pro forma assumptions. The pilot study was in essence a small piece of action

research with children which within itself raised questions of consent such as how any child can truly give fully “informed” consent to research participation. The validity and legality of “informed consent” given on behalf of a child when it comes from a parent or guardian rather than the child him/herself is also unclear if taking into account the impact of article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right of a child to have their voice heard on matters affecting them. Obtaining signed ‘parental consent’ to the research *after* discussion of the research schedule between the child and parent might mean that it is really the parent who has consented to the research rather than the child him/herself. It also almost inevitably means that the parent has shaped the child’s eventual answers in a way that cannot be traced or quantified. Also the nature of action research - a flexible and continuous adaptation of the research questions and methodology during the process of research - implies that “informed consent” sought at the outset of research may not cover what is actually being conducted at the close of the research or at the start of each cycle of research and refinement. Interestingly, the University of Glasgow’s ethical procedures also imply an assumption that the child involved in the research must give active informed consent in order to participate whereas the Education Authority procedures assumed that the child is passive in the process and the capacity for “informed consent” is actually situated in their parent or guardian.

If anything, informed consent must be aimed at ensuring we hear the young research participants’ own voices, rather than a regurgitation of their parents’ views *or* their attempts to tell us what they think we want to hear *or* our interpretation of what we expect to hear from them. For this research it is also important that the pupil participants feel at liberty to give their own

opinion using their own vocabulary:

“...the students teachers find most difficult to consult are those who they most need to hear.” (Hopkins 2008:134)

The ethics of what might be termed “permission to research” or of authorisation for the research also proved problematic in this small-scale study. The Headteacher eventually sent out two sets of ‘consent’ forms: the University approved “active consent” format and the Education Authority’s own “passive consent” format. Both were conditions of permission to research by the respective bureaucracies yet it could be argued that either one rendered the other redundant. Research authorisation from the Education Authority issued by their Management Information Coordinator on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2011 allowed conduct of research in all and any of the Council’s educational establishments. A letter of authorisation was issued as proof and the instruction was given that a copy of the letter should be given to the Head of any establishment the researcher wished to research in. In theory a Headteacher could refuse entry or co-operation but I was informed by the Coordinator in writing that this scenario would only occur in exceptional circumstances: e.g. a proposed date for research coinciding with a full HMle inspection. A further verbal instruction was added that if the Headteacher of any establishment refused permission to research, this should be reported to the Coordinator immediately. This reflected the Council’s “commitment to Educational Research”.

The difference in the respective bureaucracies and in turnaround time was also quite marked. The Education Authority in question issued full authorisation for research within 3 days of receiving a completed ‘Research Application’ pro forma. By contrast the University of Glasgow’s ethics approval for this small pilot study took several months to obtain. The University’s Ethics

procedure lacked finesse and responsiveness and was error prone - the application was mistakenly withdrawn at one point and no one was sure how to override the system to correct this error. This caused frustration and loss of time. Successful resubmission was finally achieved.

SLC’s permission to conduct research came with a mandatory ‘Consent Form’ to be used by the researcher. This “consent” form raises its own ethical issue as it is effectively a ‘negative’ consent form addressed to the parents or guardians of any pupil, and not to the pupils themselves. The SLC consent template mandated for this research states:

“This form must be attached to a covering letter (which you may detach and keep) and should only be completed and returned IF YOU ARE UNWILLING (*their emphasis*) to have your child participate in the research study described in the attached letter. If you do not complete and return the form this will be taken as implying that you WISH your child to participate in the study.”<sup>4</sup>

The assumption appears to be that if a child is present in school then by implication that child has consented to do whatever the Education Authority believes to be in their best educational interests. And if the Education Authority has determined that the piece of research is in their educational interests then the child, or more precisely their parent, can only opt “out” rather than opt “in”.

Also of ethical significance was the whole issue of working with children and seeking to elicit genuine, independent and authentic responses from them. Children of this age (ten to twelve) in a school setting are already well-institutionalised in a power relationship in which the “normal” rules of engagement are that the adult is in authority and the pupil conforms to the

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<sup>4</sup> South Lanarkshire Council, Education Committee ‘Consent Form’

adult’s expectations. Both staff and pupils work within an assumed and largely unconscious pedagogy in which an adult’s questions are meant to lead to the ‘right’ response. A great deal of conscious and unconscious ‘leading’ goes on in any classroom setting where the teacher or authority-figure questions the pupil in order to confirm a pre-determined answer. A true exploration of the ‘Sensings’ desired in RO must deliberately and intentionally break this pattern. This is unfamiliar territory for child and adult alike. It is so much easier in a school setting to lead to the desired sound-bites and expected answers than to free a child to say what they really think and feel.

“Teaching is probably the one profession where we routinely ask questions we know the answer to and therefore children become highly accomplished at guessing what the teacher is thinking.”  
(Baumfield, Hall & Wall 2008:53)

*This chapter has outlined a small-scale pilot study. Chapter 3 details the chosen methodology for the final research.*

# CHAPTER THREE

## RESEARCH METHODOGY



**"Can anyone draw me a picture of God?"**

Figure 10 - © Steve Younger

*This chapter outlines the choice of research methods for my research into Pupil experiences of RO in Scottish non-denominational schools. This research exercise concerns both the practice and provision of valid and effective spiritual development of children and young people within school. Current legislation on Education requires that all schools - Primary and Secondary, Catholic and non-denominational - provide opportunities for RO. The frequency of these events is fixed in Circulars which define RO as “Community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.” The various Circulars, Guidance letters and Advice notes also detail the frequency of RO events.*

Spiritual development within CfE is defined by the RORG as creating moments for: “sensing mystery - experiences of awe, wonder and mystery about the natural world, human achievement and for some a divinity; sensing values - attitudes and feelings about what is really important, what really matters; sensing meaningfulness - the ability to make connections or to see potential patterns in one’s life which give it meaning; sensing a changed quality in awareness - the feeling of being ‘at one’ with nature, oneself and others; sensing ‘otherness’ - the sentiment that humans are more than their physical elements; sensing challenge - being challenged and moved by experiences such as love, beauty, goodness, joy, compassion, injustice, evil, suffering, death” (RORG 2004:20).

My research focussed on exploring the lived experiences of children and young people within non-denominational Scottish Schools in the context of Curriculum for Excellence. A premium was placed on finding their authentic voice and on eliciting the views of the practitioners who actually deliver RO events in schools.

The current context for Scottish Education as a whole is a philosophical shift to the “Curriculum for Excellence” (CfE). It places upon all educational staff a responsibility to contribute to health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy across learning. Amongst other things, teachers are encouraged to

engage in inter-disciplinary co-operation, cross-curricular learning, and the creation of partnerships with other agencies within a school’s catchment area. The underlying aim is to develop in every pupil four ‘capacities’ - each related to the values inscribed on the Scottish Parliament’s Mace: Wisdom, Integrity, Justice and Compassion. These values manifest in a focus on four: “capacities” - namely “Responsible Citizens”, “Successful Learners”, “Effective Contributors”, and “Confident Individuals”. RO sits comfortably within this philosophy and a number of practitioners I interviewed informally refer to RO as a “fifth capacity” though with no universally accepted title. RO, Spiritual Development, and Values Acquisition are not easy to place precisely within CfE. While formally situated within the remit of the Curricular Head for Philosophy and RME (Religious and Moral Education), elements of each cross the boundaries of all four capacities. However, the definition of RO events and the sensings indicate a closer ‘fit’ with ‘Health and Wellbeing’. While RO is the subject of various Guidance and Advice notes which stress its importance, and HMIE inspections do include assessment of compliance, the individual FIN reports (Findings of the Inspection) rarely comment on the content or conduct of RO nor do individual School Development Plans routinely include RO.

There are a number of problems with this situation which this research can address. Firstly schools (i.e. their Senior Management Teams) frequently express uncertainty as to what format RO should take. Most appear unaware of the templates offered as a resource on the Education Scotland website as acceptable evidence-recording tools. When aware of them, many school staff seem unsure of how to complete them. Secondly, schools do not feel qualified to deliver RO. They understand that it differs significantly from Religious and Moral Education but are typically unable to define the differences. Thirdly, as the term ‘spiritual development’ is itself a contested one, the official Curriculum for excellence documents carefully do not spell out the anticipated “experiences” and “outcomes” for RO. As a result, schools simply do not know what they are aiming at. Fourthly, the authentic voices of the young people who are the subject of our RO events are rarely heard and appear to have been routinely absent from all levels of RO planning and delivery. Fifthly, the provision of specific training in the delivery of RO events is sparse. The Masters level module on ‘RO: Design and Practice’ offered by the School of Education in Glasgow

University (2009-2012) was a rare exception. No other Scottish University currently offers any equivalent.

While there are several texts addressing issues of spiritual development for the English Educational system (most notably: West-Burnham, J. & Huws Jones, V., ‘Spiritual and Moral Development in Schools’, Network Continuum 2007; Eade, T., ‘Childrens Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development’, Learning Matters 2008, part of the Achieving QTS series of guidelines), there is currently no Scottish-context text book on implementing the Scottish legislation relating to RO. This research aims to provide practical guidance on training and implementation for Scottish non-denominational schools and the research methods chosen should facilitate this. Such research makes a valid contribution to this field. An appropriate research methodology will also give the research catalytic validity:

“put neutrally, catalytic validity simply strives to ensure that research leads to action ... (research) should not only augment and improve the participants“ experience of the world, but also improve the empowerment of the participants” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007:139f.)

By the nature of the research topic - measuring, implementing and assessing spiritual development - quantitative data simply does not apply. Spiritual Development has no mathematical quantification, despite the abundance of ‘Spiritual Wellbeing’ scales now emerging. Basic categories and definitions are still disputed. ‘Spirituality’ is a phenomenon rather than a numeric quantity. There are no algebraic or arithmetic formulae that apply. That spirituality is related to phenomena such as beliefs, values, philosophies and cultural understandings means there is also no definitive ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. The subject is about the “why?” areas of life rather than the more easily coded “what?” and “how?” This necessitates an interpretative approach. Qualitative methods rooted in context will help to explore perceived meanings and lived experiences. Participant observation, interview, narrative analysis and case study methods seem the most appropriate. Methods which are not deductive and descriptive would fail to catch the essence of this subject.

Because RO is a phenomenon, no hypothesis or assumption is being tested: rather patterns can be discerned in the interview data. The spirituality and spiritual development implicit in RO have no universally accepted, quantifiable definition. Therefore this is an area of study better suited to an Action Research approach. Such an approach has the advantage of dynamism, adaptability and flexibility. McNiff (2016) comments that,

“Doing action research is, for me, a way of investigating the practices of everyday life, including when those practices are incorporated into institutional programmes.” (McNiff, J. 2016:15)

She outlines the commonly understood key features of Action Research, which also underlie this study, as

“A commitment to reflection, knowledge generation, participative and collaborative working and practice transformation. Achieving these broad goals includes the following: a commitment to educational improvement; special kinds of research questions; taking responsibility for the self; educational action that is informed, committed and intentional.” (McNiff 2016:9)

### **A starting point**

In 2004 the ‘Report of the Religious Observance Review Group’ was published (RORG). The Review was set against a backdrop of a major philosophical shift within Scottish Education towards the Curriculum for Excellence. A significant component of this new curriculum has been a move away from delivery of a rigid curriculum structured into discrete subject areas. Now the aim is to produce four key “capacities” in every individual with an emphasis on cross-curricular links and community Partnerships. The individual subject disciplines are no longer rigidly discrete. Delivery of this curriculum is assessed on the attainment of “experiences” and “outcomes” rather than arithmetic grade points. Links between subject areas are explored and strengthened. The links between a school community and its contexts (local, national and global) are also emphasised. This new approach encourages proactive formation of character and recognises certain strands or currents that pervade every subject area and binds them together. This aim underwrites supporting foci such as ‘Health and Well Being’, ‘Rights Respecting’ and ‘Getting it Right for Every Child’.

The RORG is placed within the ethos and intent of the CfE. Apart from minor variations in subsequent Education (Scotland) Acts and the aspirations of the Millar Report (1972) the place and purpose of Religious Observance has yet to be significantly rethought since its inception in 1872. Although well aware of the changing ethos of Scottish Education represented by the CfE, and aware of the Scottish Government’s focus on the four key values carved into the mace presented to the Scottish Parliament (Justice, Wisdom, Integrity, and Compassion), the members of the RORG consciously chose not to reduce contemporary Religious Observance (RO) to a list of “experiences and outcomes”. Instead they subtly and carefully redefined the task of RO as providing “community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community, and express and develop the shared values of the school community”. Furthermore they consciously chose to describe it with the word “sensings” rather than “experiences and outcomes”.

These ‘sensings’ are: sensing Mystery, sensing Values, sensing Meaningfulness (patterns in one’s life, making connections in one’s life), sensing a ‘Changed Quality of Awareness’ (being ‘at one’ with nature, oneself and others), sensing ‘Otherness’ (that we are more than our physical elements and that there is more to this earth than we perceive with our physical senses), and sensing Challenge (being moved by our experiences, e.g. of justice & injustice, of good & evil). For many school staff and RO practitioners more familiar with a fixed curricular framework this is a completely new approach. It simultaneously attracts and alarms as it allows a flexibility and fluidity in implementation. It hints at the use of techniques previously untried, of a pedagogy that is unfamiliar and of the need to acquire a new way of understanding things. This is a clash of worlds - the familiar educational framework and a fundamental philosophical shift - that could either enrich or create deep uncertainty and fear. I see this as a change from education as a noun to education as a verb, from learning facts by rote to gaining understanding and feeling, from clear and separate subject areas to an integrated whole and from learning a literature to forming living character. RO fits well into this invitation to walk in another world:

‘ “What is it that a writer produces? Words, words, words. Mere marks on a scroll. A storyteller, a good one, mind you, produces a spell that binds his audience into sharing another world. Can written words ever

do that?” “Sometimes,” said Cato defensively. “Only for those who can read. And how many in a thousand Romans can do that? Yet every person who hears can share the tale. So which is the better? The written or the spoken word?” ’ ([Boudicca to Cato] Scarrow 2002:325)

Choosing to define RO by sensings rather than by numbered and subdivided outcomes shows respect for the aims of the CfE. It allows for the development of RO that is accessible to all, that is non-partisan and non-sectarian, that is not indoctrinatory, and that is cross-curricular. It can leave schools (i.e. their senior management teams) struggling to grasp its substance and wondering how to deliver something so nebulous. Within the Catholic sector the response has been to see this new pattern of RO as akin to creating a “fifth capacity”. In the Catholic sector this fifth capacity is frequently termed ‘Faithful Disciples’ and reflects an existing rich heritage and a complete ease in handling this area of character formation. For the non-denominational sector however this is largely uncharted territory. The ‘sensings’ have no ready equivalence to any current practice and the RORG definition sets goals that are out-with the perceived capability and skill-set of existing staff. There are no reference points for staff used to delivering pre-CfE RO. The problem is similar to that outlined in Gavin Menzies’ *1421: The Year That China Discovered the World*. Until the Chinese fleets sent out by Emperor Zhu Di could solve a vital navigational and mapping issue, finding fixed stars and new constellations for accurately determining their position in the Southern Hemisphere, they could not safely explore the world beyond their knowledge and experience. The Admirals needed to discern a Southern equivalent for Polaris. RO, as described in the RORG, requires facilitators who understand the phenomena of spiritual development and who can chart a safe course by keeping the sensings in sight.

In this context - RO without fixed reference points, no agreed vocabulary beyond the word sensings, and no definitive list of ‘experiences and outcomes’ - a loose alliance of interested parties were called together for exploratory meetings in COSLA’s offices in Edinburgh in 2009 to look at setting up training for RO practitioners. School teachers and school chaplains were invited to attend. Under the auspices of the Church of Scotland’s Education Convenor and the University of Glasgow’s School of Education, key policy makers in the implementation of the RORG were brought together with the practitioners and interested groups. The purpose was to create and deliver a Masters level course

in “The Practice of Religious Observance”. The course would be open to school staff and to chaplains/youth workers and would generate both a body of trained personnel and a bank of exemplar material. The course would have both academic rigour (20 points towards a Masters degree) and educational value - recognition as valid career long professional learning (CLPL).

From these exploratory meetings a small team was formed from representatives of the Church of Scotland, the University of Glasgow, Scripture Union Scotland, and practitioners from the Catholic and non-denominational sectors. During the detailed meetings for planning and discussion some of the points to emerge included:

- finding the reference points for exploration of the Spiritual
- definition of Spirituality and, especially, of ‘spiritual development’
- how to generate appropriate spiritual ‘experiences and outcomes’
- how to create opportunities for the sensings to emerge
- how to assess “success”
- how to train practitioners to deliver RO compliant with the sensings described within the RORG.

I was present at this initial meeting and became a member of the small team tasked with taking this further. My research has been conducted in parallel with this involvement and with the desire to find answers to the points above.

In the course of this research I have interviewed four main groups: policy-makers (Advisors, Consultants, Education Scotland, Religious Representatives, and School SMT members), practitioners (chaplains and youth workers tasked with the actual delivery of RO events), parents of Primary and Secondary School pupils, and pupils themselves (from Primary 3 to Secondary 6). In total qualitative data was gathered in 34 interview sessions from nine policy-makers, eight practitioners, nine parents, thirty-five Secondary school pupils and seventeen Primary School pupils. The practitioners, pupils and parents were connected to Schools from seven Local Education Authorities: City of Aberdeen, Dumfries & Galloway, Fife, City of Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire. The pupils came from four non-denominational Primary Schools, three non-denominational Secondary Schools and one Independent School (Christian, faith-based, fee-paying). These interviewees were contacted through formal research requests and permissions (and subsequently interviewed

in schools) and through informal networking (in a variety of settings, mainly interviewed in homes and offices). The informal networks helped to broaden the geographical area covered and also allowed a more relaxed atmosphere and longer interviews. They included a policy-maker within one Education Authority arranging an informal meeting with a parent (a friend) in another; a School Deputy Head asking if any of the parents who had agreed to allow their children to be interviewed also wished to meet me; a general appeal for “interested parties” to join Focus Groups at events I was speaking at (e.g. a Denominational Ministers’ Conference at which two delegates who were School Chaplains agreed to meet me); and contact through a Church-based youth group asking if any parents were interested in giving their views and allowing their children to be interviewed at home.

Several interview schedules were prepared: one aimed at Primary School pupils (P1-7), one at Secondary School pupils (S1-6), one for policy-makers and one for practitioners and focus groups. [See Appendices]. Those for pupils made provision for responses to be verbal (spoken out) and/or visual (drawn) and/or written. All interviews required ethical consent [see Appendices] and all interviews were digitally recorded. Hand-written notes were also made during the interviews. All interviewees were informed of anonymity and confidentiality and assured that they would not be identified in transcript and that any identifying features such as names and schools and locations would be excised. Interviewees were also invited to choose a pseudonym if they wished and they were addressed by this pseudonym during interview. Pupils especially enjoyed picking and using pseudonyms. I advised them to pick names that they did not use in any other context: e.g. on social media, on gaming platforms or as classroom/family nicknames. Two of the policy-makers specifically waived any anonymity and said that as their views were well-known to colleagues in any case they were not worried about retaining confidentiality. Two practitioners also refused to choose pseudonyms on the grounds of “openness”. In transcription however I have chosen to omit all names and have also excised references to named schools and staff and anything else that might have acted as an identifier.

As the interviews produced over eighty hours of digital recordings an initial attempt at using transcription software was made. This was abandoned

almost immediately as the software could not cope with multiple voices in group settings nor with Scottish and regional accents. Following investment in a professional transcription kit (a foot-pedal operated system that allowed easy repetition of phrases and the ‘slowing’ of the speed of playback) I transcribed every interview myself. Although laborious this allowed an extremely high level of interaction with the interview material and a greater depth of familiarity with it. Accuracy of transcription was tested by comparison with written notes taken manually during the course of each interview. Surprisingly few ambiguities or difficulties emerged. A handful of indecipherable comments occurred across all thirty-four recordings, none of which involved any substantial point of interpretation. Copies of the full transcripts were e-mailed (or posted where appropriate) to each participant for them to read through and to confirm accuracy. Each interviewee was invited to submit any corrections, amendments, alterations, additions or clarifications that they wished. They also had the opportunity at that point to ask for their interview to be deleted and not used in the research. One respondent asked to rephrase one sentence and this was done in the final approved transcript. All those who responded expressed a high level of satisfaction at the accuracy of transcription. One school asked permission for copies of the full transcripts to be duplicated for a staff planning meeting aimed at improving the quality of their RO planning. As all pupil identifiers had been removed and pseudonyms used I agreed to this.

### *A classic Interview/Participant Observation pairing*

As the subject being studied concerns spiritual development, any chosen method would have to be capable of engaging with semantics and meaning, with abstract concepts, with symbolic language, with ritual, with nuance, and with narrative. People tend to use the language and concepts of spirituality to justify their choices and actions and to give meaning to their lives. Semi-structured Interviews allow the subjects a fair amount of freedom to narrate their own experiences and construct their own meaning, while keeping within the parameters of the research interest. My chosen methods had to be able to access this meaning through examining lived experiences and interpreting the

self-narratives, the explanations people report for their beliefs. All autobiography is inherently self-serving and self-justifying so careful triangulation will need to be made with other methods to preserve validity. Participant observation seemed the most likely method to verify autobiographical material. In the semi-structured interviews I was able to combine clear parameters and a scaffold of questions with freedom to explore nuances that arose and to ask further questions for clarification. As an active participant alongside my interviewees in some situations, observing their actions and recording their words, I was also able to ask supplemental questions in the semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of their motives and thoughts during events. To assist in reflecting on events I was a participant in, I also kept a detailed Research Journal throughout. Some of the reflections from that Journal will be used for illustrative purposes within this Thesis.

Participant Observation and Interview are the perfect complements for this field: participant observation allows a researcher to see things interview cannot reveal, and interviews allow the researcher to ask things participant observation alone cannot answer.

“The observer may be blind to what is being looked at, may not understand it, may think that they have seen something or may influence the ongoing process both consciously and unconsciously.”  
(Banister 2005:31)

Likewise the interviewer may be deaf to what is being said non-verbally and cannot apprehend the subliminal or the subconscious. Careful participant observation may redress this: non-verbal clues can be taken into account, and the observer can identify moments which need supplementary probing to analyse subconscious values or unexpressed processes. Participant observation complements Interview and the pairing of these two methods is

“A common feature of contemporary Qualitative research. .... At the level of the local scene, phenomena are both mapped using formal empirical methods [such as interview], and deeply interrogated using ethnographic methods [such as participant observation]” (Nilan 2002:364)

Of the available qualitative methods, the initial one is therefore interview. As spiritual development is a highly experiential and emotive field of research, it lends itself to qualitative interview and narrative analysis.

“Interviews can permit exploration of issues that may be too complex to investigate through quantitative means.” (Banister 2005:50)

Interview gives participants freedom and space to tell their own stories and reveal their own meanings with their own voice. This is particularly crucial as the current literature is devoid of the voices of pupils and practitioners. Interview also allows further questioning to clarify meaning and dispel ambiguities. Shades and nuances of meaning can remain intact. With time to build trust and relationship, good quality data emerges. Semi-structured interviews are preferable to structured and unstructured, though

“... no interview is completely devoid of structure: if it were there would be no guarantee that the data generated would be appropriate to the research question.” (Britten 1995)

I am aware that interview is not a neutral process of course. While ideally

“The aim is to discover the interviewee’s own framework of meanings and the research task is to avoid imposing the researcher’s structures and assumptions ....” (Britten 1995).

Interview is a partnership in which both sides explore the research question and co-create the data (Roulston/ deMarrais/ Lewis 2003).

“Both parties to the interview are necessarily and ineluctably active. Meaning is ... actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are ... constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers. Participation in an interview involves meaning-making work.” (Silverman 2002:114; also Banister 2005:68)

My small-scale pilot study had allowed me to refine interview questions in order to reduce confusion, redundancy and ambiguity as much as possible (Coleman/ Briggs 2005:151; Opie 2004:115). It also helped me be more self-aware of my own Researcher biases (Opie 2004:118). I am clearly investigating from the standpoint of a person of faith. The self-awareness is crucial if skewed data is to be avoided. While no researcher has complete control over what emerges from

the dynamic process of interview, self-awareness and carefully chosen methods should help avoid the potential extremes: creating either a Cinderella or a Frankenstein. Interview data construction is unavoidably collaborative (Garfunkel 1967; Sacks et al. 1974).

“It is virtually impossible to free any interaction from those factors that could be construed as contaminants. ... The speakers are ... competent observer-analysts of the interaction they are involved in.” (Silverman 2002:118f. 126, 131)

Interview also has an important advantage as a method for use within Educational establishments: it overcomes some of the risks in hearing from children and young people of very mixed literacy and comprehension levels -

“If the target population consisted of very young children, poorly educated people, or those who had difficulty with writing for some reason, then you would probably obtain better results from talking to them, rather than asking them to write.” (Coleman/ Briggs 2005:145)

Interview is also a familiar and ‘normal’ tool to use in a typical school setting. Interviews with a sample of staff, students, parents, chaplains and priests in the field of spiritual development are long overdue and sorely lacking. Interviewing a sample of 30-40 pupils should provide a satisfactory level of saturation, with the caveat that no sample for qualitative study could be enough to definitively generalise for the whole population of school communities. At best I can say I have gained a reasonably accurate snapshot of the reactions of one sample in one place at one moment. The notion of a “typical” school or pupil is, of course, an illusion. ‘Grange Hill’ and ‘Wellington Road’ are, after all, fictional. ‘Educating Essex’ is a fly-on-the-wall, real-life documentary-style case study but cannot claim to be representative of all UK schools. Of course none of these is contextualised for the Scottish educational system. Since there is no typical school or pupil or person delivering RO, it seemed best to choose a sample on a combination of quota sampling (proportionate numbers from Scotland’s Primary, Secondary and ASN pupils) and to attempt a purposeful representative sampling (different age groups, different ability levels, different staff, a selection of practitioners) .

There are no specific rules on how many interviews are ‘enough’ for this type of research: “50 or 60” (Britten 1995). But others dispute this figure:

“The size of a sample for qualitative interviews is good enough if ranging from 20-40 (if we need to compare findings, we can double it). When dealing with a very specific group of children, the sample can be even smaller. Anything beyond 50 can only mean putting in extra effort, which can be better used to be much more careful about the consistency of interpretation and analysis.”<sup>5</sup>

The concept of ‘saturation’ is more useful: defined as that point at which no “new” information or insight emerges. Even a small sample can be indicative:

“Using data from a study involving sixty in-depth interviews with women in two West African countries, the authors systematically document the degree of data saturation and variability over the course of thematic analysis. ... Based on the data set, they found that saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews, although basic elements for meta-themes were present as early as six interviews” (Guest/Bunce/Johnson 2006)

Careful participant observation allows a judgement on when saturation has been reached and meta-themes have become clear. Throughout the research phase the journal I kept of RO events conducted and observed, and of all training and conference events related to RO was useful for identifying emerging themes. Participant observation also proved useful for studying phenomena such as spiritual development. It would be hard to explore beliefs and values, especially about the numinous, in a laboratory. Participant observation of events and subsequent semi-structured interviews following the events can also confirm if actual behaviours match self-stated beliefs. This combination of participant observation and interview is a readily acceptable, recognisable and familiar technique within Education. It can challenge assumptions and assertions, and allow documentation of lived experiences as they happen.

“...it opens up practise for detailed scrutiny” (Opie 2004:121).

This may require some tact from the researcher. There is a need to be sensitive that the quest for clarification and the need to gain a deeper understanding may

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<sup>5</sup> Guidance from LSE Media and Communications ‘Best Practice’ document Downloaded 17.12.11 from <http://www2.lse.ac.uk>

be perceived by an interviewee as implying criticism or as a questioning of integrity. Self-awareness and care are needed so that the interviewer is not taking a role as interrogator rather than interviewer. Similarly the interviewee, subjected to close questioning, may feel manoeuvred into the role of ‘suspect’ rather than ‘subject’. It also requires considerable effort from the researcher: the need to learn the language of the cultural setting, to understand sub-texts and unwritten codes of behaviour, to discern power relationships and status interactions, to analyse accurately, and to get to grips with why things work the way they do. It can also be time-consuming and labour-intensive, particularly in writing up field notes in the research journal.

Participant observation, to be useful, cannot be casual or merely reactive. It must be pro-active, purposeful and analytic. It has to move beyond the descriptive if it is to have value. The key continuum is hinted at in the word pairing itself: “participant” with “observation”. There is a balance to be maintained at all times. If this is the only method of observation then it will be flat, flavourless, partial and futile. If it is full participation then the researcher is shaping the data and may be unintentionally introducing all sorts of biases and potentially altering the “true” meaning of the event. I resisted the temptation to categorise observations: all that would be spotted is the incidence of a limited range of pre-determined markers. The real interest was in the miscellaneous and the unorthodox and the unguarded comments, and in the answers and the insights that defied categorisation and preconception, and that crossed categories.

The frequent debate over the relative values of observations made by ‘insiders’ v. ‘outsiders’ is pertinent here. While an outsider might miss nuances and meanings that an insider will spot, any thorough and careful observer will be constantly working to gain access and acceptance such that they are no longer an outsider. An outsider may have an objectivity that an insider would lack. An outsider may question behaviours or see connections that an insider would not see the significance of:

“The relative position of an observer participant can reveal a new perspective, a hidden meaning, or a unique understanding” (Labaree 2002:103)

I am aware that where I stand on the participant/observer continuum matters. I believe that my stance is very much as an ‘insider’ making participant observation, yet rather than seeing this as a potential weakness I believe it gave significant advantages. For example, in general,

“It [being an insider] can provide information on the environment and behaviour of those who cannot, or will not, speak for themselves.” (Opie 2004:122)

Some pupils might not speak up in interview because of the fear of repercussion by peers or by those perceived to be in authority. In several of the schools in which I conducted interviews and made observations I was already School Chaplain. I believe that the pupils’ familiarity with me and the existing good relationships made the research more fruitful and penetrating and meant that I was more readily trusted with their responses. I believe a strength of this study, particularly in the responses from the Primary School aged pupils, lies in the strong relationships built over thirty years of unbroken service with the schools, their staff, the pupils and their parents. Adams (2010) makes a robust case that regular interaction and work on a daily basis, especially with younger children, greatly increases the researcher’s understanding and empathy.

“Once individuals are aware, a key factor in gaining further access is by developing relationships with the children which are characterised by trust and mutual respect. Children are highly responsive and open in the company of adults whom they trust to listen carefully, explain where necessary, and above all, be non-judgemental.” (Adams 2010:124)

I have been able to build on existing relationships. My status as a known and trusted ‘insider’ has allowed me to hear the authentic (Adams 2010) voice of the younger age group in particular.

Care is needed later in the process too as

“Those observed may have to take the consequences of what has been written about them.” (Banister 2005:19).

Nevertheless,

“Observation is a key means of obtaining both “hard” and “soft” evidence about what currently exists in [school and classroom practices]” (Coleman & Briggs 2005:189).

### *Supplementary Methodology considered: Case Study*

Although common in Educational Research, I decided that Case Study may prove a less useful method for this research. The option of case study certainly presented itself also from the point of view of simple opportunity. As a practising school chaplain of 30 years experience I have an ongoing relationship with a number of schools. This high level of familiarity and intimacy allows for close study of a single setting. However, less attention will be given to a formal case study as

“A case study does not ... set out to implement any changes as a result of its findings. Although findings from a case study may illustrate practice, or result in recommendations for change, this is somewhat secondary ....” (Opie 2004:78f.)

Since

“The choice of method should clearly depend on the problem under study and its circumstances” (Flyvbjerg 2006:226),

and my purpose is global action rather than isolated illustration, case study is therefore inherently less useful for developing applicable and transferable action points. While a strength of case study is its “irreducible quality” (Flyvbjerg 2006) and the richness of data it produces, even a single case can have

“So many facets - like life itself - that different readers may be attracted, or repelled, by different things in the case. Readers are not pointed down any one theoretical path or given the impression that

truth might lie at the end of such a path. Readers will have to discover their own path and truth inside the case.” (Flyvbjerg 2006:238)

In my experience, the mind-set of most teachers regarding RO appears to oppose this relativism. They do not want to discover their own path or work out their own truth or gather rich, thick data. What they want is a definitive guide or a ‘yard stick’ to apply; a curricular guideline. They seem to be searching for a check-list of “experiences and outcomes” to fit the philosophy of the Curriculum for Excellence that they work within. The practitioners I met in the Secondary schools seemed to me more careful in casting their aspirations in the CfE terminology of “capacities” and “E’s and O’s” (“experiences and outcomes”). The Primary school staff and practitioners more bluntly articulated a desire to have the WILF (“What I’m Looking For ...”) and the WALT (“We Are Learning Together”) for RO spelled out for them. They wanted an off-the-shelf heuristic, and the patterns and template that will fit most of their pupils most of the time. Case study would offer findings specific to one locus but potentially leave too much work to do in discerning, adapting and applying insights elsewhere. Case study could determine key factors for that individual case but there would be no guarantee of their applicability elsewhere.

Knowing which case to select would also be problematic. Flyvbjerg, an able proponent, says:

“When the objective is to achieve the greatest possible amount of information on a given problem or phenomenon, a representative case or a random sample may not be the most appropriate strategy.”  
(Flyvbjerg 2006:229)

He suggests there may be value in finding a critical or extreme or paradigmatic case. However, being sure you have selected such a case may be more a matter of luck or intuition than judgement. Interviews and participant observation might reveal an appropriate case study, but plunging into a pertinent case study has too much of a chance element. Case study is also time-consuming if it is to be done in depth. It may be useful ethnographically and interesting anthropologically but of limited value in helping to determine the parameters and paradigms for spiritual development. There might be value in a longitudinal

study of a single case though. The test and retest of a sense of spirituality within a fixed case (a single selected school) might show changes in self-understanding and spiritual development but that lies beyond the parameters of this paper’s research question. The intent then was to major on semi-structured interviews and participant observation which could produce some generalisations and universalities that might be testable in later or subsequent study.

### *Ethical considerations*

Specific ethical guidance is given by the ‘British Educational Research Association’ for working within a school context, including an awareness of applicable Human Rights Law:

“The Association requires researchers to comply with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3 requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration, Article 12 requires that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity.” (BERA 2011:16)

Domestic laws such as the Data Protection Act (1998) also have an impact. Research within Educational Establishments has substantial ethical implications, not least those implicit in meeting such legislation related to the protection of children and young people from any harm. Local Education Authorities have statutory responsibilities to meet from the level of International Law on Human Rights (Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), to the level of UK Law (the Data Protection Act 1998), and the level of Scottish Government Law (the ‘Protecting Vulnerable Groups’ scheme). As a matter of integrity and good practice no researcher can bypass full compliance. In their own ethical guidelines for researchers seeking permission to engage with their establishments Local Authority Education personnel also required evidence of this compliance. Quite apart from providing their Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) reference number, researchers in non-denominational Scottish schools must also agree to clear ethical standards and procedures. A fairly standard request, and a requirement of the ethical code of the British Educational Research Association, is that:

“Researchers must ensure that ... the form of any publication, including publication on the Internet, does not directly or indirectly lead to a breach of agreed confidentiality and anonymity.” (BERA 2011:28)

Normally, to protect the anonymity of research participants, they will also require the anonymisation of all data so that no person or establishment can be identified. This requirement was occasionally in tension with some Local Education Authorities which made it a condition of research that researchers report their findings and disseminate them. Since they knew precisely which schools and staff had participated this made anonymisation of data problematic at points. This tension may have reflected what I thought of as “an inspection mentality”: i.e. the LEA’s were used to HMle inspections resulting in two levels of feedback - the short, generalised summary reports on specific schools which enter the public realm (e.g. school handbooks, letters to parents, council websites) and the much longer, specific and detailed FINs (Findings of Inspection) which stay in the private realm (e.g. a subject school’s Senior Management Team, the Council’s Quality Improvement Officers, the members of the Education Committee). In one authority I was given permission to research in one of their Secondary schools and was subsequently asked to “share” the findings from this identifiable school in an authority-wide training day for their staff and chaplains. The school itself also asked for detailed feedback for the formation of their own School Development Plan. The tension of making data accessible while retaining confidentiality was resolved simply enough by anonymising any and all pupil-specific identifiers.

As this research potentially concerned sensitive moral/ personal/ spiritual/ emotional issues, a pastoral sensitivity was also necessary.

“Questions that raise uncomfortable issues about the participant to themselves, or invite the participant to be revelatory about themselves to a stranger (the researcher), may raise the need for researchers to offer counselling to ensure any harm caused is dissipated when the discussion or observation ends.” (Coleman & Briggs 2005:83)

To remain ethical, this research needed to comply with school procedures on guidance, counselling and disclosure. Where necessary an interview or

Participant Observation could be halted and an appropriate referral made to Guidance Staff and/or Senior Management. It was made clear to participants, especially to children and young people, that they could opt out at any stage without consequence and that they were entitled to...

“The exclusion from the transcript or other records of anything the interviewee does not wish to be seen by others” (Banister 2005:54)

Interestingly, Coleman and Briggs (2005:79f.) found that in practice some adults also objected to full transcripts but only because

“They thought the transcripts made them sound inarticulate. This unintentional causing of harm to some participants was addressed by one of the researchers talking with them about it.” (Coleman & Briggs 2005:79f.)

A major concern in this study was taking great care to ensure that as far as possible, fully informed consent was given by all participants. Levels of understanding vary though and it is a moot point how truly complete informed consent can be from any child. Consent was also sought therefore from those with parental responsibility for each participant; though consent-by-proxy itself raises ethical concerns.

“Although asking proxies for the participants - for example asking parents or teachers for permission for children to participate is sometimes perceived as a means of addressing this problem, it only serves more effectively to disempower the participants. Not least there is the risk that the participants will be unwilling to openly disagree with their proxies, even if they actually do, because the latter usually stand in powerful social positions compared to the former.” (Coleman & Briggs 2005:84)

### *Caveats*

The weakness of my research design is its potential for subjectivity and the consequent possible lack of reliability and replication. However I contend that there is no quantitative data that can irrefutably verify the results of a phenomenological examination. Nor is there a sure way to determine either appropriate sample size or the definitive ‘saturation’ point. Both chosen

techniques - interview and participant observation - suffer the same basic flaw of qualitative methods that,

“There is no such thing as value-free data gathering” (Coleman & Briggs 2005:179)

This is simply a truth that must be acknowledged. My own researcher biases need to be acknowledged as they may unintentionally influence my participation and observation, my interpretations and conclusions. I am a Christian, faith-based practitioner; a serving Baptist Minister with an Evangelical theology, and an active member of Scripture Union Scotland. I therefore declare an interest in RO that is neutral but not neutered of all ‘religion’.

“It is important to recognise that qualitative data - like other depictions of social reality - are social constructs. Thus, they are influenced by researchers’ assumptions about social reality and methodological practice.” (Silverman 2002:26)

The same holds true for Observation:

“Participant observers must negotiate ... the maintenance of objectivity and accuracy. This, of course, rests on the assumption that some manner of objectivity is possible.” (Labaree 2002:107f.)

In both interviews and participant observation we are trying to achieve “reality reconstruction” (Silverman 2002:26), but whose reality it is will always be moot.

“What makes an observation salient is highly subjective and depends upon the particular research context.” (Wolfinger 2002:89)

My analyses and my interpretations of the data may be subjective ultimately but they can still be rigorously focussed on the themes uncovered:

“A majority of the interpretation, if we are trying to be objective, needs to occur directly from the data gathered.” (Coleman & Briggs 2005:173)

In addressing this inherent subjectivity the first step is to acknowledge it and embrace it, though the simplest and most obvious interpretations are probably truest for subjective data too. Peer and Supervisor review should help

to determine if my conclusions and inferences are logical and reasonable. International comparisons of my findings for different faiths and in different cultures would further validate any conclusions though this would be beyond the remit of my research. I believe that my methods have validity and value:

“Those of us who aim to understand and document others’ understandings choose qualitative interviewing because it provides us with a means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality.” (Silverman 2002:100, 111)

It should be clear that education research on a phenomenon such as the ‘spiritual development’ of a school community is a qualitative task rather than a quantitative one. Spiritual development is ideally suited to methods that can explore meaning, significance and symbol rather than number and quantity. The three methods discussed - Interview, participant observation and Case Study - are all viable and appropriate means to generate relevant data that could capture the essence of the phenomenon without it being straitjacketed. All three are also well-used and well-established mainstays of research within Education. The former pair (Interview and Participant Observation) have formed the principal means of research into this topic as they feel more capable of sampling the ‘flavour’ of the field rather than the facts. This is, after all, more an area of experience and emotion and feeling than of straightforward description and analysis. The latter method (Case Study) could provide invaluable snapshots illustrative of practice in particular places at precise moments. But unless the research was repeated at regular intervals for comparison and for analysis of change and variance case study adds less value to the topic.

This is also an area of research that may have more (in quantity and quality) significant ethical issues than other fields of study with human participants might carry. As it concerns beliefs and values it requires skilled and careful sensitivity on the part of the researcher. Yet it has the potential to make a significant contribution to a field that cries out for proper research and better definition and the discernment of clear principles. It may be a caricature, but the unspoken “rule of thumb” on choosing Methods seems to be that: “if it can be measured, measure it; if it can’t be measured, interview it.” A more useful

version of this maxim might be, “if it can be measured, it’s quantitative; if it can’t be measured, it’s qualitative.” Simply put,

“If something can be counted it probably should be.” (Greig, Taylor, MacKay 2013:176)

Wragg (1999) makes the thoughtful observation that being clear on *why* data is being gathered should help the researcher to determine whether quantitative or qualitative methods would be best:

“Rather than gratefully seizing a category system or rating scale simply because it is available, it is better for observers to ask themselves why they might want to quantify something, as well as what might be the focus of their attention.” (Wragg 1999:20)

When it comes to a phenomenon such as spirituality or spiritual development categories and scales for measurement are beginning to abound. It is not clear why one would want to quantify such a thing: what meaning or value would there be in ‘measuring’ someone’s spirituality and in finding that someone was 10% “more spiritual” now than they were a year ago? As the study of spirituality and spiritual development within the Scottish ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ clearly sits within the phenomenological realm the inherent logic points towards a qualitative methodology. In any case I am less interested in measuring increments or changes and more in finding what generates changes in perception or gives certain events significance for a participant.

“As a broad rule, we tend to see quantitative data as telling you what happened on a specific occasion and qualitative data exploring why that might have occurred.” (Baumfield, Hall & Wall 2008:22)

No matter how good or how detailed quantitative data is, it is unlikely to uncover meanings, motives, thoughts, intents, emotions, understanding and desires. Methods should, of course, always be chosen to fit the target phenomenon’s characteristics rather than the researcher’s inclinations, presuppositions and comfort zone. While there are some who simply assume that

“Growth in the spiritual life occurs within the individual. It cannot be seen or measured.” (Earl 2008:58),

I would reason that while spirituality does not lend itself easily to precise and comparable measurement there are aspects and indicators that can be measured: e.g. frequency of prayer or of church attendance. But these make an assumption that the essence of spirituality can be matched to the forms of religiosity - something that is not necessarily always the case. To use an analogy: we might be able to measure wind speed and direction or spot the indicators of prevailing winds but analysing the factors which produce wind requires more subtlety and complexity. Yet there is a legion of scales purporting to ‘measure’ spirituality. However their variety and the absolute lack of one agreed standard suggest that there is no infallible touchstone available. Attempts to classify or quantify spirituality may become as insidious as trying to measure ethnicity or loyalty or worth or national identity.<sup>6</sup> Even if spirituality could be classified and precisely measured it may not be appropriate to do so:

“Cognitive learning outcomes, as currently understood and practised are expected to be demonstrated by the end of the lesson or unit of work and are assessable. However, *measurement of affective and spiritual learning is not desirable* (my emphasis). Indeed, this latter kind of learning may only become evident in the near or distant future. Hence, it is articulated as a desired outcome rather than a demonstrated one.” (de Souza 2007:172)

Spirituality - as something inherently immeasurable - is a qualitative phenomenon situated in the lived experiences, the life-narratives, the meshwork, the margins, and the liminality of being human. It therefore requires methods that can analyse it as living and breathing rather than as a subject for a post mortem. Methods that describe spirituality as a verb and not a noun will reveal its nuanced, colourful richness without reducing it to a binary code. To use an analogy, I have deliberately settled on methods that can feel the pulse and heartbeat, the mood and movement, and the soul and poetry of spirituality. As Parker Palmer aptly puts it:

“As we proceed, let us remember one thing about the human soul: it is like a wild animal. It is tough, self-sufficient, resilient - and

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<sup>6</sup> In 1996, Gregory Stanton wrote ‘The Eight Stages of Genocide’. This article was originally presented as the first Working Paper (GS 01) of the Yale Program in Genocide Studies in 1998. It was given as a Briefing Paper to the UN. Stanton’s first of eight stages of Genocide is ‘classification’.

exceedingly shy. If we go crashing through the woods, screaming and yelling for the soul to come out, it will evade us all day and night. We cannot beat the bushes and yell at each other and expect this precious inwardness to emerge. But if we are willing to go into the woods and sit quietly at the base of a tree, this wild thing will, after a few hours, reveal itself. Out of the corner of our eye, we might glimpse something of the wild preciousness we are looking for.” (Palmer 1999:16)

Spirituality, the movement and life of a human soul, does however have clear markers. Some call these “characteristics” (Ofsted 2004), some call them “attitude-virtues” (Best 1996:49f.), some call them “spiritual identities” (Kirmani 2009), and in the Scottish non-denominational schools context we call them “sensings” (Scottish Executive 2004). Whichever methods are adopted for the study of spirituality and spiritual development, they would have to be flexible enough to discern these markers and delicate enough to handle them.

In selecting the most appropriate methods for this study, thought was also given to the purpose in collecting any data. If all we do is define a set of markers and then group what we find according to these we have only engaged in butterfly-collecting. We may find things of breathtaking beauty but what do we do with them other than file-and-forget or display-and-label? As the stimulus to this PhD is the ‘RORG’ it may be suggested that there is an inherent purpose that significantly shapes the methodology: the Report asks Scottish Schools “to promote the spiritual development of all members of the School community”. This situates the tasks involved as qualitative rather than quantitative and strongly shapes the overall approach as being a piece of Action Research. ‘Qualitative’ rather than quantitative because “development” suggests flavour more than figures, the numinous more than the numerical, and definite character more than definable characteristics. This is action research rather than a statistical analysis because an experiential outcome is being sought. This is research that should make a difference to the lived experience of spirituality:

“Information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive change in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes.” (Mills quoted in Hopkins 2008:48)

Having said all this, it is also important that any findings can still be verified or subjected to a satisfactory level of triangulation:

“At a ‘grass-roots’ level it does not matter very much if one method or another is used, as long as the process is rigorous and systematic and the recommendations for changing practice (or not) are based on sound, reliable and valid data.” (Greig, Taylor & MacKay 2013:12)

My intent is to combine several levels of structured interviews with participant observation. The interviews are primarily with the children and young people themselves, and with those who know them best - their parents. Two other ‘levels’ of interview have been interwoven: with the practitioners (teachers, chaplains, youth workers, RO teams) who actually work at the front line of spiritual development; and with the policy-makers (Heads of Education, strategists, politicians, trainers, Religious Representatives, etc.) who determine the legislation and the direction of educational policy regarding RO and Spiritual Development. The interviews have provided rich data but, as we noted, can also appear subjective. Bearing in mind also the differing abilities and learning styles and modes of expression of children too, interview as a method may only have suited those pupils with the highest levels of cognitive reasoning and linguistic ability. This was why multiple forms of response were elicited from the children and young people: verbal, written, and drawn.<sup>7</sup> Offering the option of multiple responses meant more children could be included. While I often found children hesitant or uncertain in the use of the language and vocabulary and concepts of spirituality, no child or young person was ever stumped or puzzled or fazed by the request “Draw me a picture of God”. No child ever hesitated or queried whether this was possible and the things they drew showed immense creativity and connections of thought I hadn’t considered.

Giving children the option of visual responses can be particularly fruitful when exploring their perception of spirituality. Visual options sit comfortably with generations more used to using apps, and photo and video elicitation is proving particularly suitable in enabling responses from young people. A lovely example of visual material enabling young people to explore spirituality

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<sup>7</sup> No-one took up an offer to sing a response!

occurred when Mecum (2001) sent every one of the 168 children in her school in Hawaii out on a single day with a disposable camera each and the single, simple instruction to “take a picture of God”. Every frame in every camera was used. And every child spoke - in their own way - of ‘seeing’ God and of having profound spiritual experiences. Surely hearing such authentic, undirected voices must be at the core of this research too:

“In summary then, qualitative research attempts to capture the ways in which our young research participants make sense of the research events under investigation. In an important sense, then, qualitative research enables the voice of the participant to be heard” (Greig, Taylor & MacKay 2013:74)

The largest group of interviews had to be with the children and the young people themselves, the intended subjects of this “spiritual development”. It is right and proper that there should have been

“... a direct research focus on children’s experience itself - how children interpret and negotiate their worlds, and the way in which their construction of experience shapes their perceptions and views. This approach not only seeks the child’s perspective - it also acknowledges children as ‘competent’ human beings in their own right, rather than as ‘deficient’ or ‘unformed’ adults.” (Punch 2009:46)

Observation of children and young people in the course of participating in their RO events was an important facet of my methodology. Considerable time was spent observing many practitioners delivering multiple RO events aimed at the sort of “spiritual development” envisioned by the legislation. These ranged from assemblies in Primary and Secondary schools to longer and more complex events such as: Reflective Spaces, Prayer Spaces, Christmas presentations, Easter presentations, ‘Challenging Perceptions’ days, school Residentials, etc.. Comparison of practice with principles is always revealing. Participant observation has some significant advantages and opportunities for discerning how people experience and explore spiritual development. It is also low in impact and disruption. It allows study of

“Things and events in their natural settings” (Punch 2009:117),

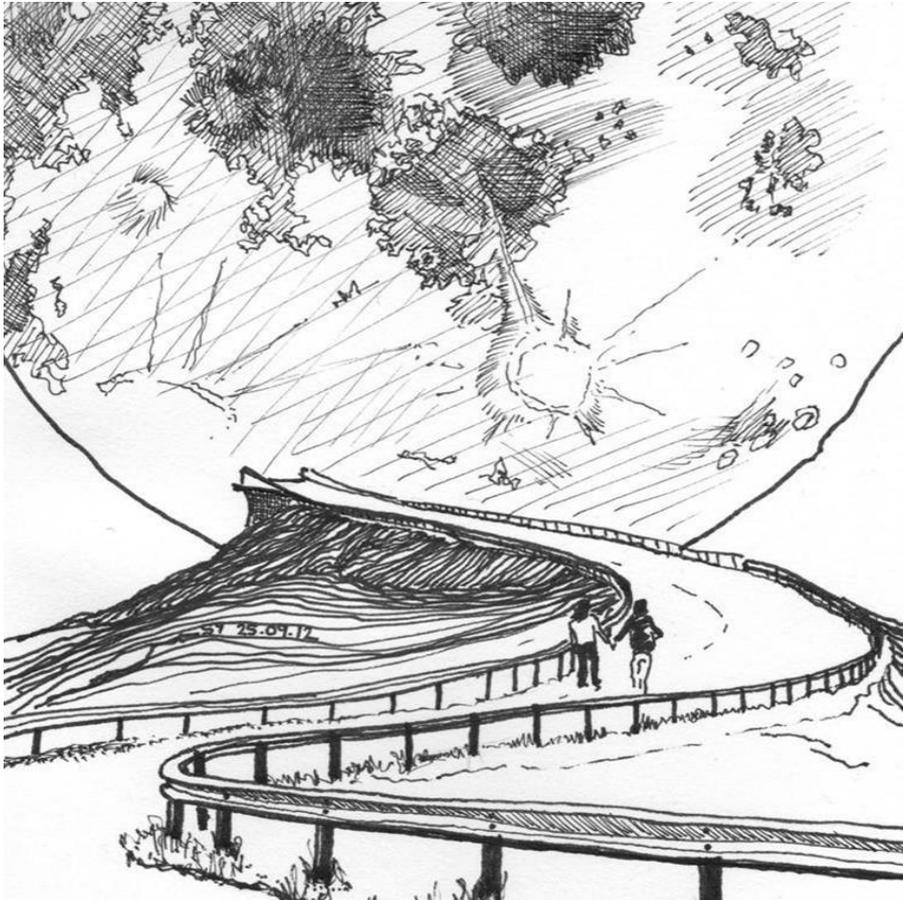
and gives a clear sense of context, adds to understanding, and opens up the possibility of entering and sharing participants’ experiences:

“Learning to sense and make meanings as others do thus involves us not simply observing what they do, but learning how to use all our sense and to participate in their worlds, on the terms of their embodied understandings.” (Pink 2009:72)

*This chapter has covered the choice of methods for my research. The next chapter summarises the main findings from the subsequent data.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS



## Religious Observance - a bridge to ...?

Figure 11 - Bridge to nowhere © Steve Younger

*This chapter outlines where interviewees think RO and spiritual development ‘fit’ within Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence. It also summarises the research findings from my semi-structured interviews and participant observation.*

## Overview

The ‘Report of the Religious Observance Review Group’ (2004), the key document on the purpose and shape of Religious Observance within the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence, identified six key sensings as definitive for RO and for Spiritual Development. It is the presence of one or more of these sensings that makes an event ‘Religious Observance’ rather than an exploration of values acquisition, moral teaching, Religious Education, Citizenship Education or philosophy. My approach will be first of all to offer some general comments on themes emerging in the interview data in the light of these sensings and of the purposes of the RORG report. These sensings are critical to RO and Spiritual Development within Curriculum for Excellence. They are to be experienced in events that provide collective expression of the school’s shared values.

### *A fundamental question: where does RO fit in CfE?*

When pressed as to the point and purpose of RO within CfE and Scottish schools it was - perhaps unsurprisingly - the policy makers who had the clearest grasp and most articulate sense of its place. The practitioners, who in theory are much closer to the implementation of RO, were often too wrapped up in their own agendas (e.g. an ‘evangelical’ espousal of a particular frame of reference such as Christianity or Humanism) or too concerned with the practicalities of delivering RO events (e.g. fitting their event into a limited time frame or completing an RO template afterwards). The policy makers have a “big picture” view:

“Religious Observance comes under, in my view, the ‘experiences for all’ section of CfE. ...the bit called ‘The Totality of Experiences’ ...I see Religious Observance far more around the umbrella things that makes a school what it is: around ethos, community links, religious observance, you know, links with fund-raising and enterprise and behaviour management and the contribution of the school to the wider community.” (003PM230514)

One policy maker hinted at the potential of RO as a means of reflection for School Leaders themselves - a vehicle for reflection on the purpose of schooling and of education,

"We talk about the curriculum as the totality of experiences that youngsters participate in within a school and within the learning that goes on around their school. So the Curriculum is no longer about just what happens in Maths and English and RME and Science, and then the rest is “extra-curricular”. The curriculum is that whole thing of whatever happens within your school so I think that within that context of the ethos and life of a school community, Religious Observance is a really important vehicle for exploring “what are the values?”, “What is the rationale behind your curriculum?””  
(004PM030614)

In contrast the RO practitioners - the school staff and chaplains actually tasked with delivering RO - sometimes lacked clarity on the place of RO within the curriculum. Asked where RO ‘fits’ in CfE, one interviewee constantly used the phrase “I guess” and seemed to place RO as a vague subset of mental health:

“Within CfE, I mean I guess it’s ‘Health and Wellbeing’. One of the schools was having a Health Week a few years ago and they ended up with somebody that had dropped out and they couldn’t come and classes all had a wee timetable and were expected for things and they said “Could you come in and do something and we could class it as kind of ‘mental health’ and ‘spiritual health’ and we could do that?” So I went in and led some workshops and that was what they were classing it as as well. So they had it as part of their Health Week. I had done it years ago for another school as part of their Health Week as well and they saw it as a part of health, the spiritual health aspect.” (014SC270814)

Another practitioner, directly asked where RO fits in CfE, seemed to view RO as an un-clarified strand of ‘character development’ or some sort of messy, undefined exercise in self-awareness:

“...in RO - maybe for want of a better term - they’re teaching themselves. If it’s done well and it’s done correctly, RO gives information and they then reflect upon it and take what they can out of it, whereas in the class they’re being taught more facts and things that they need to know for an exam. RO doesn’t have an exam. It’s there to help them develop as people rather than for them to gain an intellectual knowledge of any particular faith.” (016SC010914)

Perhaps aware or self-conscious of how this sounded even as it was articulated, this practitioner then tried to reframe their answer within the language of CfE, suggesting RO links to the notion of capacity building (i.e. the creation of

successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors - the “capacities” referred to in CfE documentation):

“I think that a good Religious Observance event is the centrepiece for the curriculum and it gives them that opportunity to draw all four capacities in and see how they work within this space and then they can take that out into their other classes because they are getting an opportunity here that other classes in their curriculum will not afford them to do. I think it’s right at the core of what the Curriculum for Excellence is trying to do.” (016SC010914)

It may be that though RO is a responsibility of the schools, the majority of RO practitioners in my sample are not school staff but are external partners to schools such as Youth Workers and local clergy. Whereas school staff have regular CLPL (career long professional learning) and are intimately familiar with the ethos and practice of CfE, visiting RO practitioners frequently have no specific training in working within the CfE. Current Church of Scotland ministerial training has no module on working in Schools and no requirement in the mandatory parish placements to gain experience and reflect on school chaplaincy. Yet a high proportion of school chaplains are drawn from their ranks. Coupled with a lack of Induction courses provided by the Education Authorities and a paucity of Education-organised training events or CLPL for Chaplains, the situation has emerged of chaplains who have very varied understandings of the CfE context. It is clear from this sample of practitioner interviews that further research could usefully be conducted on the factors which make some chaplains better attuned to CfE than their colleagues. At this stage I would offer for further testing the potential factor that theological and denominational differences between chaplains play a part: for instance, the Roman Catholic chaplains in our Denominational schools have a far clearer role expectation than the chaplains in our non-denominational Scottish Schools and are subsequently offering RO input that appears far better integrated to CfE. Within the non-denominational schools the chaplains with an ‘Evangelical’ Christian faith-base also seemed to have a very different rationale for their engagement with schools than their Church of Scotland colleagues which was reflected in their levels of understanding and commitment: the latter frequently spoke of school chaplaincy and RO in terms of “duty” and the former more often spoke in terms of “mission”, “service” and “privilege”. Perhaps a time factor also operated - those

school chaplains with greater time commitments to their schools because they were paid or commissioned solely to focus on schools perhaps inevitably showed a greater understanding of context than their hard-pressed Parish colleagues for whom RO input was just one more claim on limited time and attention. My own circumstances were such that the Church I am full-time pastor of saw engaging with the community as a high priority and specifically viewed Christian engagement with young people within schools as of strategic missiological and incarnational value and subsequently allowed me considerable time to devote solely to building relationships with local schools.

There is a dearth of training specifically aimed at chaplains in Scottish non-denominational schools. At the time the University of Glasgow created and ran its own Masters level module in ‘Religious Observance’ (open to school staff and chaplains) no other Scottish University was offering anything similar. There is still no accredited, recognised course for Chaplains in Scotland. In contrast England has, for example: a full-time MA in School Chaplaincy at the University of Chichester; a post-graduate Certificate in Chaplaincy with Young People at Newman University (Birmingham); a ‘Youth Ministry and School Chaplaincy’ Masters level course at St. Mary’s University (Twickenham, London); and the ‘School Chaplains and Leaders Association’ (with the Oxford Centre for Ecclesiastical and Pastoral Theology) calls itself “the only national organisation providing initial training for school chaplaincy.”<sup>8</sup>

Some, often the more committed and experienced Scottish school chaplains, seem to have developed more precise understanding of how the RO they deliver fits into CfE. They most often cited links between their RO events and “capacity building” or “Health and Wellbeing” or “adding value”. For example,

“I would see the four areas confident individuals, responsible citizens, and so on, the other two have escaped my mind, [i.e. the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence] I would see RO as being able to, to use a business term, “add value” to all of those areas...”  
(006FG (1)110614)

“The Chaplains and I had a chat with the Headteacher last week and outlined this event that we would like to do for Easter and the Senior Management Team had a look at it and they were really enthusiastic about the format it would take. They see it as something that’s going

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<sup>8</sup> [www.scala.uk.net](http://www.scala.uk.net) accessed 21.07.2016

to add a lot of value to the school and so we’re going to be planning to do that at Easter.” (016SC010914)

The senior managers and policy makers interviewed certainly seemed to applaud such an approach whenever they discerned it in their chaplains. In my school visits and interviews I have found very little evidence of this happening systematically or intentionally. Very few schools seemed to have created RO teams or have regular meetings with chaplains; very few seemed to plan any further than one term ahead; and very few had RO written into their development plans. It was rare to come across much intentionality in planning RO and comments such as this were sparse:

“How are you taking account of your local context and community? Have you actually explored values? Have you explored what, for want of a better word, your ‘Unique Selling Point’ is? What’s your USP for your school community and what is it children are going to get if they come to your school? And have you done that with the children and with their parents and with community partners? Have you opened up that discussion? I think that’s quite important around Religious Observance: how you actually explore what it is that your school has to offer these children in addition to qualifications and subject content.” (004PM030614)

In general neither policy makers nor practitioners intentionally sought to create the conditions for the sensings to occur or planned RO events with the sensings in mind. The interviews with some of the practitioners suggested that they most often and most strongly linked RO to character formation, values acquisition, moral development and self-actualisation. The risk is that this reduces RO to no more than a moral or philosophical exploration. It is the presence of the sensings or of a ‘spiritual’ element, however that is expressed and understood, that makes RO different and distinct. There is a risk that the rising prominence of Citizenship Education and of Character Education within CfE is in danger of substituting for RO. CfE has a stress on the capacity of creating ‘responsible citizens’. It would need further research to substantiate this. Many RO practitioners may even be willing if unwitting partners in that process because they share a similar desire to create “better” human beings and “good, moral” citizens. Unless they can keep their contributions to RO spiritual and sensing-based and can find a way to balance and maintain the ‘religious’ part of RO then they will become no more than Life Coaches or morality mentors

or pastoral counsellors. While each of these roles is valuable and has its place it is the “godly presence”, that “spiritual” presence, that is the added value of faith-based chaplaincy. This does raise the issue of what kind of people should be chaplains and what freedom they have to express their personal faith-stance, an issue I will deal with later. For the moment I note Caperon’s comment borne of Catholic thinking on Priesthood that sees the Priest as an *alter Christus* standing in the place of Christ. Caperon links this to a chaplain’s role in schools:

“...chaplaincy in school is about being the public face of God, the visible representative of God, both to the young and those who work and live with them.” (Caperon 2015:56)

Another link some chaplains made between RO and the CfE was in terms of RO’s contribution to resilience and Mental Health. We have already noted RO’s place in CfE’s list of ‘Experiences for All’ and its general contribution to spiritual development. Nursing Education and Health Care Chaplaincy has long understood the links between physical, mental and spiritual health. Some school chaplains and senior management teams make that same link:

“One of the schools was having a Health Week a few years [back]...and they said “Could you come in and do something and we could class it as kind of ‘mental health’ and ‘spiritual health’ and we could do that?” So I went in and led some workshops and that was what they were classing it as...” (014SC270814)

Certainly Health Care Chaplaincy has shown a ready acceptance of evidence that spirituality plays a part in recovery and healing and wellbeing. School chaplaincy and the potential of RO for spiritual development and wellbeing are still contested. At a time when the NHS is expanding its programme of paid faith-based Chaplains and ensuring that each Hospital has a multi-denominational, multi-faith Chapel facility, Education seems reluctant to acknowledge RO’s input to Wellbeing and to building resilience. Some of the interviewees were beginning to pursue this issue proactively:

“I think the purpose [of RO] is helping pupils and staff [to] find the language to articulate the spiritual dimension of life more effectively. I also see it, I think, as having the potential ... [to] raise the whole topic of what I would call ‘spiritual fluency’. I think the very significant contribution that RO can make is to give people ways in which they can access, articulate, discover and share what I would call the spiritual dimension of life. ...I think good RO and good spiritual development have the potential for developing a person’s

sense of self so that they are more resilient. Good RO can produce healthier people.” (002RR220514)

There is an important truth to be heard that

“...when crisis comes, Religious Observance suddenly just comes right to the fore.” (006FG (2)110614)

During my research phase I noted a pertinent example of the relevance of RO in time of crisis in my PhD journal arising from a chance conversation with a colleague who was, at that time, chaplain to a High School in a neighbouring Education Authority. She referred to an occasion in which a pupil was killed and a number of others were injured in a tragic accident on a school trip. As news spread, hundreds of parents and pupils gathered at the school gates. The Council operated its existing Crisis Policy and called in every Educational Psychologist they could reach. When my colleague offered her assistance she was informed by the representative of the Council’s Education Authority that the crisis policy did not include chaplains and that the School “will deal with this” and her help was not required. Undaunted she went back to the crowd at the school gate and told them that a team of Educational Psychologists was available in school for anyone who wished to speak to them but that in the meantime she was heading down to her Church and would open it up if people wanted a place to pray and comfort one another. She walked the few hundred yards to her church’s building and, turning round, realised that a crowd several hundred strong had followed her. An informal, impromptu service of prayers and readings and sharing followed, while only a handful of parents had stayed to speak to the School team. Her personal reflection on this was that the felt need of the school community was not for counselling but for precisely the sort of sensings and shared values that define RO in the ‘Report of the Religious Observance Review Group’. The school community - instinctively and collectively - needed a community act in which they shared their common values. The Education Authority, reviewing this incident and the responses of the school community, subsequently invited her to join a small group that revised and re-wrote its Crisis Policy. Chaplains are now included in the Policy: in the event of a crisis or traumatic incident within a school community, the Authority now contacts the school’s chaplains as well as its own Psychological Services. My interviewees would approve:

“...one of the great plug-ins that we can have [is] to try to bring a sense of hope and wellbeing to the youngsters. You know, going back to the holistic thing, you know, it’s much more than just saying “Jesus saves” or “Jesus can help you. God can help you.” Much, much more than that: it’s being able to say “The whole package that we offer here is for your whole benefit, not just, ‘Oh, we’ll tick a box’” ...”  
(006FG (2)110614)

Following the RORG definition, RO readily fits with the affirmation and expression of a school community’s values. Given that one of the sensings is ‘sensing values’, defined as “attitudes and feelings about what is really important, what really matters”, a list of the values a school chooses to adopt and intentionally promotes are in themselves ready-made and suitable subjects for exploration through RO events. If a school’s chosen values are to be more than a wall display or a topic list for assemblies then RO events must take them to a deeper level:

“...it’s very common now to go into lots of schools and you go into the foyer and the first thing you see is a display of ‘Here are our values’ and ‘at such-and-such a School, this is what we believe.’ Now it’s not necessarily “believe” from a faith point of view but it’s “believe” as in how we’re going to interact with each other and how we’re going to treat our surroundings or ...but again it’s an opportunity to start to explore some of those things and even for us the bigger questions like “**Why** do we think it’s important to treat other people like that?”  
(029SM221014)

Many Scottish non-denominational schools have engaged in a ‘School Values’ exercise in some form or other in recent years. These are programmes aimed at contributing to a distinct ethos for the school. It is less about curriculum and more about character. For instance, during my research phase, as a part of their commitment to the ‘Rights Respecting School Award’ scheme initiated by UNICEF, one of the Primary schools (Nursery to P7, i.e. three to eleven year-olds) where I am chaplain chose a list of values all pupils are encouraged to attain to. Their chosen values include such virtues as “honesty” and “kindness”. In a Secondary school (S1-6, i.e. eleven to eighteen year-olds) I had contact with over the same period, their chosen values were: “responsible, respectful, resilient, and reliable”. The latter school chose its values during a two-day long out-of-school conference in which the Chaplaincy Team worked with elected ‘Rights Respecting’ representatives from each year group and three members of the senior management team. Using material from the Virtues

Project<sup>9</sup> they selected those four values that they felt best reflected their aspirations and the school’s ethos. Though it was not realised or voiced at the time, this process exactly fits the RORG description of what RO is about.

The acquisition of values by individuals and corporate groups - whether they are seen as ‘moral’ or ‘spiritual’ or ‘professional ethics’ or some other type of value - does not of course come simply from identifying an agreed list of desirable qualities (Allan & Crow 2001, Baehr 2011, Dorr 2006). They need to be internalised or ‘owned’ or in some way and instinctively practised without participants having to think about it. They also need to be understood and accepted by all members of the consenting group. Values and morals are truly internalised when people use them and comply with them not simply to avoid the negative sanctions and consequences of breaching them or because they are the societal norms. Perhaps this is where moral values, which are so often about societal patterns, shade into becoming spiritual values in which individuals are prepared to take a lone, convictional stance and will hold to it no matter what sanction they face or what punishment is inflicted. We can only really say a given set of values and principles are those of a school community when they are named, chosen and lived by the whole school community and not by a ‘Rights Respecting’ Committee or a Senior Management Team. This is highly relevant for RO of course as - by definition - RO events are meant to express a school’s shared values.

“the planning of religious observance should involve the children and young people in terms of planning and even sometimes the delivery wherever possible. They should have some ownership of it. It should be about them. It should be for them. They should have a connection to it. ...They can take the responsibility. If we’re talking about “shared values” then it has to be values that they actually own and can stand up. They can take part of the delivery process and say “we do share in these values. These are not just the values [of] the minister or the Headteacher or the school values being delivered to us.”” (004PM030614)

Of course, a school’s values never stand alone or only work within that context. The exploration or sharing of values in RO events cannot be an isolated and insulated academic exercise. It should also spill over into acquisition of life skills. Two respondents, in their discussion, touched on this aspect of RO:

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<sup>9</sup> [www.virtuesproject.com](http://www.virtuesproject.com)

“[If we have no RO]...as a person of faith I just think we’re going to end up letting a whole generation grow up with a far narrower view of themselves, of life, the universe, how to relate to one another, justice, peace, reconciliation, all the values of our society which are inherently Christian.” (006FG (1)110614)

“I think the basis of education is to give the broadest possible experience to youngsters to allow them to make value judgements of their own. And if we leave a raft of experience out of the youngsters’ Curriculum then ultimately at the end of the day there [sic] we’re doing them an injustice because it’s part and parcel of growing up.” (006FG (2)110614)

CfE is as much about producing character as it’s about delivering curriculum, speaking in terms of values, understanding, capacities and character as often as it refers to curriculum. Its outcomes speak of both academic achievement and of human flourishing, health and wellbeing:

“The curriculum reflects what we value as a nation and what we seek for our young people. It is designed to convey knowledge which is considered to be important and to promote the development of values, understanding and capabilities. It is concerned both with what is to be learned and how it is taught. It should enable all of the young people of Scotland to flourish as individuals, reach high levels of achievement, and make valuable contributions to society.” (A Curriculum for Excellence: the Curriculum Review Group 2004 Scottish Executive)

The core document - ‘Curriculum for Excellence: Experiences and Outcomes’ (2004) - details curricular areas and achievement levels. But it also has an explicit focus in the opening chapter on the “responsibility of all practitioners” for “health and wellbeing across all areas of the Curriculum”. The markers for this are termed the ‘SHANARRI Indicators’: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included. The opening four statements of the general principles read:

“I can expect my learning environment to support me to:

- develop my self-awareness, self-worth and respect for others
- meet challenges, manage change and build relationships
- experience personal achievement and build my resilience and confidence

- understand and develop my physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and social skills” (Curriculum for Excellence: all Experiences and Outcomes 2004:12)

Therefore no subject area and no experience can ever be kept purely theoretical or academic - it must become practical. The document details the Experiences and Outcomes (E’s and O’s) for each curricular area, including RME, but deliberately does not prescribe E’s and O’s for RO.

RO is about sensings and about the values of a school community. These sensings cannot be dictated or codified easily yet they are fundamental to spiritual development and to character formation. This ability to provide real-life and real-live explorations of fundamental values that shape who we are and how we live could be RO’s greatest strength.

"I do find the talk about values in a kind of disembodied way as a bit disingenuous somehow. I think values have to come from somewhere. There has to be an origin for values and I would have thought RO would have something to do about exploring where these values come from and how we express them." (011 IG 110814)

### *The inability of chaplains to articulate the place of RO*

My research shows that it is not only senior management teams and Quality Improvement Officers (QIOs) and the Education Support Officers (ESOs) who struggle for a clear sense of the potential and place of RO within CfE. I also found a widespread deficiency in understanding and instances of poor practice by those delivering RO as well. As one of the authors of the RORG commented in interview:

"...if you had said to me ten years ago that we’d still be battling against poor practice I’d have said ‘of course we won’t’. But we are. But that’s as much about practitioners as about the actual subject." (003PM230514)

On the whole practitioners were vague as to where RO fits in CfE. This was largely due to unfamiliarity with CfE. I would estimate that half of those faith-based RO practitioners I interviewed had no working knowledge of three key documents: ‘Curriculum for Excellence: all experiences and outcomes’, the ‘Religious Observance Review Group Report’, and ‘How Good Is Our School?’ (A document currently in its fourth incarnation). These practitioners really struggled to articulate clear differences between RO and RME/ Values Education/ Character formation/ etc. They also struggled to articulate a clear

purpose for what they were doing in their RO events. In general there is a marked lack of knowledge of the legislation and requirements amongst practitioners. The policy is clear (in print at least) but the practitioners - the key people for implementing the policy - do not seem to understand the policy. They also seem to consistently underestimate the potential of their own RO.

Some of my interviewees seemed aware of their own shortcomings and my impression was that these RO practitioners lacked courage and confidence in delivering RO. Some simply found RO in schools difficult to implement. This uncertainty in many practitioners was puzzling in some ways. Many of them, in a church context, are competent and practised and experienced at values teaching but they appear to lose that certainty in a school context. It appears however that they don't know what they're doing in RO. They don't know what they're aiming at. And too many of them simply don't know what the educational context is, or how to interpret and implement sensings in a school setting. An alarmingly typical conversation with a practitioner, a former teacher who has kept up her registration and who delivers RO events in more than a dozen schools, illustrates this lack of clarity -

*“You mentioned that it's about morals and message. So again, just to keep pushing on that, how does RO differ from teaching morality? I think... [Long Pause] There's no right or wrong answer. [Pause] I'm not trying to catch you out! No. It's... [Pause]. It just is! I can't think just now. I think because.... I don't know.... [Laughs] [Shrugs]”*  
(014SC270814)

Another practitioner, also with a great deal of experience and working full-time on school links on behalf of a large local church in her area, also struggles to articulate what RO is about and how it differs from her work in church. She finally settles for a somewhat vague suggestion of potential self-realizations:

*“[Sighs] OK, OK, OK. How is that different? How is that different? So...[long pause]. I guess you're hoping for different outcomes? [Shrugs. Expectant look.] What I mean by that is the experience of sitting in an RME class, Values, PSE, versus sitting or partaking in an RO event is that [pause]....it's that whole liminality thing isn't it, where you've got [pause]...there are always opportunities for liminality, there's always that chance that you'll be sitting in a class and then the kids “get” something or one kid suddenly realises that, I don't know, like the jumper that they're wearing the fact that it's [copyrighted Trade name] doesn't necessarily mean anything, you know like, there's always opportunities for kids to learn stuff but, I guess the word would maybe be ‘encounter’? The RO, you would hope*

that the kids would have an encounter or an understanding or a like, what do they call it, is it an epiphany? You know, light-bulb moments.” (019SC040914)

However, some of the faith-based chaplains and practitioners I interviewed were much more aware of their context in school and were well-informed on legislation and education policy. It is notable that within my sample these better informed chaplains were mostly practitioners whose main or sole focus was on working alongside schools. Usually they were from para-church organisations such as Scripture Union Scotland or were funded by Presbyteries (or a single evangelical Christian church in one instance) to provide services linking local churches and communities to schools. In my sample, none of the faith-based Chaplains whose preoccupation was with Parish duties and who subsequently had very little time for input to Schools had a good level of understanding of RO. Of the practitioners I interviewed who gave their full working week to engaging with schools, the positive difference in the quality of their understanding was very marked. They used the language and the concepts of Education fluently and understood the relevant legislation much more clearly. One outstanding practitioner, when asked “What would be the outcomes that you would set for an RO event?” immediately gave the confident, fluent answer,

“Well, you want to come back to the six Sensings, not that you can say “someone will experience ‘Otherness’”. Full stop. They may. I generally would want them to experience a couple of the Sensings through the event, maybe two, certainly not all of them as that would be overwhelming. So that’s one of them. It depends on the theme of the RO event what your aim is but they do have to be clear and measurable. Not ‘measurable’ like you’re going to mark them but when you do your evaluation you can compare it with what folk are saying.” (015SC280814)

This practitioner understood the sensings and could clearly articulate a place and purpose for RO within CfE (and did so using teacher-speak such as the acronym CWBAT - ‘children will be able to’). However many others, less engaged with schools, reported some difficulties. Some struggled with identifying where RO shaded into RME or ethics or philosophy. They experienced some role tensions - for example their instinct to preach jarring with a school context which wanted them to teach. Some of my sample also struggled to adapt from their church-personas as missionaries and evangelists and worship-leaders to

more impartial teacher modes. As a general comment, they are not alone in this as RO needs a totally different method of dissemination and implementation to the teaching of many other subjects. The sensings in the RORG are not a policy document that headteachers can just read and file. This needs a different kind of training. I have come to like the frequent reaction we get at RO training days: the light-bulb moments when teachers suddenly say “I get this now!” My conclusion though is that there are still chaplains who do *not* “get this”. Delivering RO is a skill-set yet to be “found” or acquired by too many practitioners. And the RORG is a “lost” document still unknown and unimplemented by too many schools.

*“What’s the last RO legislation that you remember then in detail? The last one would be the one issued about a year ago?... [The 2011 Guidance Note] which watered it [RO] down a bit.” (001PM190514)*

Few of us have perfect recall but this was both an ill-remembered time scale and a mistaken summary impression of the 2011 guidelines. However it highlights a consistent problem that too much of the legislation relating to RO in Scottish schools has sunk without trace, particularly in many Secondary schools. The widely distributed Guidance letters do not seem to have impacted practice. By way of illustration from my research journal, over April 30<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 I assisted in two days of training in the delivery of RO/TfR for one Education authority. The first day was held in a Conference Room in a large Secondary School within the Authority and the second day was in the Council’s Training facility. Over the course of two days 34 staff attended. Most were headteachers and a handful of those attending were chaplains. The Authority’s Education Officer attended throughout and was clearly knowledgeable and committed. On the second day, in the Council’s facility, when 20 attended, with her knowledge of the participants the Education Officer pointed out with a clear hint of disappointment that not a single Secondary School staff member had attended that day and that only 2 Secondary Heads had attended the day before (one because hers was the host school).

It seems nothing has changed since the ‘Special Note on Religious Observance’ added to the foreword of the HMI paper *Standards and Quality in Secondary Schools: Religious and Moral Education 1995-2000* which stated that:

“In carrying out the programme of inspections which have contributed to this report, HMI found that 2 out of 3 non-denominational secondary schools were failing to follow the advice contained in Circular 6/91 in respect of the frequency of religious observance. In contrast, non-denominational primary schools generally follow the advice issued in the Circular. HMI do not believe that so many secondary schools are deliberately negligent about this aspect of school life. ... It is clear that the potential contribution of religious observance to the all-round development of young people in many of our secondary schools is not being realised under the present arrangements.”

Indifference and ignorance of RO *within* the schools and amongst practitioners can be countered with quality training. I did not find any active antipathy towards RO within schools. However there is, in Scotland, some aggressive and strident questioning of the place of RO from outside the schools. Much of this is prompted by a Secularist agenda in particular. The subheading on the home page of [www.secularism.org.uk/](http://www.secularism.org.uk/) is “challenging religious privilege” and the site is populated with numerous articles critical of the place of RO in schools. In 2016, the Humanist Society Scotland commissioned and sponsored ‘*Religion in Scots Law: the Report of an Audit at the University of Glasgow*’ (Brown, Green & Mair 2006), Chapter 4 of which looks at the privileging of religion in Scottish Education and concludes that,

“Education stands out rather distinctively in our review of religion in Scots law. For the most part, in other areas, the general trend has for some time been towards the secularisation of the law. By this we mean that in general, there has been a strong drift towards the diminution of statutory support for religion and religious influence. The major exception to this is Education. Education is an area in which the influence of religion has changed its form, but has in many ways been increasing. There is no question that education in the school classroom and the university lecture theatre has been secularising for some considerable time, and is continuing to do so. But this is in contrast to changes in curricular and governance structures which have not diminished, but rather strengthened, the place of religion.” (Brown, Green & Mair 2016:187).

In general though the Humanist Society (Scotland) appears more prepared to engage with Scottish Education in a positive manner, preferring to offer positive alternative resources to faith-based RO themes than only negative

condemnations. Their website<sup>10</sup> has a resource section exploring, for instance, themes of ‘Caring for our World’ and ‘Human Rights’. They can also provide accredited ‘Visitors’ to schools who can come and explain what Humanism is and they show a willingness to work with existing school chaplaincy teams.

Some of the antipathy to RO in Scottish schools seems to be a reaction to instances of poor practice making it into the press<sup>11</sup>. There may also be a general cultural antipathy towards RO, suggested by some respondents, e.g.

“Although you were talking about a negativity I would say it’s more an apathy in our culture towards spiritual awareness and an apathy in schools rather than a negativity.” (006FG (1)110614)

HMIe inspectors do include questions in Inspections on RO compliance and practice -

“...sometimes it [the conversation about an inspection of RO] will start with the Headteacher has ticked the box saying “Yes” they do meet the requirement for religious observance. So then I’ll say to them, “So when did you last look at the 2005 Guidance?” Blank face. Because they assume because they have a chaplain come in a couple of times - Christmas, Easter, maybe a couple of other times, Remembrance Sunday or, that time of year, they might do something on Holocaust Memorial Day - and those are events that are built into the school calendar - they assume that that’s religious observance. And quite often it *is* religious observance that they’re doing because they’ve set those events up in a very sensitive way and they are very inclusive and so on. But that’s again, what I say, it’s quite often by default rather than them having looked at the Guidance, then set up, in the way that they would with any other area of school life...” (004PM030614)

This kind of probing in Inspection often prompts schools to seek improvements in their practice of RO. I now move on to outline some of the positive understandings of RO that emerged from my interviews with practitioners, parents and policy-makers. These centre around some general comments on various metaphors for RO as -

- ‘space’: RO as a literal or physical space, as a temporal space, as an emotional space, as a space for sensing, as a spiritual space, and as a

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<sup>10</sup> [www.humanism.scot](http://www.humanism.scot)

<sup>11</sup> E.g. The ‘Times’ on-line article by Michael Glackin of 14<sup>th</sup> Sept., 2013 (downloaded 27.04.2017) referring to the redeployment of an East Kilbride Primary School Headteacher and Deputy Head to “backroom duties” after allowing their school’s chaplain to distribute US Creationism materials to pupils. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/scots-head-teachers-removed-from-jobs-in-creationist-dispute-2qx9ddpvl2f>

reflective space

- ‘exploration’
- ‘questioning’

### *Creating ‘space’ as a metaphor for RO*

The practitioners interviewed frequently expressed the metaphor of RO as creating the “space” for the sensings to occur. They often used the term “space” in reference to their own experiences of RO and their expectation of what would make Spiritual Development possible. That ‘space’ was variously described as a

- **literal or physical space** - the creation of a sacred space or the manipulation of a physical space to make it more conducive to experiencing moments of sensing.

"...within a school we're not talking about developing my children's spirituality, we're talking about developing two hundred children's spirituality and that's very difficult because... [pause]. And spirituality is [pause]...what is it about?...my notion would be to allow lots of actual space." (021PCP110914)

The draft plan for a new-build non-denominational secondary school in one authority I visited *before* construction included a classroom-sized space in the first floor area of the corridor nearest the main entrance (marked management suite) which was clearly identified as 'Contemplation Room'. Touring the school on completion and before pupils entered that same 'space' I noticed it had become the Behaviour Support base and was fitted out as a classroom. In contrast, seven miles away in a near identical new-build two years later and within the same Education Authority, staff have adapted one Support classroom to be a 'space' for the Guidance staff and chaplains to use for interaction with pupils. It is furnished with soft chairs, play areas including a snooker table, and facilities for tea and coffee. It effectively functions now as a liminal space and as a quiet, contemplative area. Other schools have sought to fulfil their RO remit by partnering with organisations such as Scripture Union Scotland and 'Prayer Spaces in Schools' to temporarily adapt

physical spaces to allow for a sense of entry to a different state of mind. Almost akin to creating a sacred space or a meditation area, they have manipulated a physical space within which an encounter with another dimension could take place.

- **temporal space** - this included arguing for the provision or safeguarding of time(s) within a school’s schedule which were purposely not filled with curricular activity such as allocating ‘free’ times to visit a prayer space or time on a residential week to reflect (e.g. using the John Muir environmental material). Non-denominational schools routinely carve out a time prayer for Muslim pupils during Eid. Several chaplains referred to seeking to create RO events with moments for quietness, stillness, or reflection that seemed to have a similar purpose
- **emotional space** - a ‘space’ to be, to experience, to feel, to sense, to seek a self-realisation or to ‘find oneself’:

One practitioner put this in metaphysical and philosophical terms -

“[RO] is about your being rather than what you do if you see what I mean. You’re not shaping what people do but who they are.” (002RR220514).

Another declared the purpose of RO to be

“that time to remember that there is an alternative way of thinking, that there’s something more to them than what they can see, feel and touch. And there are emotions, there are feelings, there are things going on around them that perhaps can only be made sense of when you reflect on them from a faith perspective, and this gives them that opportunity.” (016SC010914)

- **space for sensing** - a conscious attempt to create the conditions for a moment of sensing to occur or to imagine what it might feel like. A few of my sample spoke in terms of consciously aiming to create a metaphysical ‘space’ or atmosphere for one of the sensings to occur:  
 “...I wonder if there was some visual aid to the children to say “Here we are going through this door. When we pass through this door we’re going into a space where things out of the ordinary can happen.””  
 021PCP110914
- **spiritual space or potentiality** - a ‘space’ for an encounter with an Other dimension or deity, a ‘sanctuary’ moment, a place of stillness, an instant of knowing liminality. For instance: e.g.

“This is going to make me sound like a hippie but they’re engaging with another dimension, ...they’re engaging with the concept of otherworldliness, however they choose to move after that. The concept is hopefully something that they would encounter in an RO event and the point of an RO event I guess is you’re trying somehow to create opportunities for that” (019SC040914)

- **reflective space** - a ‘space’ for self-discovery, meditation, contemplation, epiphany and for existential meaning-making.

“In the classroom they know that they’re going to have an exam at the end of it where they have to be able to answer certain questions whereas in RO they don’t have that. This is just giving them space to think for themselves.” (016SC010914)

Reconciling such a variety of interpretations and expectations is challenging. Any RO event must balance the risk of fragmenting into a myriad of individual, personal experiences with the requirement to provide collective experiences based on shared values.

### *‘Exploration’ as a metaphor for RO*

In the interviews there was a widespread inability amongst practitioners to verbalise clear and distinctive characteristics for RO. Most of them also seemed to struggle to explain their understanding of its place and purpose. My judgement would be that many had not previously considered these issues and were creating meaning and exploring issues *ex tempore* as they answered. Only a couple referenced at all in terms of sensings. While the commonest word applied to RO was ‘space’ - variously described as above - the impression was that this space was being seen as an arena for dynamic experiment. To caricature: RO was the purposeful creation of a ‘space’ followed by a mental step away into an observer role to “see what happened”. The approach reminded me of setting off fireworks from a selection box not knowing exactly what the outcome would be - almost literally, something spectacular or a damp squib. A couple of the practitioners seemed more purposeful though and appeared to view RO events as shared explorations in which they were partners with the children and young people, sharing a journey of exploration with them and sharing their delight at wherever that journey led. The vocabulary and language of the children interviewed often seemed to reflect this sense of RO events as exploration too. RO was a quest, a journey, into new territory and new

discoveries about themselves and their world.

### *‘Questioning’ as a metaphor for RO*

Another finding would be that RO events frequently functioned as a forum for Life’s ‘Big Questions.’ My impression is that this is an area that has been underestimated in the curriculum. Many children expressed a desire for a ‘space’ to ask, to explore, to raise, to open up, questions. Many of these could be anticipated: the traditional existential, ontological and teleological questions emerged again and again. I had not anticipated though that the largest single category of questions children of all ages wanted to explore in RO concerned death. Typical “big questions” concerned resurrection and reincarnation, what happens at death, where the dead ‘go’, etc. Yet this - and questions about God - are probably two of the key areas schools would prefer to avoid exploring as they are seen as being both contested and contentious. The young people themselves relished RO events that touched on controversy or topics they perceived to be ‘forbidden’ or ‘avoided’ normally in school. Some of my interviewees saw RO as one of the few curricular spaces where it would be appropriate to do this. ‘Dave’, a sixteen year-old boy, voiced the opinion that RO events such as school assemblies would be far more relevant and useful

“if they talked about the more controversial and darker parts of the bible that perhaps it would make for an interesting discussion and would, and probably would, get more people in on both sides, atheists and religion” (007PS200614).

‘Vicky’, a girl aged fifteen years and 7 months in the same school, enthusiastically agreed:

“if they did cover controversial topics like that or, I don’t know, pro-life or pro-choice or divorce and lots of different things like that I think it would like entice people because they want to see that Religion isn’t just really straight-edged, it can be what everyone interprets it to be - and that’s really not what comes across in school.” (007PS200614)

Arising from the questions of the children and young people, RO as meaning-making is one of the aspects that could be strengthened and seen as a more pressing priority. Making sense of this world gets harder as children and young people confront and cope with more information and more visual material. Many of the pupil interviewees had viewed such things as ISIS

beheadings shown in real-time and accessible in multiple electronic formats. RO may be one of the few ‘spaces’ in CfE helping them learn how to make sense of such events. Constructing meaning and understanding such events - handling moments of trauma and challenge - are a key part of the ‘Health and Wellbeing’ strands of CfE. Values, faith and beliefs are all shaped and reshaped by grappling with such events. Such events cannot be explored without emotional reaction either and a sensitive and trusted RO practitioner has a key role in helping children build resilience and increase their emotional literacy. RO is perhaps one of the few places left in the Curriculum to raise such explosive topics and safely examine them with the help of sensitive staff and figure out how to live with them.

“there’s something about teaching Religious Observance and Spiritual Development that takes that “Why?” question even deeper and would, it would be my hope that RO and spiritual development would fit in in such a way that [pause] I guess it’s about setting up children and young people for life.” (019SC040914)

I now outline some of the specific findings that emerged in how practitioners in particular construct meaning for what they are doing in RO events.

### Specific findings

A consistent conclusion from my data reflects on how both practitioners and participants in RO events viewed them and constructed meaning from them: this was frequently done by offering opposed pairs and, almost literally, placing themselves or their RO events at some point on the continuum between two poles. While acknowledging crossover and cross-fertilisation of one pole by the other, this Likert approach was a common response to defining RO. It allowed for fluidity, dynamic meaning and multiple nuances of understanding. A majority of practitioners struggled to define what they thought RO was and subsequently cast their comments in terms of these contrasted pairs. A whole spectrum of continua emerged which are summarised here:

- From indoctrination (RO) to education (RME)
- From collective (RO) to individual (RME)
- From emotional (RO) to intellectual (RME): though practitioners were frequently at pains to make clear that this did not mean RO was inferior or in any way anti-intellectual or lacking in intellectual rigour.
- From experiential (RO) to explorative (RME)
- From inspirational (RO) to informational (RME)

Table 3 - an RO/RME continuum

With very few exceptions everyone interviewed (from policy makers to practitioners and from pupils to parents) struggled to define RO and to differentiate it from other fields. Many seemed to confuse it with RME or with various aspects of Values Education. These paired opposites and the placing of RO on a continuum between two poles often emerged as interviewees struggled for definition. We have mentioned this difficulty before of trying to discern where particular moral values become universal spiritual values. Character formation and spiritual development sometimes appear to be shades of one another. This raises the question of whether the differences between the two are substantive or semantic. It also raises issues of how the processes of exploring sensings can be differentiated from philosophical enquiry or decision-making in moral dilemmas and in the acquisition of values. These questions would, however, take this research in a different direction and I wish to focus on how respondents perceive, express and construct meaning for their engagement

in RO.

Within the non-denominational schools, Religious and Moral Education (RME) was the most common field of comparison for my respondents. Asked to define the differences between RO and any related fields respondents of all ages answered either by describing a perception of polarised opposites (i.e. RO defined as ‘factor x’ and the other field as the opposite of that factor) or by a Likert-scale approach (i.e. RO is closer to one end of a scale and RME closer to the other end of the same scale). These polarised continua and Likert-scales are summarised in the box above. I now turn to a closer discussion of each pairing.

### *The ‘Indoctrination v. Education’ Continuum*

A recurrent theme, most frequently referenced in my sample by the policy-makers and parents interviewed though sparsely mentioned by practitioners and pupils, concerned whether and in what sense RO and spiritual development might be regarded as a matter of religious ‘indoctrination’ rather than as neutral ‘education’. This suggests that findings from the USA (Glazer 1999) and Europe (Lapidus 2002), may also be true of Scottish Schools:

“Why are some people so afraid of prayer in schools? The fear of prayer in schools is the fear that education will be rooted in imposition. People are afraid of the indoctrination of particular beliefs, values, and habits on themselves and their children. They are afraid of the imposition of identity: the filling up with *beliefs about* prior to having *actual experience*.” (Glazer 1999:1f)

“German judges have raised questions as to whether Muslim education represents a genuine religious tradition or is a form of political or ideological indoctrination.” (Lapidus 2002:797)

Broadly, Scotland’s teaching of ‘Religion’ in its non-denominational schools has shifted in recent decades from being “Religious Instruction” to “Religious Education”, with the latter being viewed as more neutral and more about a Comparative Religion approach. The catechetical aspect of the original 1872 legislation does not sit well with a contemporary scene which values tolerance, secularism and freedom from indoctrination. The parents and policy makers among my interviewees often reminisced about the differences in the school assemblies they had “endured” as children and the presentation of RO events in the current school settings. Their most frequent word to sum up this

sense of difference was “indoctrination”. Their understanding of this word - and hence the understanding that I use here - is that “indoctrination” meant being told what to think and believe; meant instruction in Christian doctrine; meant being compelled to participate in acts of worship (e.g. hymn singing, prayers, scripture memorisation); and meant punishment for non-participation. Assemblies - and these were the only form of RO event that these older generations experienced - were perceived as being instruction in appropriate behaviour for membership of a faith community. Coupled with this was their perception that RO was an activity without “educational” value or validity. Uncertainty was voiced as to where exactly RO fitted in the Curriculum for Excellence and its educational rationale. This parallels some of the reactions to meeting the requirement for a daily act of collective worship in English education, leading defenders of the practice to argue for the educational value of ‘faith’ in schools:

“The legal requirement for a Christian presence [or testimony from a visiting person of faith] is educationally defensible on these terms, that it is the major western living faith and part of living in the west is to meet it in a living and not textbook version. We do not need to make apologies about that. It is good educational practice, provided that children are protected from indoctrination.” (Copley 1989:63)

Copley’s comment seems to assume that a Christian presence in schools is being challenged as being doctrinal rather than educational. More recently Caperon (2015), also referring to England, has offered a re-imagining of the role of faith as ‘invitation’ rather than ‘indoctrination’:

“School ethos is thus a prime agent of religious socialisation, to be understood not as a form of indoctrination but rather as an introduction to the way of faith; something for pupils to be invited to understand and to consider as a possible pathway for their own lives.” (Caperon 2015:48)

Turning to the situation in Scotland’s non-denominational schools, the CfE is divided into eight core subject areas, each answerable to a Curriculum Head who manages them on behalf of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning. RO is placed under the remit of the Philosophy and RME Head. Critically, RO is very much the responsibility of the schools and not of the faith communities or the school chaplains. The chain of responsibility goes from the

Minister to the Curriculum Head and then to the Directors of Education and, ultimately, to the Headteachers and SMT's in each individual school. It is the Headteachers who are responsible for seeing that RO is conducted in a manner compliant with Guidelines (the latest were disseminated in March 2017) and they are answerable to HMIE for the quality and provision of their RO. RO is regarded as having an historically privileged and protected place yet increasingly its inclusion in Scotland's schools is contested by Humanists and Secularists. There is an ongoing and virulent debate about the right of RO to a place in the timetable. A key point to clarify for my interviewees would be whether or not there is a satisfactory 'educational' justification for RO within CfE and that RO does not become an excuse for religious indoctrination. Some of my interviewees, usually those with a particular faith-bias themselves, robustly and simply resolved their uncertainty about this 'indoctrination v. education' continuum by maintaining that keeping the status quo of RO in schools is justification in itself, i.e. the retention of an important cultural tradition:

"I listen to colleagues, whose views I respect on these things, saying that RO doesn't really fit into the CfE although my immediate reaction to that would be "Well, so much the worse for CfE, not for RO" because if RO is a continuing reflection of a long historic tradition of the practice of religion and faith in this country, if it can't embrace that then I would say the problem lies with the CfE." (0111G110814)

In this way of thinking, RO is seen as having a role in understanding 'faith' and 'religion' and 'spirituality' as a key part of our cultural heritage. RO is seen as a way of demonstrating how religion and faith have played a significant part in shaping our past and present. Some argue that familiarity with (Christian) biblical and religious material and living experiences of them still matter as understanding factors which shape our national identity. While this may be a positive reason to keep RO as part of every child's school experience it does run the risk of reducing RO to a subset of History or Modern Studies. It would imply RO is misplaced in Philosophy and RME and should shift to Social Studies under the banner of "history". Participation in RO would become less a living experience and more akin to school's visits to a museum exhibition. It makes RO a relic of the past, a specialist interest, a curio, a piece of background information. A typical comment was that

"It's about understanding culture, history and faith... it was about raising awareness and being informed. ...So my justification was that

broader one about the understanding of the history and culture of a very critical part of our society, and an understanding of faith.”  
(001PM190514)

This understanding of RO would divorce it from the sensings which are our key markers and makes it harder to discern how RO can contribute to the four capacities (effective contributors, responsible citizens, successful learners, and confident individuals). Even so some parents also seemed to take this reductionist stance

“...when I did come to seeking I just felt I’d never had even the basic bible stories other than perhaps what had been taught in Primary School assemblies and in classrooms and Noah’s Ark for example and all your classic type of things. And my view now would be “that’s a gap in your education” because if you are...as you’re told in senior school...studying, and so much of the bible is referenced in literature from Shakespeare to whatever, it’s a good educational thing.”  
(028PCP221014)

Not seeing RO as having a distinct educational value ultimately reduced it to an ill-defined, vague ‘good thing’:

“...a lot of children and young people have no experience of church or religion or what that might entail. So even just finding out some information can be good for them too.” (014SC270814)

Perhaps aware of this risk some of the respondents more consciously saw RO’s role as less about a historic-sociological understanding of the past and more about education and preparation for contemporary cultural realities. In this view RO has a positive, contemporary educational validity as a life experience or as the acquisition of a life skill. It is seen as a preparation for the religious landscape pupils will encounter in real life today. In a world wracked by forms of Terrorism that attempt to give themselves a religious/fundamentalist justification RO has strong educational value as a counter to sectarianism; a balance to intolerance; a preparation for the moral ‘messiness’ and uncertainties of life; and as a vital part of the formation of personal values and morals. For example:

“If you’re moving towards an inclusive society then actually experiencing what is different from you is important.” (002RR220514)  
“...the majority of people, what was it, 53 or 54 %, are still expressing a Christian faith and that’s just Christian faith not faith as a whole, and if we’re in a faith-based society, if schools are supposed to be preparing children for being part of society they have to prepare them

for this. If you’re not providing RO, if you’re not developing the children, helping children to understand this and explore these themselves, you’re not actually preparing them for adult life in the society they’re living in so I think it would be a major omission in not providing that.” (018SC040914)

Some comments related to this continuum of religious indoctrination versus education seem to be subconsciously trying to avoid a charge that they are really just making ‘religious indoctrination’ sound ‘educational’:

“[faith is] ...a major feature of contemporary life therefore I think it’s reasonable for young people to be exposed to that kind of reality. I think you can do that without necessarily brainwashing people. You’re allowing people to see and to touch and to participate in a very real part of religious experience.” (0111G110814)

“I just think, Religious Observance, for example, would be a tiny injection, we’re talking tiny really aren’t we, of other possibilities being introduced to children, but in a collective way, that’s inclusive and... but you would, you know, have the opportunity to explore all the traditions as well as Humanism, as well as wider things, that, in a way that fitted with the values of the school...” (0091G250614)

Few of my interviewees seemed aware of the key document of CfE (All Experiences and Outcomes) which opens with a discussion about ‘Health and Wellbeing’ stating that

“Each establishment, working with partners, should take a holistic approach to promoting health and wellbeing, one that takes account of the stage of growth, development and maturity of each individual, and the social and community context.” (CfE)

The fourth of the eleven points listed under the heading “I can expect my learning environment to support me to...” is

“...understand and develop my physical, mental **and spiritual** wellbeing and social skills” (my emphasis)

There can be no doubting then that the architects of CfE see an educational value to spiritual development and, by extension, to RO as the vehicle for delivering that development. In practice it may be the case that the majority of parents are largely unaware of this policy strand of “spiritual wellbeing” and character development, and may also be less concerned about the risks of indoctrination and more concerned with grades and qualifications, even in ‘Faith

Schools’:

“In abstract debates about faith schools people talk about religion. Secular activists oppose faith schools on grounds of religious indoctrination and discrimination, while religious people support them because of the faith element. But our poll shows that when choosing a school most parents aren’t concerned with religion. They are concerned with academic standards.” (Woodhead, *YouGov Survey 2013 Westminster Faith Debates*)<sup>12</sup>

RO has a key educational role in mainstream schooling in combating intolerance, sectarianism and racism. Issues such as immigration, refugees, acculturation, fundamentalism, citizenship tests and human rights abuses are high in the public consciousness at present and unlikely to recede in the next decade. In fact they seem set to intensify given the rise in international terrorism and the pressures brought about by the ‘Brexit’ vote and its aftermath. Both RME and RO are well-placed to explore these intellectually and experientially, with RO in particular being that one curricular ‘space’ where it is possible to walk in someone else’s shoes for a while. It is argued by some that all education is indoctrination of one form or another (Freire 1974, McLaren 1999) more or less consciously shaped by the educators’ assumptions and values. The indoctrination is rarely as explicit as the political poster Freire once spotted and commented on:

“I have never forgotten the publicity... for a certain Brazilian public figure. The bust of the candidate was displayed with arrows pointing to his head, his eyes, his mouth, and his hands. Next to the arrows appeared the legend: You don’t need to think, he thinks for you! You don’t need to see, he sees for you! You don’t need to talk, he talks for you! You don’t need to act, he acts for you!” (Freire 1974:51)

It is not just that:

“Not to have an understanding of where Sikhs came from or where Muslims came from, not to have an understanding of what Christianity is about and what its powerful influence in society has been and on the school is to miss out, is to be denied education.” (001PM190514)

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<sup>12</sup> The survey was designed by Linda Woodhead and carried out online by YouGov. It was completed by 4018 people. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). Northern Ireland is not included. The Westminster Faith debates are organised by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead and supported by Lancaster University, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council. They are designed to bring high-quality academic research on religion into public debate. [http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/faith\\_debates-2013/Religion & Society](http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/faith_debates-2013/Religion & Society)

It is that developing positive respect and understanding for others' faiths and religions and world views is an important antidote to racism, extremism and intolerance. Parents in particular seemed alert to this potential within RO:

"I think it's good also for kids to learn about other's beliefs. And that lets them respect other peoples' beliefs, whether they're following the Koran or being taught Christianity on a different faith level. Because then, if they understand other people ... If that child can understand that's what they believe in and can respect their belief then they might just respect mine in the same way." (013PCS210814)

"It [RO] should be delivered ...mainly in schools because as I said before it gives the children the opportunity if it's not happening in the house or within the family. That's the parents' choice if they don't want to believe in God or any other religion, but give the children the opportunity to learn. How can they [the children] respect people or religions if they don't know anything about it?" (032PCP241014)

RO has an educational function in giving pupils a place for finding the value of 'faith' - both for themselves and for themselves. Alain de Botton (2012) for example, working from a Humanist stance, is one who has written about the rediscovery and relearning of the positives in religion. Exploration of what 'faith' is about through RO should give pupils the tools, information, competence and confidence to make their own informed choices. This freedom of choice is arguably fundamental to education and cropped up repeatedly in my interviewee comments: e.g.

"this is about respecting individual people and a whole range of faith, and faith is critically important to people, whatever their faith is and it's not what my faith is and it's not about me proselytising; I know what I believe and I know why I'm comfortable in it but that's not my job to, you know, in a non-denominational school, to spread that. My job is to make sure that youngsters have that choice." (001PM190514)

"My opinion is that the purpose of RO is to give the school community...a chance to think about life and values, about their future and their present from a faith perspective, from that different perspective." (016SC010914)

"...it occurs to me that we're taking the spirituality out of children's lives. If at some stage in their future they think, "Nah! Spirituality is hogwash", but if they've never had the choice of engaging with it, how do they make the decision to get rid of it?" (009IG250614)

"...if we were not permitted to be within that sphere then these children would miss out very much on the breadth of learning and experiences in life to help them make their own decisions." (006FG (2)110614)

A clear strand of opinion was detectable that felt that while religious

indoctrination and proselytism had no place, neither should RO be a neutral or a neutered experience. Hill’s (1982) and Kelly’s (1986) discussion on the teacher’s role when discussing controversial issues offers the perspective of “committed impartiality” as a useful position that contemporary faith practitioners could adopt.

“First, teachers should state rather than conceal their own views on controversial issues. Second, they should foster the pursuit of truth by insuring that competing perspectives receive a fair hearing through critical discourse.” (Kelly 1986:130)

Committed impartiality would allow faith practitioners to be open about their faith position and create RO events that need not shy away from being worship experiences or from using religious language and practices. Committed impartiality requires that the practitioner acknowledge and express and declare their own faith position but consciously undertake not to use their views to persuade or to proselytise. While the official Guidance speaks plainly enough of keeping “worship” in the extra-curricular realm, a number of the contributors challenged this on educational grounds:

“...I think the purpose of RO should be to give children an experience, we’re all talking about experiences, you know, the children go out to visit the riverside Transport Museum or they go out to collect frogspawn. I think the experience of an act of worship must be part of children’s education. So Religious Observance I think is more than just teaching “about”.” (017SC030914)

“... RME. ...[is] non-confessional ... and I think Religion should be taught that way...But that’s quite different from, say, having a religious observance experience where perhaps a Buddhist would come in and say, “I think a part of my tradition is meditation: today I’m going to take you through a three minute meditation, to let you see how that feels.” ” (009IG250614)

“RO is about the changed quality of awareness and the idea of mystery and things like that as well so it’s almost letting the children see that there’s not answers for absolutely everything and that they need to think about things as well.” (014SC270814)

Some of the students who currently experience our RO events seem to want this too, including those who declared themselves to be ‘atheist’ They wonder why faith practitioners leading RO events that they experience are so circumspect and cautious about expressing a faith stance.

*The ‘Collective v. Individual’ Continuum*

Clearly RO has to have an impact on individuals and a value for them or it is pointless expecting them to engage in it. Some respondents referred to RO’s potential role in an individual’s capacity for spiritual development and resilience:

“It [RO]’s ...much more, about your wellbeing as a person. But then, you’d asked the question, “Well why is it different from personal and social development?” There’s not a spirituality element in that I suppose so that is the defining difference. There’s got to be a place for spiritual development although there will be similarities.”  
(015SC280814)

However, RO’s potential for binding individuals together and giving them shared experiences also stood out as important. This fits perfectly with the RORG requirement that RO events should express and celebrate a school’s shared values. This is by definition a communal or collective activity. One contributor seemed to imply that while RME could be “taught” in multiple settings it would be absorbed or internalised by hearers individually. In contrast RO felt more like something that had to be “caught” by a group - a collective moment or a communal epiphany. Note their use of language, terming RO as “experience” and RME as “lesson” and the way in which they favour the word “interactive” as a desirable and distinctive quality of RO:

“I think RO is meant to be an interactive experience and while obviously the hope would be that RME, PSD and Values Education, those sorts of things, would be interactive lessons ...” (019SC040914)

Others highlighted RO’s contribution to an individual’s capacity-building but also a potential for building community. While this comes close to character formation such as might be expected in fulfilling the ‘responsible citizens’ capacity, more than that seemed to be in the mind of many practitioners. For example:

“It [RO] gave you somewhere to go when the tragedies struck in life ...if you don’t have that then you struggle. We tried to build that sense of community. ...I think this is the critical bit: if the RO sits separate from everything else the School does then it’s pointless. It’s got to be part of that whole culture of a school, the ethos of the school, the building of the values of the school, and all part and parcel of that. At the end of the day you are saying that all these different faith backgrounds and none have to work together for some kind of common good. ....You had to build a community ...the RO was a

collective, it was about bringing people together, it was about sharing in a different kind of way from the sharing within the classroom.”  
(001PM190514)

Several respondents stressed the importance of RO in building or expressing or reinforcing a school’s sense of community and its distinctive identity. For some this arose from an almost literal interpretation of the RORG definitions and the associated Circulars (1-2005) and Guidance Notes (Feb. 2011)

“RO is for the whole school community. The teachers should be connecting in there too. It should make them think too. Though some may argue that’s not the main purpose of it I think it is. The RO guidance talks about “the whole school community” so it should be something for staff, for children and for any parents that happen to be there too” (004PM030614)

Several obviously relished RO as the key to creating a school’s sense of communal identity and saw this as another point of differentiation between RME and RO:

“There is a point in RO in terms of it being everybody coming together with a common purpose. And coming together regularly to establish the community of the school. ...That’s where the core purpose comes, and I think it is about understanding that unless you share and celebrate what you think is important to you, you will not develop as a community, you will not be a cohesive community. You share and express the things that are really important to you. That’s the opportunity that RO gives you.” (003PM230514)

“RO should create that sense of “we’re part of the school but we’re also part of the human race and how are we going to contribute in a way that’s meaningful and how are we going to develop an inner life that’s meaningful.” (009IG250614)

Some had come to this conclusion through their own positive experiences of religious observance and others viewed this as the ideal to strive for:

“...it was about creating that community atmosphere. What was important to us, what was important to us, as a community, as a school and as people. ...good RO is about that community.”  
(003PM230514)

“I think RO is important in having a school community event because in most schools that’s the only time that you have the school coming together as a community or as a kind of family. Certainly in some of the Primary Schools you do get more of a sense of it being a kind of family and having pride in their identity and who they are and in being part of that school and I think that that’s important and is very good for enhancing that.” (018SC040914).

*The ‘Emotional v. Intellectual’ Continuum*

It was often expressed that RME was the more academic and intellectual discipline and RO was the more emotional and affective dimension.

“I try to think of RME as the more rigorous, intellectual, at the broadest sense, objective treatment of religion, and of religious and moral positions, you know, in the form of any kind of curriculum subject where there’s an objective study of the subject. RME it seem to me is about that and has a kind of intellectual rigour associated with it. RO it seems to me is more the experiential, more the understanding of how personally you’ve become involved in it, how emotionally and spiritually you relate to these truths...”

(011IG110814)

“I think it is the emotional side that makes it [RO] different from RME. When we talk about good RME we talk about learning about religion and learning from religion. But that learning from religion can be quite an intellectual process, an academic process in a way...”

(004PM030614)

“RME is more education isn’t it? It’s saying these are what are the facts, this is what a Muslim believes, this is the festival the Jews celebrate whereas Religious Observance is more kind of reflecting on themselves isn’t it? Thinking of how it affects them...” (018SC040914)

Yet as respondents started to state this distinction they frequently went on to moderate their own assertions. Only a couple of respondents doggedly stuck to a position that seemed to suggest they saw RME alone as academic and RO, by implication, as somehow ‘non-academic’ or even ‘anti-intellectual.’ More common were those who offered the academic v. emotional polarity while acknowledging this needed qualifying and that RO could equally involve academic rigour.

“I guess you are learning, obviously you are learning in RO as well but you’re learning about yourself and about other people and about the world in a way that you wouldn’t necessarily do in a classroom.

[pause] I think.” (019SC040914)

There is an assumption that RO might be situated more in the emotional realm but if it has no intellectual and academic rigour then its place should be queried in Scottish Education. If it can’t be justified academically then it will struggle to attract support from Policy Makers and those who shape the Curriculum.

*The ‘Experience v. Exploration’ Continuum*

Another attempt to distinguish RO from RME treated both as “undiscovered country” yet with differing approaches as to how that realm should be entered. RME was seen as eliciting the stance of ‘Explorer’ (entering an unexplored territory to map it, describe it, compare it, sample it, for a relatively short term and ultimately returning to some other reality) and RO elicited the stance of ‘Anthropologist’ or ‘Missionary’ (entering an unexplored territory to engage with it, understand it, experience it, participate in it, for a relatively long-term with the intent of being ‘at home’ in this new reality without necessarily returning to some other reality). The former stance keeps a conscious measure of detachment (often characterised as more “academic”) while the latter stance suggested a conscious immersion in the new realm (characterised as more “emotional”). Those practitioners who acknowledged a personal faith position were much more likely to view RO in the latter - experiential - way.

“...as a Christian I believe you have to engage with something and experience it. And I think that’s where Religious Observance is different. There’s actually opportunity to engage in something, to engage in some worship, or to participate in a prayer and say “well, how do I” - for want of a better word - “how do I *feel* about that?” Do I feel that’s any relevance to me? So I think there’s a kind of experiential aspect when you get into Religious Observance that distinguishes it from just purely the study of some of these things.”  
(029SM221014)

There are benefits and risks to both stances of course. The ‘Explorer’ has a greater chance of retaining objectivity though possibly less opportunity for personal development and transformation. The ‘Anthropologist’ risks subjectivity but arguably has a greater opportunity for understanding and personal growth. This may also be another ‘false’ polarity as an explicit curricular intent behind quality RME is that exploration should lead to transformative experience. RME as ‘Personal Search’ should never be underestimated. This continuum may mark a statement of tendencies rather than a definite point of distinction: both RO and RME can equally be exploratory and experiential. At least one respondent was aware of this dimension of RME, stressing that active exploration of beliefs, values and morals in RME could be complemented by transformative experience in RO:

“Religious and Moral Education principles are very clear. It’s about children developing their own beliefs and values. They will do that through learning about religions and learning from religions....To me, Religious Observance is the experience of putting those things into practice, into a wider context, in a way that allows time to reflect. ...the fundamental difference is this time to stop and think within that little bubble that is that one child, that one young person: ‘what does this actually mean for me?’” (003PM230514)

Some felt that RME dealt in a discursive way with ideals and principles, apparently viewing RME as a detached and academic exploration of topics. RME was viewed as something that could be engaged in as a completely internal thought process that did not necessarily evidence itself outwardly. In contrast they saw RO as dealing with experiences and active experimentation with practices:

“I was asking a group of Primary kids once in my old job about what they thought the difference was [between RO and RME/PSD/Values], and I had been trying to work it out for ages in terms of how can you word it in a sentence and the kids were really brilliant because they said...RME is “something you have to learn about” whereas RO is “something you do” ” (019SC040914)

Of course, RO events don’t necessarily need a ‘religious’ element to practice one of the sensings, as more than one respondent noted:

“There are other things that are exciting like getting a Physicist in to talk about, I don’t know, String Theory and the idea of multi-dimensional Universes. That’s also awe-inspiring for young people, do you know what I mean? It’s “what is that which would create a sense of wonder and awe and otherness?” ” (009IG250614)

“It’s an opportunity for children to reflect I would say and respond to a story or a life experience or something that has been told to them, to think about how it affects their own lives as well.” (014SC270814)

“And I think RO is something that brings together a whole range of different categories of learning and is by its nature what the school as a whole is about. Now that’s a very big statement but I think that’s... how important I think RO is.” (002RR220514)

One Religious Representative succinctly expressed the distinction in this way:

“I think at the heart of it [RO]... it is the difference between knowing something and experiencing something, so that an RME topic would leave someone aware of the practices of Islam or of Judaism or of Christianity - but it wouldn’t require them or expect them to take those practices into their own self and begin to form and shape who they are.” (002RR220514)

*The ‘Inspiration v. Information’ Continuum*

The ultimate measure of whether a subject is thought to be for informational impact as opposed to an inspirational one is whether or not it is seen as assessable through exams. Within CfE there are exams and tests in RME but there are none for RO. No child’s annual report ever includes an assessment or ‘score’ for spiritual development. On the face of it this clearly situates RO as non-academic: as about inspiration rather than testable knowledge or information.

“I would say that, ...for RME, PSD and values and Philosophy ... what’s happening there is instruction. They’re being taught about, for example, in RME they would be taught about faiths. ...whereas in RO - maybe for want of a better term - they’re teaching themselves. If it’s done well and it’s done correctly, RO gives information and they then reflect upon it and take what they can out of it, ...RO doesn’t have an exam. It’s there to help them develop as people rather than for them to gain an intellectual knowledge of any particular faith.”  
(016SC010914)

As far back as the 1872 Education Act (Scotland) there was an acknowledgement that faith issues were not an appropriate area for examination by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate<sup>13</sup>. Inspection and assessment of matters regarded as ‘religious’ were left to visiting clergy at the invitation of the Headteacher. The current ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ has defined, measurable, quantifiable ‘experiences’ and ‘outcomes’ for every subject - including RME - but does not offer any for RO. At one level this is perfectly logical: the multiplicity of sociological ‘measures’ of spirituality is a sign of the simple reality that there are no universally agreed markers, no standard measures, no touchstones. A Maths exam can give a precise score for how many questions were answered correctly. There is no comparable exam for RO - there are no definitive statements of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ answers for each question and no precise

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<sup>13</sup> Section 66 The Act specifically exempts matters of religious knowledge – and hence Religious Instruction and Religious Observance – from inspection. The summary introduction states: “**Inspection.** Every public school, and every school in receipt of Parliamentary grant, must be open at all times to any of H. M. Inspectors. But the inspectors are not required to examine in religious knowledge, or in any religious book. ...Every public school, and every school which is subject to inspection, shall be open at all times to the inspection of any of Her Majesty’s inspectors, but it shall be no part of the duties of such inspector to inquire into any instruction in religious subjects, or to examine any scholar in religious knowledge or in any religious subject or book.”

scales for measurement. RME has an exam structure and any parent whose child attempts this subject would expect some guidance at the Parents’ evening or through an annual Report. It would be an unusual school that would offer an assessment of the moral progress or spiritual development of its pupils.

*I now consider how practitioners in particular visualise and verbalise “successful” RO. On paper at least there is a simple answer to what defines a ‘successful’ RO event and what an Inspector would look for: it will be an event that has expressed and explored the shared values of the school community and has led to a moment of ‘sensing’ compliant with the indicators defined in the RORG. There will have been evidence that those present engaged communally in discerning one or more sensings. In practice it is hard to discern when such an epiphany has taken place and harder to quantify. I asked practitioners and participants how they adjudge that an RO event has been truly ‘religious observance’ as opposed to philosophical enquiry or values acquisition or moralising. This next section summarises their responses to being asked when an RO event had succeeded.*

### **An RO event is successful when I think it is**

A number of respondents offered a subjective assessment of the “success” of an RO event that seemed to be based mainly on how they “felt” or “thought” it had gone. Teachers do develop an “instinct” for when pupils are attentive and engaged. Many practitioners seemed to instinctively make a similar judgement.

“I can tell by just as I look out across the audience whether or not they’re getting it. ...You can see how they engage with the song, whether or not they’ve understood it.” (016SC010914)

This impression may be reinforced by the participant’s interpretation of observed body language, reactions or verbal feedback.

“... there’s a lot, you know yourself, you can tell by the way the kids look, you can tell by the look on their face, or their body language how engaged they are.” (018SC040914)

“The children’s faces, sometimes you might have said something that they’ve maybe heard before but you said it slightly differently and they understand it more. You can almost see the light dawning. They’ll respond to something if it’s funny: they’ll laugh. Children are very good at body language. You can tell from that what they’re thinking about something as well.” (014SC270814)

“I think you are aware of an impact if you like. That’s a pretty horrible education word, but if you’re aware of an impact when...you

know...maybe a staff member, a pupil, a parent sometimes, will maybe make reference back to something.” (029SM221014)

The problem with these *ad hoc* measures is that they are highly individualistic, they are unverifiable, they may be contradicted by other observers present at the same event reaching opposite or alternate impressions, they are non-transferable (experience and instinct are not techniques that can be learned in teacher-training), they are non-replicable (in terms of scientific experimentation they cannot be repeated for verification), and they are unquantifiable (there is no agreed marking scale for them). They may feel true enough in lived experience but these subjective measures cannot be triangulated.<sup>14</sup> Yet these measures are a persistent strand in interview comments. Although informal personal measures like this are highly flawed markers and are necessarily treated with extreme caution, they do make sense and resonate with practising teachers. The ‘silence’ test is perhaps the most concrete and is potentially measurable:

“Silence is an indicator. ...it’ll be a staff member coming up or a teacher coming up afterwards and saying “see the boy who’s sitting on the third row, four seats in ... I’ve never seen him so quiet for fifteen minutes as he was there.” To me that’s an indication that boy’s got it because if he can’t even sit in his classes for fifteen minutes without laughing, joking, annoying someone, and yet he sat through a 15 minutes assembly without making a movement, something’s happened in that 15 minutes that’s captured him, that’s taken him to a different place.” (016SC010914),

More than one practitioner could also identify with the informal ‘exclusions’ test:

“Now, I suppose also, as one teacher said, “That was a really good assembly today.” “Why? What was really good about it?” “Well, we didn’t have as many youngsters taken out of assembly”. In most of the fourth year assemblies, there would be maybe three or four youngsters would be taken out simply because of their behaviour.” (006FG (2)110614)

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<sup>14</sup> My favourite *ad hoc* measure followed a two-hour RO event I was involved in (a presentation of the biblical Christmas narrative for P6 pupils) when one teacher offered the spontaneous observation that our team had “passed the toilet test.” She explained that “no-one asked to go out to the toilet the whole time you were here.” While I got the point of what she was saying, the toilet test is hardly likely to make it into the school’s next FIN report.

*An RO event is successful if it was ‘enjoyed’*

Non-definable tests of success persisted in the responses despite their obvious limitations. One of the most frequently cited measures of success for RO was “enjoyment.” Not surprisingly, given the affirmation and positive stroking it involves, practitioners especially quoted this as a sign of success. Signs of pupils enjoying an experience such as spontaneous applause, unsolicited comments and praise (“that was good”, “I enjoyed that”, “I like this”), laughter, joyful participation should not be underestimated despite being subjective.

“There’s a school I go into whenever they say “are you coming into assembly this week?”, I say “Yes” it’s “Aw Yes!” [Laughs] You think, Oh well this is obviously something they’re pleased about; this is something they do feel is a positive part of their school life. To me that’s a sign of the programme I’m doing is being successful. The kids are wanting to talk about it, they’re wanting more of it, I would take that as being successful.” (018SC040914)

“I think there’s an obvious one which is that children have enjoyed it. ...I think the most successful ones I’ve known about have been where the children said “that was great, I really enjoyed it” and that isn’t to be pooh-poohed.” (017SC030914)

That sense of enjoyment need not be expressed during or immediately after the event. It may come at a later stage in comments from children and staff.

“Sometimes kids will come back and say afterwards, particularly Primary School kids will come back and say afterwards, “Oh I really enjoyed that” or “That made me think”, without me asking them, “Oh I really thought about that” or “It made me think of God and isn’t God amazing”.” (018SC040914)

However, offering ‘enjoyment’ as a measure begs the question: “should RO always be enjoyable?” If the notion of sensing challenge is taken into account then there is also a place for RO to disturb complacency and challenge assumptions. The RORG definition of Sensing Challenge speaks of

“being challenged and moved by experiences such as love, beauty, goodness, joy, compassion, injustice, evil, suffering, death.” (RORG 2004:13)

The advice for English schools seems apposite:

“Pupils who are developing spiritually are likely to be developing some or all of the following characteristics: ...a readiness to challenge all that would constrain the human spirit: for example, poverty of

aspiration, lack of self-confidence and belief, moral neutrality or indifference, force, fanaticism, aggression, greed, injustice, narrowness of vision, self-interest, sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination...” (HMI 2125 2004:13)

These are, by definition, not all likely to be ‘enjoyable’ experiences and explorations. Scottish schools are actively encouraged to mark such events as Holocaust Memorial Day in January and Remembrance in November. In the nature of exploring these historical events and their contemporary significance, sensing challenge undoubtedly occurs. The experience is more often disturbing than ‘enjoyable’.

There should be some recognition at this point that spirituality also has a negative or ‘dark’ side. The RORG is aware of this and defines ‘sensing challenge’ as being challenged and moved as equally by “experiences such as love, beauty, goodness, joy, compassion” as by “*injustice, evil, suffering, death.*” (RORG 2004:13 - my emphasis). As a clearly stated goal of the current focus on ‘Health and Wellbeing’ within CfE is that every pupil can expect their school to “build my resilience” (CfE ‘All Experiences and Outcomes’ p 12), RO cannot ignore this dark side:

“...spiritual development happens not only in the positive and warm relationships, but through exploring relationships of pain and suffering as well.” (Grainger, T. & Kendall Seatter, S. 2003)

While some might be reluctant to address this dark side intentionally, children and young people may initiate such explorations and concerns themselves. The darker aspects of spirituality may intrude unexpectedly at times anyway - through a frightening nightmare, a disturbing image glimpsed on-line, witnessing an act of violence, or through an overheard news report. The confrontation with the dark side may even be entirely accidental:

“...it is essential to recognise that most aspects, including identity, relationships and the search for meaning and purpose, also have darker sides, often manifesting as periods of doubt, anxiety or crisis. Even an experience which elicits awe and wonder for some children could frighten others.”

(Adams, Bull & Maynes 2015)

The potentially negative aspects of spirituality (for example radicalisation, indoctrination, evil, death, etc.) may intrude without warning at any time. Some advocate a robust pre-emptive confrontation: for example Pamuk is of the view that in our world “evil is as necessary as virtue and sin as necessary as rectitude” (2001:350) in character formation; Fernández-Armesto contends that dispensing with guilt “is a recipe for moral inertia. We need to feel badly about ourselves if we are going to make ourselves better.” (2000:21); or McLaren’s belief that “the dark side of ordinary life can radically assault consensus and ambush the sacred.” (1999:214); and some medical practitioners such as Morgan (2001:269) bluntly opine that “What we have to do is find some way of helping people face a life that includes death...that includes pain.”

RO can certainly help with self-awareness and discernment, as well as provide points of reference and stability. A more measured and less confrontational approach is indicated in other commentators such as de Souza’s calm and logical recognition that

“We need to help children realise that none of us are nice people all the time. We have our good and bad days, our good and bad times; the times when we may love the world and the times when we hate the world and everyone in it. This is being human in all our wholeness and we remain spiritual beings in all these experiences. Thus, we need to teach children to be discerning. Until value is placed on the variation and spread of human gifts and children are led to recognise that their individual gifts are as important as others precisely because they complement the gifts of others, human flourishing will continue to be impeded and the shadow will prevail.” (de Souza 2012:300)

#### *An RO event is successful if a school is “happy with it”*

RO events need not always be ‘feel-good’ events for schools to express that they are “happy” with what has been done in a particular event. ‘Happiness’ with an RO event may equally reflect a satisfaction that it has been an experience in which pupils sensed challenge or a complacent and uncritical way of thinking was challenged. Speaking in the context of UK Anglican school chaplaincy, Caperon (2015) suggests that a chaplain is in a privileged position of being accountable to a different authority and to a value system that may directly contradict the ‘shared values’ of the school community. He comments that

“What is clear is that chaplains in all contexts sense a calling to be a school’s conscience, its questioning and truth-telling prophetic voice.” (Caperon 2015:122).

This is almost the polar opposite of the definition of RO in our legislation: the celebration and expression of a school’s values. This suggests that perhaps an assembly or RO should actually do the opposite from time to time and provide a counterbalance or challenge to the school’s values.

“One function of school worship could be, as we have already seen, to challenge the inherent and unquestioned values within a community.” (Copley 1989:11).

“The practical theologian Paul Ballard has recently written about the nature of chaplaincy as ‘embedded’ in the institution or community in which he or she serves, ... The implication is that the chaplain is living in and alongside the community and yet working to a value system extending beyond it, even counter-culturally.” (Caperon 2015:50).

However you phrase this, RO’s potential to challenge and disturb may also be uncomfortable and unwelcome as far as a school’s Senior Management Team are concerned. An RO event that tackles a contentious issue may have unpredictable outcomes. Schools are conservative and cautious institutions by nature. Their measure of an RO event’s ‘success’ may have more to do with behaviour management, good order, and compliance.<sup>15</sup>

This concern for the smooth running of a school and the reinforcement of its ethos should certainly be borne in mind by those conducting RO events. Equally, RO practitioners frequently voiced their concerns that having worked hard to create moments of sensing, the impact of these can be lost when (sometimes consciously?) sabotaged by staff members. Every Chaplain interviewed in the course of this research offered stories of “beautiful” and “peaceful” atmospheres created by RO events being destroyed by staff members who followed with litter-lectures, behaviour or uniform rants and loud readings of the riot-act. One experienced policy maker, aware of this problem, suggested an important measure of the success of a RO event is

“That it doesn’t jar with how the school runs ... if the values that are coming across in an RO event actually are blown out of the water half

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<sup>15</sup> As one Headteacher expressed it in my hearing to an obviously enthusiastic newbie chaplain: “Just remember - if you wind them up and get them excited then you have a responsibility to wind them down again before you hand them back to their teachers.”

an hour later when a member of staff talks to a pupil in a particular kind of way or the Head runs the school in a particular kind of way that runs counter to what you’ve just been talking about, then there’s this disconnect. So an RO event, to be successful, has to connect.” (001PM190514)

An illustrative anecdote from my observations in one school is of relevance here. In one Secondary School I am chaplain to, the school experienced a visit from an inspection team as they sought level 1 of their ‘Rights Respecting School Award’. In conversation with the inspector he offered a comment transferable to the assessment of RO events by highlighting one of the markers he was looking for was that the values implicit in being a ‘Rights Respecting School’ could be found to have permeated every classroom and every staff member and every student. To paraphrase his point he suggested that

“you know it [the Rights Respecting agenda] has affected a school when you can stop a random pupil in a corridor - rather than one who’s been picked to talk to you - and *they* can tell you what the school’s chosen values are or what a ‘Human Right’ is or what ‘Respect’ means.”

Similarly, when the pupils themselves spontaneously express the values shared in RO events and are happy to “own them” then it seems reasonable to many practitioners that “success” should be concluded.

### ***An RO event is successful if there is “pupil engagement”***

This level of evident or apparent engagement by all the participants and spectators in a school community is surely an important factor. It’s not just that

“If they pay attention [during an event], that’s a ‘success’ to the school.” (006FG (1)110614)

It’s also that there are signs of engagement with the content or topic or theme both at the time and afterwards - not just by individuals but by the whole school community. To fit within CfE it is of course imperative that RO events satisfy the SHANARRI indicators: they must leave everyone feeling that they have been “respected” and “included” for example.

“I guess a very practical thing is that everyone has been able to engage in it regardless of their faith, their values, their lifestyles, their beliefs.” (019SC040914)

Good RO should also give the participants as much responsibility then as

possible. RO, to be about shared values, should be something we do together rather than something that is done to passive recipients. One chaplain offered this level of engagement as a primary measure of ‘success’ for his RO events:

“...they’re driving some of it rather than us. ...their senior pupils have really responded well to that, to the point that they have now, ...gone and **they** start planning for the next Easter or Christmas assembly, choosing Christian music without even asking the chaplains, without even telling us. We’ll arrive for a planning meeting and we’ll be told “Oh the Seniors have got this song looked out and planned”, so to me there’s a sense of they’re taking the initiative with RO” (006FG (1)110614)

If the Sensings are the key markers differentiating an RO event from RME/ PSE/ Character Education/ etc., then perhaps it is the evidence of engagement with the sensings themselves that is the most important indicator of the success of an RO event. For instance two of the sensings referenced in the RORG (sensing a changed quality in awareness and sensing otherness) are frequently cited as occurring in events adjudged to have been “successful”:

“Success is indicated - [when something] really resonates with those children. ...It took them into a deeper place. It helped them understand. And it integrated the learning through embedding it in their sense of self.” (002RR220514)

“...that the youngsters can walk away, if you like, from an RO event feeling different, having been changed in some way. ...to change their thinking, perhaps, about an aspect of human existence, about where they live, where they are in the world...” (004PM030614)

These are accounts of pupils experiencing individual epiphanies, personal moments of changed awareness and moments of ‘otherness’. They may not articulate it in the precise language of the RORG but they clearly refer to private moments of changed self-awareness and a difference in perspective and to moments of altered or improved relationship with others. As one practitioner phrased it,

"You want them to engage with the concept that there might be something more than the ‘Eat, sleep, rave, repeat’ thing, do you know what I mean? And so you’re, I guess that might be the difference, that you have to really think about each of the individuals in one sense in class and their learning needs but in actual fact what you’re trying to do with RO is - or one of the hopes of RO - would be that you are addressing each of these young people, each of these children, as an individual and helping them to engage with whatever it is that you are presenting to them in a way that makes sense to them

and hopefully gives them a challenge and a sense of worth and that “I’m glad that happened.”” (019SC040914)

*An RO event is successful if pupil feedback says it has been*

Another consistently mentioned measure of “success” listed by practitioners is when the instant feedback and spontaneous response from participants goes beyond “That was fun” or “I enjoyed that” and specifically mentions something within the event that matched one of the sensings. For instance:

- “That [event] really made me think about my relationship with....”
- “What can we do to change that [i.e. the situation that was spoken about in the RO event]? How should we respond to that? How can I fix that? How can I help with that?”
- “That made me go ‘wow!’ ”
- “I wonder how...”
- “I wish that...”

Although the Education Scotland RO template includes space for evaluation of events, surprisingly few practitioners plan for responses or a record of feedback before the commencement of their RO events. Yet giving pupils a small feedback sheet asking them to complete a sentence such as “This assembly made me think....” or “This assembly made me want to...” or “This assembly made me feel...” can give invaluable data. In larger RO/ TfR events in Secondary schools it is relatively easy to set up an on-line Survey Monkey for instance which can be answered during a computing class or from home later. It gives the advantage of uncensored and anonymous feedback, encouraging honest responses. Or post-it notes can be given out during an event and collected in or posted anonymously on a wall.

Beyond some gathering of immediate feedback perhaps a deeper measure of success is that an event is remembered or recounted or discussed or sparks spontaneous reporting to those who were not present. Pupils might share a reaction later with parents:

“You know I’ve maybe been dealing with a parent over an issue and they’ll say “well I know you were talking about this at assembly, I know you’re trying to work on that” so the youngster’s obviously gone

home, they’ve spoken about it, they’ve been reflecting on it.”  
(029SM221014)

“...parents who come in at parents evening and say ‘Oh yes, we heard all about that. That was interesting. That was an interesting discussion we had over the dinner table that day you had an assembly about X, Y or Z. That’s when you know that you’ve made an impact. And that’s the great one when you realise that you’ve created a conversation in a family somewhere in the catchment area. That’s when you know that you’re getting it right.” (003PM230514)

It might be with their peers or at their next meeting with the practitioner that the pupils provide evidence of their engagement with the RO event. It is not simple recall that matters though - an event may have been remembered as particularly touching on a sensing, creating an epiphany, or it may have been remembered as particularly insensitive or offensive or just plain disastrous. ‘Success’ is clearer if there are signs that an event has been not just remembered but absorbed and understood and reflected on:

“I’ll know I’ve done well if someone either comes up and speaks to me, which doesn’t always happen, and speaks to me directly after the assembly then I’ll know I’ve done really well. If I see them a week later and they say, “Aw hey, that was really good” and then they’re able to tell me what it was [Laughs] then that’s also really helpful.”  
(019SC040914)

“When the children talk to you about it three weeks later. And it’s the same about the mark of good teaching, is that children will apply what they’ve learned to another situation at another time. That’s the true test of whether they have learned, is ‘can they apply it and then move on in their thinking and their learning?’ We know that, in terms of the rest of the curriculum. It’s exactly the same in terms of RO. If you see children who stop and think about things more, who are remembering about a situation or a story that they were told about at assembly three weeks later, ‘Oh miss, remember when...?’ then you think they’ve got it.” (003PM230514)

Since RO intentionally targets values, meaning, purpose, faith, etc., perhaps the measure of ‘success’ should not be reckoned by responses gathered three weeks later but three years or three decades later. The ultimate success of an RO event would be more than an engagement with one or more sensings: it would be a changed life. In England, the 1996 SCAA (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority) Discussion Paper 6, *Education for Adult Life: the spiritual and moral development of young people*, effectively applied a deficiency model as the motivation for spiritual and moral development:

“For some children, school is the only place where they will encounter moral teaching. ....In an increasingly fragmented society, schools are often the only safe haven where young people can develop a sense of belonging to a secure community. ...Breakdown in family life was regarded by many delegates as a primary cause of behaviour and attitude problems in young people, with schools increasingly expected to compensate for inadequate parenting.” (SCAA 1996)

With such a model ‘success’ would be pupils leaving school to become life-long citizens who were morally-responsible and community-minded. Might the actual “success” of RO be better measured by greater compassion, better mental and spiritual health, stronger communities, fewer hate-crime incidents, increased politeness and respect and tolerance, and an increase in fidelity within relationships? Some practitioners seem to be close to expressing such sentiments.

“... [A] tangible increase in pupils attending, or being referred to, the school counsellor. So this Secondary School has a permanent counsellor. So there was kind of measurable impact from that, that some of the Big Questions the Religious Observance schedule was raising for pupils, they then felt, some of the pupils felt, that they needed to go and see either Guidance or the School Counsellor.”  
(006FG (1)110614)

Some felt there was a discernible difference in the quality of relationships following successful RO events:

“Sometimes you will see tangible examples if sometimes what we’ll do is as part of our assembly programme is set the youngsters a particular challenge, maybe to do with friendship or how we’re dealing with others, and sometimes you can see some tangible outcomes.”  
(029SM221014)

### ***An RO event is successful if your chosen quantifier says it has been***

Sometimes the relative “success” of an RO event is patently quantifiable - e.g. a cash offering or donation to an appeal or a charity; a number of pupils volunteering for a follow-up activity; a package of ‘Thank You’ letters from a class who have attended an event. The number of letters received may be poor quantitative evidence though as they are rarely spontaneous and more often are the outcome of classroom exercises that were really focussed on composition, letter-writing and citizenship skills. The contents of the letters may have use as qualitative comment though once you filter out the copied, formulaic phrases parroted from a whiteboard and discern the genuine and uncensored responses.

A ‘Thank You’ from a staff member may actually be a more significant sign that an event has been well-received,

“...to get just a simple note of thanks or appreciation from one of the management team like the head or the deputy heads, to me that’s a positive, it’s not a token thing because they get hundreds of emails and they’re busy enough...” (006FG (1)110614)

Even written feedback may give no objective assessment of which sensing was the focus of the event or how significantly it was experienced. It may be an ultimately subjective assessment but practitioners frequently cited what they perceived to be signs of reflection or thoughtfulness or of increased resilience or of development in values or spirituality or ‘maturity’ as “evidence” satisfying them that an RO event had been worthwhile.

While,

“...there has to be, I think, an opportunity for them to then do something about whatever it is they’ve heard.” (019SC040914),

the discernible response might take an unexpected form. ‘Something’ has clearly successfully impacted the participants in these two anecdotes.

“In one particular assembly two youngsters were taken out, really big bruising lads, kinda ruled the roost in the year, and they were instructed by the Deputy Head to come and apologise to me personally. And he says, “I hope you don’t mind, I think it’ll be good for them” and they came in and they spoke to me and I said, you know, “What’s up guys?” “You said something I didnae like.” “What did you no like about it?” “It was true.” And I thought well maybe that was a degree of success because he’d actually started to talk about it and it was an issue, a big issue, in his life.” (006FG (2)110614)

“...there’s one wee boy who said “Aw, some of the stories we’ve done, they’ve really made a difference in my life and changed the way I think. There was that story about that wee guy Zacchaeus and how he stole all this money and that really made me think about some of the things I was doing.” Now I don’t know what his story was but to me that was spiritual development, that moment in time exploring a story from the Bible, he had stopped and thought and considered and it impacted him as a spiritual person.” (015SC280814)

Others spoke of ‘good’ RO or ‘properly done’ RO impacting participants regardless of their own faith and beliefs and making them think and challenge their own values. When pupils began to express and explore issues in their own lives which were previously unaddressed, this too was marked as a sign of “success”. Sometimes schools seem reluctant to tackle some issues (e.g.

addiction, abuse, bullying) for fear that it will produce revelations and disclosures. This capacity is perhaps the strength of effective RO and its biggest risk. Guidance staff may feel ill-equipped and unprepared for handling the emotions that may emerge. TV producers understand this fear and prepare for it with help-lines and links for follow-up: i.e. “If you have been affected by this issue then call our help-line...”. Some senior managers may actually shy away from truly engaging and effective RO “in case” it prompts a response they feel they are unqualified and unequipped for. Some practitioners described RO events following which a significant disclosure was made, but they classed this as “success” and none reported that the outcome was negative. A measurable increase in referrals and requests for counselling triggered by an RO event is certainly a sign of impact though schools may be uneasy and interpret this as a negative sign of disturbance.

“...pupils starting to talk about the issues in their lives, whether it’s fear or “I hope I’ll get a job one day” or it’s, you know, “my parents are split up and it’s tough stuff going on at home.” Yeah, pupils coming to you and saying “that was really hard” or “what you said, I can really relate to that” is a sign of success.” (006FG (1)110614)

#### *An RO event is successful if there are no complaints about it*

Perhaps reflecting the challenges to the place of RO in some schools and authorities, some practitioners seemed to offer validity through negativity as a sign of ‘positive’ success, i.e. that ‘successful’ RO attracted no complaints or objections and no-one walked out or opted out:

“Well I’ve never been asked to stop. So that’s a measure of success...” (006FG (1)110614)

“...the fact that we’re still allowed to keep coming back in is in one sense I suppose an affirmation, because if it wasn’t valued and if it wasn’t deemed to be something adding to the campus and ethos then we probably would have been told to “sling your hook” you know.” (006FG (2)110614)

A more positive formulation of this measure of success is hinted at in the way this respondent phrases it:

“I suppose in a strange, perverted kind of way it’s successful if, if it didn’t happen it would be missed?” (001PM190514)

A few of the chaplains interviewed spoke of colleagues who had been asked not to return to schools and some Education Authorities have recently had

to defend themselves against accusations of RO events that have been marked by ineptitude, inappropriateness, intrusiveness or attempts at religious indoctrination. On the whole the Authorities have clear and unambiguous RO policies and procedures and such incidents are few and far between. The large majority of practitioners I interviewed also showed a general competence, a high level of commitment and professionalism, and at least some awareness of the educational context. However a number also exhibited poor practice, poor quality, ill-disguised evangelistic motivation, a proselytising mind-set, a wholly inadequate grasp of the changes brought about by the Curriculum for Excellence, and a general lack of understanding of the ethos of CfE.

### Getting it ‘right’

The majority of RO events in Scottish schools (no-one has ever been able to quantify this convincingly) are delivered by faith-based chaplains. And the majority of these are allied to the national church, the Church of Scotland. Few education authorities keep a register of chaplains serving their schools and usually leave such appointments to individual headteachers. There is no central register of school chaplains in Scotland. However, the greater number of RO events in our Scottish schools produced by these chaplains are well-prepared, thoughtful, reflective, and effective. They understand perfectly well that the School assemblies of thirty years ago which functioned like mini-church or replicated Church services are no longer acceptable. While most of them grasp the facts of a different cultural context and a different educational ethos, some express regret at this ‘loss’ or ‘change’. Amongst my interviewees were a few parents and practitioners who seem to have either misunderstood or actively resisted the shift from explicitly Christian acts of worship towards a more expansive and inclusive spirituality. A typical comment shows that interplay of nostalgia for past practice and misconception about contemporary restrictions:

"I think in the past Religious Observance, it was understood that you were part of your church and the school was a part of the church and you could openly talk about issues of religion and spirituality in the same breath but I don't think you can do that in the same way now."  
(021PCP110914)

It is, of course, still perfectly possible to speak openly in RO events about issues of religion and spirituality. Perhaps the difference is that there does need

to be a greater sensitivity to the multi-cultural, multi-faith audiences of today and the fact that ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ will be much more openly questioned and contested these days. No-one leading an RO event in Scottish schools today should make assumptions about the faith-position of their audience or lead into an act of worship without careful explanation and guidance. A few practitioners, hankering for “the good old days,” are apparently still struggling to get the balance and the integrity of holding a personal faith while understanding and respecting the faith of others. They think it’s only about adopting new techniques and becoming more techno-literate:

“I really...believe passionately that if, for example, particularly Christian ministers and deacons and workers are permitted by the grace of God to come in [to schools] ...if we still have the freedom to give children this experience then it has to be a good experience. ...And these days we have to engage with children so it has to be either this interactive experience and as exciting as some other lessons can be using PowerPoint and YouTube clips.” (017SC030914)

Most, however, are aware that it’s about more than computer savvy now and have grasped that a completely new Educational framework needs a completely new approach to RO:

“There’s one school I worked in last year where there had been no RO at all but, as quite often happens, it had been picked up in their Inspection and the Headteacher was keen to do something different with RO so it was meaningful for the pupils so myself and the Chaplaincy Team created a reflective space for all the first years and all the second years for a week. That was planned in partnership with the senior management team and it was a high level of assessment as well. All the pupils gave a review after they’d gone through the reflective space which was quite thorough and very insightful and was really positive so the school wants to do even more of that next year.” (015SC280814)

Some of the RO practitioners interviewed struggled to conceive of spirituality outwith their own denominational or theological world-view, wrongly equating their own traditions of ‘faith development’ with the more neutral ‘spiritual development’ of CfE. But the majority of those I interviewed in the course of my research who are delivering RO seemed well able to separate in-church faith development from in-school spiritual development. Key to this was their ability to conceive of spirituality occurring within other faith traditions and belief systems, and taking forms other than those they are familiar with. The

more alert were aware that other faiths have skills and resources to offer that can aid spiritual development. The British Humanist Association also has produced thoughtful explorations of religion-free spirituality. The ‘spiritual values’ they offer should be acceptable to all faith-based RO practitioners.

“In the task of trying to identify some of the things we all hope to foster, it is hoped that these items listed in the BHA’s leaflet, ‘The Human Spirit’ [1993], will find general acceptance: ‘moral sensibility; response to natural and human beauty; appreciation and wonder at the natural world; the quest for meaning and values by which to live’.” (Best 1996:36)

Most of the practitioners and senior management teams I contacted were alert to the need to balance an exploration and experience of ‘religious’ observance with an avoidance of religious indoctrination and evangelism. Some went to extraordinary lengths to avoid the slightest hint of proselytism even when it might have been expected:

"I think they [an Independent Faith-based School this person provides RO for] have a very open Christian ethos and I’m still always quite careful about how I say things because I don’t ever want to be seen to be or be mistaken to be either indoctrinating kids or proselytising." (019SC040914)

Others consciously moderated what they would normally do:

“It is ‘*religious*’ observance’ but very low key. ...As a Christian Minister I see my task [in RO] as being to share biblical values and biblical truths with others. Not to force folks, not really to press it down the children’s throats ... but to share something of the Christian message and also to allow children to realise it’s part of our heritage as well.” (006FG (2)110614)

Objections and challenges to the place of RO in schools are becoming more common and strident, causing some schools considerable anxiety. But this does not mean that RO should be abandoned for the sake of not offending a vocal minority. One policy maker made this comment:

“I was at a school in [name removed] a couple of years ago talking to a headteacher over that very issue. That headteacher had drafted a new RO policy, and had taken account of all of the guidance, and had done a very thorough consultation with all of the parents. But there was one family who were objecting to having bible readings and a prayer. And that poor headteacher was really getting quite upset because she felt that therefore they couldn’t go ahead because it wouldn’t be inclusive. But I was saying to her, ‘Well, you’ve been inclusive, your practice is inclusive. You’ve given them [the parents]

an opportunity to have their view but one family? You’re going to go against 99% of your school community to suit this one family?”(004PM030614)

There are some interesting dilemmas here however. In a non-denominational school most practitioners are cautious about anything that could be interpreted as an act of worship. The Guidance Notes issued to schools (2011, 2017<sup>16</sup>) are clear that any act of worship should be a part of the informal curriculum and participation should be voluntary. The RORG also states though that RO events should express the school’s “shared values” and ethos. This can create moments of paradox where, for instance, a school’s ethos has been that ‘acts of worship’ are an acceptable part of their RO. The ‘norm’ for some schools is still that a hymn or faith song and a prayer are *expected*. My research journal entry and sketch below are illustrative:

March 1<sup>st</sup> 2014

I took a whole-School Assembly today in a Scottish Primary School with a roll of 320. My theme was ‘Sensing Values’ and I spoke on the “values” shown by some of the people featured on our recent and current banknotes: E.g. Mary Slessor and Elizabeth Fry (Care), Robert Burns (Love), Robert the Bruce (Perseverance). It works well as a neutral exploration of the importance of values and it’s easy to make the point that real value is not measured in the pounds and pence marked on our currency but by the kind of people we are. The people pictured on our banknotes and coins exemplify important human (and arguably *spiritual*) values. This was my attempt to make sure the event was reflective, inclusive and accessible to all. I am responsible for sharing this brief message and I am given total freedom to do it.

Yet where the Assembly got interesting for me is that the school’s SMT take responsibility for the choice of songs and a prayer for this in-school event. And they consistently choose a format more normal for a faith community than a school community. The prayer was one written out and printed by the class teacher for three members of her class to read out. It began with the same formula the school uses in *all* its assembly prayers: “Hands clasped, eyes closed...” The language of the prayer is unfailingly first person plural (“we/us/our”). The convention and the absolute expectation is that every pupil (*and* staff member) will duly bow their heads, close their eyes and clasp their hands. Almost everyone present automatically voices the concluding ‘Amen’. Apart from one pupil who has been opted out by his parents (Jehovah’s Witnesses) everyone else remains and is expected to participate. The songs that were chosen were ‘Resurrection Rock’ (emphasising that this was doubling up as practice for a forthcoming Easter Assembly) and another called ‘For God so loved’.

<sup>16</sup> Available from <https://education.gov.scot/>

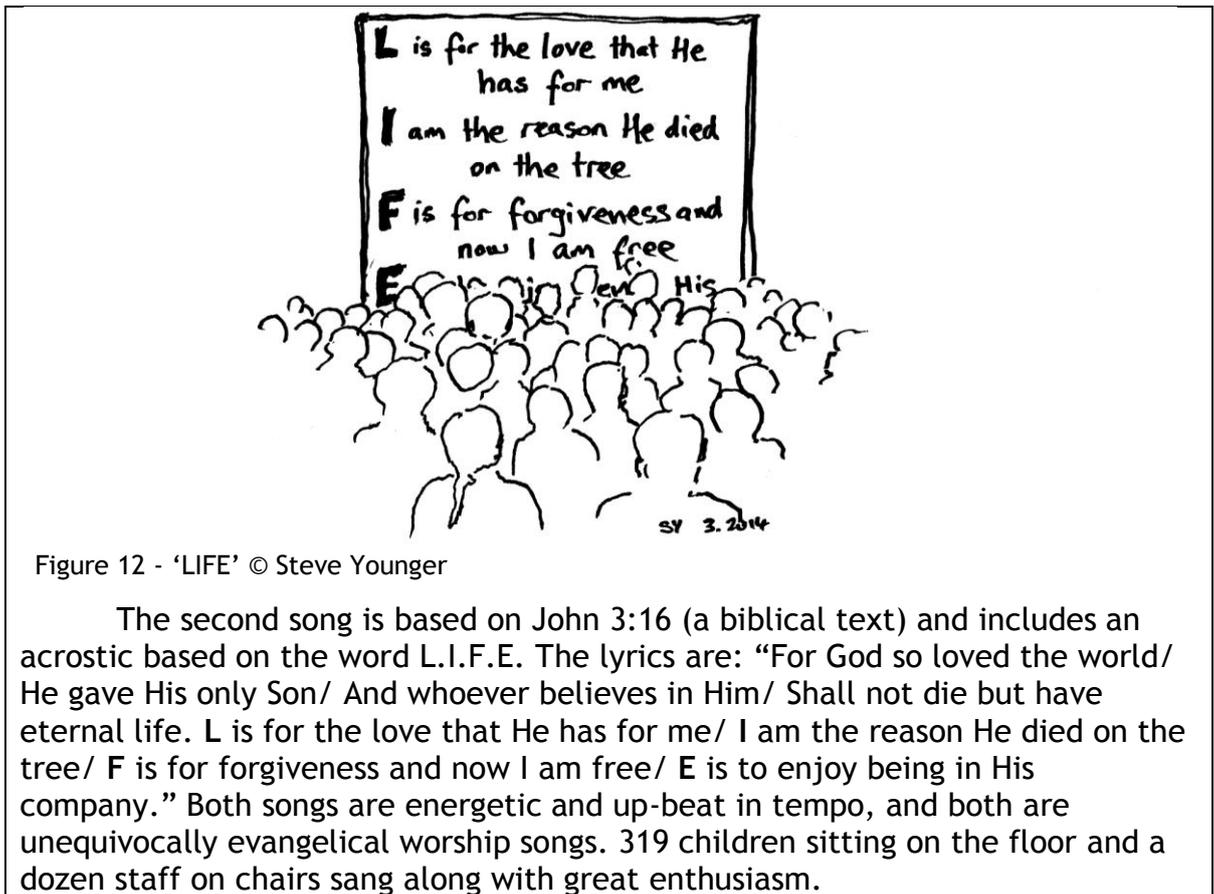


Figure 12 - 'LIFE' © Steve Younger

The second song is based on John 3:16 (a biblical text) and includes an acrostic based on the word L.I.F.E. The lyrics are: “For God so loved the world/ He gave His only Son/ And whoever believes in Him/ Shall not die but have eternal life. L is for the love that He has for me/ I am the reason He died on the tree/ F is for forgiveness and now I am free/ E is to enjoy being in His company.” Both songs are energetic and up-beat in tempo, and both are unequivocally evangelical worship songs. 319 children sitting on the floor and a dozen staff on chairs sang along with great enthusiasm.

Table 4 - Journal Entry for 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2014

Such experiences raise issues about the finer points of compliance with RO legislation and guidelines. The school seeks to comply with the RO guidelines on the frequency of RO events and has agreed to the formation of a team to plan their RO. The team comprises myself as school chaplain meeting once a term with the Headteacher and two staff members to plan the basic dates and themes for the school’s RO events. They carefully review any material I would want to give out during RO events. They are happy to record our RO events on the RO template and present this as evidence in HMle inspections. And yet their chosen formats for prayer and songs are indisputably acts of worship. The school’s way of handling and presenting the prayer and the songs allow neither a genuine invitation to opt-in nor an effective opt-out for pupils or staff. That they “have always done this and no-one has ever objected” may be true enough comment but I am unconvinced that every parent will always see it that way. I find myself in a curiously ambiguous position: I am an evangelical Christian school chaplain who is apparently the only one in a non-denominational school who is uneasy about the school community praying and singing overtly evangelical Christian

songs. Yet there has been no breach of compliance with legislation. These are clearly non-voluntary acts of worship and should therefore be questioned and challenged. Yet they completely reflect this school’s ethos and values and are an expression of its traditions and customs and can therefore be presented as appropriate and acceptable RO events *for this school community*. The dilemma for me as a faith-based RO practitioner is that questioning the school’s practice jars with my church role. The delicacy for me is in offering RO for this school that fits their evangelicalism without tipping in to evangelism. The key point for me in solving these issues is contained within the RORG’s assertion that an RO event should aim

“to express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.” (RORG 2005:12).

If the “shared values” of a school community are prayers and worship songs then this has to be respected and accommodated by whoever leads the School’s RO.

Good practice for chaplains, if they are to get it ‘right’, is to respect the ethos and shared values of the particular school community they are partnering with and present events that fit. While Chaplains may have a role in challenging school/ societal values and in critical exploration of them, no Chaplain should ever use an RO event to impose their own values and beliefs. ‘Hit and run’ events from RO practitioners who are disconnected from the school community and unaware of or disrespectful of its ethos are certainly not getting it right and risk antagonising and causing tensions. Getting it right means the closer the links between the Chaplain and a school, and the more they work together, the better an event will be:

“I think my experience has been that once a school’s experienced good Religious Observance they want more of it but if they haven’t experienced it as being good or awful then they just do the minimum that they need. So the better it’s delivered it creates more because they see the benefit of it for pupils. And if it’s blended into the whole life of the school and not just stuck on or attached.” (015SC280814)

The more effectively RO events are planned, aware of the particularities of an individual school, the better those events will be. Schools also need to see a wider partnership if their school community is to truly reflect their wider community. Parents should be seen as key allies and partners in the planning of

effective RO and need to be listened to so that their concerns and reactions are addressed.

"I personally have only ever had one parent come [sic] to me to want to opt them out and when I told them what we were actually doing they changed their mind. ...I remember a conversation with a lady from the Jewish community and asking them about what were their perspectives about RO and RME in non-denominational schools - ...and I quote her, “the only problem I have with it is the total Christianisation of the curriculum during the month of December”, and I’ve never forgotten that. She is absolutely right.” (003PM230514)

### Getting it ‘wrong’

There is clear evidence in the research of faith-based chaplains who are still getting it ‘wrong’ however by using RO events as opportunities to evangelise. Instances of inappropriate preaching, of attempts at proselytism, of incompetence, and of poor ability to relate to pupils are still happening and, surprisingly, are being tolerated in some schools. Sometimes it is a combination of an older chaplain (usually male) with a particular mind-set who has not adjusted to the changes in the educational context brought by CfE. One parent’s experience described this problem well:

“He [the chaplain of her two children’s school] is old school. He’s set in his ways. You’re not going to change him. There’s no way he would modernise his method when he does assemblies which is a shame because potentially you could be putting off a whole generation and surely that’s where we need to try and encourage.” (012PCP190814)

In my informal discussions with headteachers at authority training events in delivering RO I have come across several who are unwilling to either change or challenge a long-standing relationship with a chaplain even if they are uncomfortable with that chaplain’s input. It surprises me how many headteachers seem unaware of their right to control chaplaincy input: no chaplain can enter a school except at the invitation of the Headteacher. There is a widespread fallacy based on a “Parish” mind-set that non-denominational schools must accept as their chaplain whoever is the Minister of the Parish within whose geographical boundaries their building lies. Reading the Education Act shows that from the outset in 1872 this was never the case and no chaplain has a “right” to provide RO without the invitation and consent of a school’s senior management team. Yet from my research sample, the myth of a Parish

‘right’ persists with parents, preachers and schools clearly assuming it exists whether or not they like it, want it, or see it working:

“...it’s kind of in the job description so [name omitted] goes and he does it and wouldn’t dream of not doing it but I don’t think he thinks of the fact that ‘this could be a new generation into my church’. It’s almost like he’s kind of given up. He doesn’t think that there’s any chance of getting them to his church so he’s not even going to try anymore. He’s doing what he has to do and then he’s going up the road.” (012PCP190814)

It seems there are also those who *do* understand that there is no ‘Parish Right’, that Scottish Education is now completely different, that the models and assumptions of thirty years ago are no longer fit for purpose and yet they still choose to take a bullish approach:

“...you get chaplains like... [Names omitted] who just don’t get it, or get it but don’t agree. They do understand what the Scottish Government says RO should be but that’s not what they want it to be.” (015SC280814)

The principal cause of tensions over RO and of RO events that poorly complement CfE still seem to come though from chaplains who confuse education and evangelism. They have a completely wrong mind-set more through an inability to understand the changed context than through wilfully ignoring it (though some seem inclined to do that too). There are no standard induction courses for Scottish chaplains in which they can learn about the world of education. There is no requirement on chaplains to grasp the concepts of CfE, the language and culture of schools, the nature of the capacities, the legislation and guidelines concerning RO delivery, etc. The consistent problem is with a few chaplains who come to RO with an evangelistic intent. This crops up in the interview data as in this example:

“I did some training with, for, a particular Christian organisation, not all of them but a large majority were very, not reticent to do the RO template like a lesson plan for an RO event, they just seemed quite kind of ....unable to. So they were doing an Easter RO event ...aims and objectives... they couldn’t get beyond “to proclaim Christ crucified”. [Laughs] I don’t think they used those words but that was really it! They couldn’t get beyond their thinking of what impact an RO Easter event in a school might have. ...the problem is that so many Christians I know who deliver RO actually do believe it’s an opportunity to proselytise. Now many of them would put it in nice words and phrases and make out that isn’t the case but if they were

really pinned down they would say that’s why they’re in school.”  
(015SC280814)

A growing number of chaplains are adjusting though and are well aware of the legislation around RO and are functioning well within the parameters and intents of CfE. In fact they acknowledge the difficulties caused by some of their colleagues and are careful to position themselves apart from those who ‘get it wrong’:

“I know from experience of other people that perhaps some people who deliver RO don’t do it in the way that they should and that is hard for someone like me to take, who tries to do it the correct way. I’m not saying that every time I get it right but I do try and I know the limits, I know the guidelines. I know that some people might see it as a way of evangelising - which it should not be - others see it as a way of implementing worship - which it shouldn’t be.” (016SC010914)

The kind of attitude this practitioner was referring to is illustrated by this next quote which seems to lack self-awareness or any sense of the potential inappropriateness of their approach:

“The other thing which I’ve done just last year but haven’t been asked back, in [name omitted] I went to see [name omitted] the Deputy Head who we believed had an interest in Religious Observance and assemblies...before Christmas last year I went in to take an Infant assembly and took the character of ‘Elizabeth’ from the Incarnation gospel story and I dramatised it, I became ‘Elizabeth.’ And then we took the theme of ‘Wonder’ because it was an Infant school and I thought ‘Wonder’ when I looked at the Curriculum for Excellence was a good thing to do so we did memorise a little verse as well and we sang a song to do with ‘Wonder.’ ” (017SC030914)

This practitioner claimed “some” awareness of CfE and reported that she had read the ‘All Experiences and Outcomes’ document (though she was unable to quote any specifics) and yet had managed to effectively deliver a Sunday School lesson as an RO event and was unaware of the impact of this on the school’s leadership or that she may have missed the mark. The significant phrase in the quote is probably “haven’t been asked back.”

In this sample it is evident that most schools are actually sympathetic to, and most senior managers are tolerant of, their faith-based chaplains, especially where there has been a long relationship. This is not a situation that can prevail however and change can come quickly with a change of circumstance or staff.

“...we had a lot of staff retirements and in the main the older staff were very sympathetic to what we were doing - quite a number of the younger staff come in and see no relevance and are quite, they put up with us, but you can clearly see that they don't want to be at assembly because they see no relevance to themselves and therefore, for the children, there's no relevance and that has been a big shift in the last fifteen years.” (006FG (2)110614)

Parents interviewed were divided, with most seeing Christian faith practitioners delivering RO/ Time for Reflection events as not just acceptable but desirable so long as the chaplains were competent and engaging above all:

“I don't have a degree in Theology but I feel that my input is a lot better than some of the Chaplains' input, people who have been ministers for decades, people who - for some people it's just a job isn't it? If you're there because you love the kids and you want them to know how valued they are I think that reflects on what you do. As a parent I would want to see good Christian chaplains in the schools, obviously. But ones the children will respond to well.” (018SC040914)

Others however stated that while they found faith practitioners delivering RO acceptable they should not evangelise or proselytise when they were in schools:

“I think if every belief in life, if every preacher to that belief came in, teaching them is one thing but I think if they took it further by saying “come and attend my church or chapel or mosque”, trying to take them away from what's implied at home and show them another path in life, I would draw the line at that.” (013PCS210814)

## The ideal RO practitioner?



Figure 12 - the ideal RO practitioner © Steve Younger

On the whole the parents, policy makers and practitioners I interviewed, despite their caveats and the risk of proselytism, preferred that people of faith lead RO events. Specific reasons for this thinking were not easy to discern but there were hints in the responses that even if some Interviewees were not active members of faith-communities themselves or committed believers themselves they still held a residual belief in the general importance and value of morals, spiritual values, religious beliefs, ‘faith’. Some regions of Scotland and individual schools may also have a stronger sense of a faith heritage than others. One policy maker commented on how this needs to be taken into account when thinking about a school’s RO:

“It is about “know your school community”. So, “is this a community where actually we are basically a Christian community?” Some of the Island, or Highlands and Island Communities, where very strong church connections still exist and there is an agreed view that that’s what should be shared through the life and worship of the school - it’s about worship - and that’s OK as long as everybody’s buying into it.”  
(004PM030614)

Others seemed to view it as an issue of integrity or passion - in the same way that any other part of the curriculum should be taught by someone whose passion is for their subject and who is highly qualified and competent in it, so RO

should be delivered by those with a demonstrated passion, competence and commitment to spiritual values. Asked “who do you think is the best person to deliver RO in a school?” one respondent fixed on a blend of enthusiasm and expertise:

“I would say somebody who has the enthusiasm and has the maturity to do so.

**What happens if the Chaplain attached to a school is *not* that sort of person?**

Then I find it disappointing that they do RO, that they would do RO. In a lot of cases who is going to do the RO? I don't have a degree in Theology but I feel that my input is a lot better than some of the Chaplains' input, people who have been ministers for decades, people who - for some people it's just a job isn't it? If you're there because you love the kids and you want them to know how valued they are I think that reflects on what you do. As a parent I would want to see good Christian Chaplains in the schools, obviously. But ones the children will respond to well.” (018SC04091)

Others again simply see ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ as a part of Scottish culture and history that should be reflected pro rata in what is taught in schools:

“So, we're back to the question, “Who should do it [RO]?” I mean, I would say if there are six [RO events required in each academic year], definitely a Parish Minister because a good percentage of those who are religious in Scotland are Church of Scotland or Catholic so there's no getting away from that. So I think it would be vital that one in a year at least was, reflected the, you know, a good percentage of the nation and I think that would be about right.” (009IG250614)

“...the practice of a religion at a personal, collective and emotional level is a reality in the modern world. I mean I think it's still true that more people do that on a Sunday than go the football on a Saturday. So it's a major feature of contemporary life therefore I think it's reasonable for young people to be exposed to that kind of reality.” (011IG110814)

This preference for faith-based RO leaders was with the provisos that they understood the CfE context, were knowledgeable and competent, were ‘interesting’ and were able to communicate effectively with young people. An ability in the person delivering RO to communicate rather than an academic competence often ranked first for parents and practitioners:

“There are a lot of ministers, there are a lot of people who are passionate about their subject, who love their subject, but can’t communicate with young people.” (016SC010914)

“...that minister that I mentioned when I was at school he just had nothing in common with children...He’s very academic but I wouldn’t say he had anything in common with children so I suppose what’s going to encourage them if they’re seeing that person as boring? I remember him as boring...So I think somebody that can connect with the kids is important.” (024PCP201014)

The policy makers placed their emphasis more on those delivering RO having strong contextual awareness and less on an ability to communicate or even on their level of knowledge,

“In Primary Schools I don’t see why class teachers couldn’t lead Religious Observance with their class and I’ve seen some examples of that where they’re comfortable using a more reflective approach for a time. I think it’s probably useful to have a variety of people. For me the important thing is not about who the person is but [about] “is there a shared understanding across the school community of what it is you are trying to achieve?” so that no matter who’s leading it there’s a shared rationale for Religious Observance or whatever you want to call it within your own school.” (004PM030614)

My experience of most schools, especially primary schools, suggests that in practice their SMT’s effectively often abdicate responsibility for RO to their (usually) faith-based chaplains. Future research might explore the reasons for this. Propositions for testing might look at, for instance, if this abdication of responsibility is the result of a mind-set of ‘professional boundaries’ i.e. that RO is being devolved to the Chaplains because matters of spirituality are perceived as being their ‘area of expertise’ in the same way as counselling would be delegated to an Educational Psychologist or a Communication difficulty to a Speech and Language Therapist. The lack of formal modules on delivering RO during Scottish Teacher training means that school staff may also feel they lack competence in this area. Until relatively recently both Education Scotland and GLOW, the on-line teacher-network, lacked a significant number of exemplars. This gap is being filled by faith agencies such as the Church of Scotland and Christian Values in Education (Scotland), perhaps reinforcing the impression of SMT’s that their chaplains are better equipped and resourced for delivering RO. There are also often long-term relationships between chaplains and headteachers who, normally, work within overlapped church parish/ school

catchment areas and are frequently integrated in the same community. By and large the senior managers in such relationships trust their chaplains to deliver the school’s RO and do not interfere unless something goes wrong.

"In a lot of schools, Primary schools, there maybe would be a limited amount of planning. It’s still perceived as something that you just have to do and you invite someone like me from a faith background in to do it. So the plan is left to me rather than it being a sense of the school planning it." (015SC28081)

These responses and the general ease of access that faith-based RO practitioners have to Scottish non-denominational schools highlights several issues: whether or not persons of faith are desirable or appropriate in the delivery of RO; how practitioners are trained to deliver quality RO; and in particular how practitioners can be trained to recognise the sensings and lead events that can foster these sensings. Again there are differences between the responses of parents, practitioners and policy makers on these issues. The policy makers and practitioners mainly answered this question carefully and with conscious neutrality, stressing the skill-set and impartiality that might be necessary:

“The real issues are about how you give practitioners confidence and how do you get quality? Those are the real issues. There is another underlying issue which is the role of faith practitioners and their buy in to what is a ‘spiritual’ but not a ‘faith’ practice.” (003PM230514)  
 "...it’s not about teaching, you know about giving facts or figures, it’s about giving people the space to reflect, so anybody who’s skilled in doing that would be the right kind of person to do it. I think that’s the key bit." (020SC050914)

The parents saw faith as not just desirable but as a necessary qualification for someone leading RO events. Typical comments, even from those who expressed hesitations about bad practice and from those who did not declare a faith-stance themselves, included:

“Ministers [should deliver RO]... teachers can do it if they know what they’re teaching but if it’s someone who’s never believed in God how can they teach about the bible if they’ve never read it? *So you wouldn’t be afraid of a person of faith teaching in schools?* No. It would be better. *What limits would you set, or guidelines would you set, for them?* I don’t think I would really have a limit. ...I wouldn’t want someone who’s inexperienced in the bible teaching my child the bible or anything from it or any other religion because what would be the point in that? That’s like me going in and being a teacher and I’ve

never studied to be a teacher ...or saying I'm a doctor and I've never had training to be a doctor.” (032PCP241014)

“*What qualifies a minister to do this in schools? What kind of qualifications would you expect of them? Do you mean academic qualifications? Any kind of qualification. I suppose their faith really. Obviously I'd imagine most of them would have an MA in Theology or whatever but I would say their faith primarily.*” (024PCP201014)

The 1980 Education Act had made provision for the removal of RO from Scottish schools if a majority of parents in an education authority area requested it. At the initiative of the Edinburgh Secular Society in the City of Edinburgh a request was made (2013) that the Council ballot all school parents to have this done. The attempt did not succeed - partly on the grounds of cost and the positive submissions from parents in favour of retaining the status quo.<sup>17</sup> Attempts to remove ‘Special Religious Instruction’ (SRI), similar in some ways to our RO practices, from all Australian schools and to end State funding of school chaplaincy services provoked a reaction from parents broadly in favour of retaining RO delivered by the faith community. However the decision of Australian State governments to make SRI an ‘opt-in’ rather than an ‘opt out’ activity moved out of curriculum time and into extra-curricular time (e.g. lunchtimes and at the end of the school day) saw participation rates in SRI fall rapidly.<sup>18</sup> The clear majority of my parent interviewees sampled are happy with the status quo of Scottish RO remaining “religious” and continuing to be led by “(Christian) ministers”. In particular individual schools this is adapted of course: a ‘Christian’ religious observance makes little sense if a school’s catchment majority are of an alternative faith. I found that some schools consciously try to reflect multi-cultural, multi-faith Scotland in the make-up of their chaplaincy

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<sup>17</sup> Their petition to “remove religious observance from non-denominational schools” opened on 07.02.2013 with 1092 signatories. A counter petition from parents to retain religious observance opened on 25.02.2013 with 1852 signatories. The Education Children and Families Committee considered both petitions on 08.10.2013, 04.03.2014 and finally on 03.03.2015. The outcome was the retention of RO with the reiteration of existing policies on parental opt-out rights, and monitoring and supervising RO practitioners.

[http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory\\_record/267842/retain\\_religious\\_observance\\_in\\_non-denominational\\_schools](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/267842/retain_religious_observance_in_non-denominational_schools) (accessed 23.07.2016)

<sup>18</sup> In Victoria, for example, after the state government changed its policy in 2011, requiring parents to “opt in” to the classes rather than “opt out” enrolments fell from 92,808 students in 2013 to 53,361 in 2015 - a 42% plunge. <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/religious-instruction-scrapped-from-curriculum-20150820-gj425e.html> (accessed 23.07.2016)

teams but this is of little relevance in most of Scotland’s LEA’s. Insisting on a ‘representative team’ for every school of a Rabbi/ Imam/ Minister/ Humanist Celebrant/ etc. is simply not practical. Nor is it a true reflection of Scotland’s cultural diversity. There are few examples extant of ‘mixed faith’ teams, even in areas where local demographics might justify one. Deliberate efforts to create such teams often foundered:

“We have asked other people. We have asked a Rabbi, we definitely have asked an Imam or two, but as yet, and I think the Humanist Society have been asked a couple of times, but they haven’t really been up for it as yet. So we carry on in our wee Christian team [laughs].” (019SC040914)

The notion that the best RO practitioners are those with a personal faith stance persisted in my interview data, particularly with parents of pupils. Most parents in my sample, even those declaring their own stance to be ‘atheist’ or ‘sceptic’, emphatically preferred that RO be delivered by people with an active faith commitment, whether they were School staff or visiting clergy and faith representatives. It was felt that people of faith would have a greater passion for RO, as well as a better understanding of issues of faith and spirituality, and would also be more enthusiastic and knowledgeable. A typical remark was as follows:

**“Who’s the best person to deliver religious observance and spiritual development for your child? I’d say the local minister or priest or whatever belief is being implied to the child. To go to that individual to have it implied.”** (013PCS210814)

One parent, mindful of their own faith stance, had deliberately chosen a denominational school so that her daughter’s RO *would* be delivered by a person of faith. This came out in her answer to the question of who should deliver a school’s RO:

“Ministers I suppose. Obviously, and again I feel like a hypocrite, I should be doing it for my own child but because I don’t have a strong faith I would find the Religious Observance part difficult. Part of the reason [my daughter] goes to [-] is my partner is Catholic and before she started school we had the conversation about if she should go to a non-denominational school or a Catholic school but obviously the Catholic school it seems it’s more expected of you as a parent in terms of Religious Observance which is why we sent her to [ - (a non-denominational school)] but that was the reason probably because

there’s less expectation in a non-denominational school.”  
(024PCP201014)

Another parent strongly felt that RO in schools should be led by faith representatives, even if the parents of some children had no personal faith stance:

“...it gives the children the opportunity if it’s not happening in the house or within the family. That’s the parents’ choice if they don’t want to believe in God or any other religion, but give the children the opportunity to learn. How can they [the children] respect people or religions if they don’t know anything about it?” (032PCP241014)

One former headteacher interviewed (who had been a member of the RORG authorship team) had felt strongly that for the sake of integrity a faith-qualification was in fact a conscious necessity for leading RO/TfR,

"When I first became a headteacher ...I thought ‘I don’t know what I’m doing here, because I haven’t actually worked this out for myself yet and how can I stand up in front of a school full of children when I’m not certain where I stand in all of this?’... I went away and did *Alpha* [a church-based Christian enquiry course] at that stage if only just to sort out in my own head what I thought and what I believed in. Because, until I did that I didn’t think I had the right to stand up in front of children and colleagues and staff and parents and open my mouth on matters of spirituality. ...my own *Alpha* experience was, ...experiential. And therefore that’s what I started to bring into RO." (003PM230514)

That sense of integrity and of a working personal knowledge of faith at the least - and a passion at best - came through in the comments from practitioners too,

"I would say the best person is a person of faith who has good links with the school. I for example wouldn’t ever try and deliver a Religious Observance event from another faith standpoint. One, because I don’t know it well enough and, two, because I don’t believe it. I think the best person to deliver something is a person who passionately believes and knows what they’re speaking about.. For me the best teachers are the ones whose passion for their subject comes across." (016SC010914)

My own experiences are illustrative of the tensions and nuances for faith-based RO practitioners. As a school chaplain for over 30 years now I have been asked to present assemblies and assist in RME classes in which the focus was on Islam or Judaism. In presenting these I took particular care to consult with local

Imams and Rabbis. None of them felt they had sufficient confidence or competence to speak in these classroom settings themselves but were pleased to know care had been taken to teach about their faiths accurately. Both Imams and Rabbis were more than willing to provide artefacts and information and to facilitate guided visits to their Mosques and Synagogues. On one occasion a Muslim woman, a local shopkeeper, who had formed a friendship with Christian teachers in a missionary School in Pakistan was willing to come into school with me and demonstrate her prayer practices and talk about her faith and what it meant to her. Her Imam was happy to support her in this but was reluctant to come to the school himself. On another occasion I met with representatives from one education authority who had queried why the Gideons (a Christian organisation who believe the Bible is an important book and worthy of distribution, placing them in schools/ prisons/ hotels/ hospitals/ etc.) in their area did not also distribute copies of the Quran. They had also asked how the Gideons might react to being told they could only distribute bibles in the authority's education establishments if representatives of Islam were also invited to distribute the Quran. The answers highlight the personal integrity of any faith-representative: they would not promote a belief system they did not subscribe to but neither would they object to equal opportunity being given to other faith-representatives. There is also an issue of logic: it would make no sense to insist a Maths teacher should also give out French texts or Chemistry books whenever they handed out a book of logarithmic tables. In my experience no Imam of my acquaintance, given their cultural patterns, would be prepared to give out copies of the Quran in a general distribution such as the Gideons engage in. They would not take the risk of the Quran being disrespected or discarded. While on tours of synagogues with school groups I have never encountered any Rabbi who would be comfortable with the children touching or handling the Scrolls. In their own faith services the Scroll is never touched - only certain people will lift the Scrolls onto the Bimah (the platform), and a yad (a hand-held pointer) is used by a reader to mark their place in a text so that no human hand touches Scripture.

*In this chapter I have outlined the principal themes relating to the practice of RO in Scottish non-denominational schools. I have focussed mainly on*

*the views of three groups of interviewees: policy makers, practitioners and parents. Chapter 5 will summarise the views of the key group - the pupils themselves.*

*Another significant finding was that the sensings outlined in the RORG appear to constitute an incomplete list. There were frequent strong references to sensing stillness and to sensing community. Rather than deal with these in this chapter I will include this finding in my discussion of recommendations in chapter 6.*

## CHAPTER 5

### WHAT THE PUPILS SAY



Figure 13 - thinking for yourself © Steve Younger

“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”

(008PS230614 Stephen M 15.7)

## **“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

### **What the children and young people think of RO**

*During the reading phase of my research a single paper was found directly recording pupil voices on RO in Scottish Schools (Aitken, Gilfillan and Phipps 2010). To my knowledge no other first-voice paper has been added in the intervening years. In the previous chapter we cited evidence from interviews that practitioners and policy makers often lacked a clear sense of their purpose in delivering RO. It becomes all the more pertinent then to record what the children and young people themselves think is the purpose of the RO events they experience. Parents interviewed, broadly, seemed to prefer people of faith leading RO events in non-denominational schools. Again it is appropriate to determine what the children and young people feel about those who conduct RO events for them. We will also see that pupils are rarely involved in the planning and delivery of RO events: the majority are present as passive spectators rather than active participants. It is relevant to record how they feel about these events. As throughout this paper all names are the pseudonyms interviewees picked for themselves. This chapter will examine the main themes that emerged from the interviews with the seventeen primary school and thirty-five secondary school pupils interviewed.*

*These themes are:*

- “Don’t make it [RO] a policed endurance test”
- “Don’t make it so boring”
- “Don’t tell us what to think”
- “Let us ask our big questions. Help us find some answers.”
- “Don’t exclude us. Let us have a say. Let us help you.”

### **“Don’t make it a policed endurance test”**

The most frequent comments of pupils related to practicalities rather than purpose or personnel. Their repeated plea might be summed up as: just don’t make it an endurance test. The experiences of RO of most of the pupils in my sample are best summed up as a generally resigned and sometimes resented sense of ‘endurance’. For many in our primary Schools most of their assemblies are conducted in school halls and these usually involve the physical endurance

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

and self-discipline of having to sit still cross-legged on hard floors. It would be a challenge for an adult audience to engage and to pay attention and to enjoy an RO event if they had to sit on the floor like this and yet we routinely expect our youngest pupils to do it. I did not observe any RO event in any school where the staff shared the same seating arrangements as their pupils.

*“Anything else that you don’t like about assemblies? Sitting down forever. [Pause] Hard floor.”* (023PP201014 - Louise [9.2 F])

Schools obviously know their RO assemblies are physically uncomfortable events as it is common to see P7 classes ‘allowed’ to sit on benches or chairs as a privilege or reward. Indeed a common sanction for “bad” behaviour by primary seven pupils is the threat of removal from the benches and being made to “sit on the floor like everyone else”. RO events involving an extended period in an uncomfortable position do not make for eager participants. The offer of some measure of comfort for “good” behaviour and the loss of comfort privileges for “bad” behaviour reinforces the impression of RO events as an exercise in imbalanced power relationships and a form of social control. Pupils know when they are being manipulated and moved around. Older pupils expressed open resentment:

*“Why are we controlled by others and sorted into groups of intelligence and not equally together?”* (008PS230614 Stephen M 15.7)

Hamm (2014:10) makes a distinction between consensual rituals in schools which function to bind a school community together (e.g. assemblies, ceremonies) and differentiating rituals which function to mark off different groups within the school community for specific activities or purposes (e.g. age, gender, house). Though his categorisation would place RO events as “consensual”, being made to experience physical discomfort may well bind pupils together as a shared experience but it hardly feels “consensual” to them. Their instinct is to close ranks and resist rather than open up to moments of sensing. It feels to the pupils more like a scenario aimed at controlling them. Younger pupils sensed the unfairness too:

*“Well we have to sit on the floor and it’s just annoying because the floor is made of wood and we end up fidgeting and then the class, if we fidget, your name gets wrote down in the book but we need to earn points so we*

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

have to sit like that [sits cross-legged with hands resting on knees and a straight back - teachers at her school call this ‘legs in a basket, sit up straight’] all the time and our hands on our knees.”  
(031PP241014 - Jasmine F 8.11)

It is not conducive to positive RO to sit cross-legged on a hard floor and it is perceived as an unfair double standard when pupils hear comfortably seated staff enforcing compliance on them. School halls are also, typically, not physically conducive to creating an atmosphere for meaningful RO events. Most assembly halls double as gyms or dining areas or exam centres and consequently suffer from poor acoustics, poor temperature regulation (either too cold or too hot), poor ventilation, poor visibility and echoing background noise. To create a ‘sacred space’ in school halls and classrooms requires imagination, creativity, hard work and careful thought:

“It was interesting to fathom how the very same space that housed the students’ desks stuffed with comic books, car magazines and the occasional porno clippings could one day be transformed into a consecrated space for the holy sacrifice of God’s Son.” (McLaren 1999:199)

In secondary school RO events which I observed pupils generally did have seats. However, as these RO events took place in multi-use halls the seats were invariably hard-backed stacking plastic chairs not intended for prolonged use but for quick placing and easy stacking. A lack of variation in seat size adds to the discomfort: seats too deep for smaller first year pupils to sit back comfortably and too low-backed for larger sixth year pupils to sit comfortably supported.

“The seats hurt my back and they are un-comfy.” (Mark M 14.2  
008PS230614)

As a simple observation, staff in secondary schools I visited mostly stood to the sides rather than sat on the seats. Discomfort played a part but this also seems to be a management and crowd control measure. Standing made it easier for staff to monitor pupil behaviour. It also means that pupils can see staff watching their behaviour. This mutually understood watchfulness does not create a relaxed atmosphere for meaningful exploration of nuanced sensings. Again my reaction, difficult to quantify, but a strong impression nonetheless was that this exactly mirrored the management of large numbers of inmates in prisons I have

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

visited. The parallel is noted by others as well and McLaren (1999) makes the observation that such a pattern of behaviours casts the teacher as warder or “hegemonic-overlord” (1999:113). McLaren, observing the equivalent of RO in smaller classroom settings in US Catholic schools, reported that

“Three variant teacher-types were identified within the micro ritual: teacher-as-liminal-servant; teacher-as-entertainer; and teacher-as-hegemonic-overlord. When students responded with a sense of immediacy or purpose, either verbally or gesturally, to the teacher’s performance - when, for instance, they became the ‘primary actors’ - then they engaged in an authentic ritual of instruction: the surroundings were sanctified, the students became co-celebrants of knowledge with teacher (who had adopted the role of liminal servant), and the class was transformed into a congregation.”  
(McLaren 1999:113f)

If RO events are to be community acts of a whole school celebrating shared values then ways must be found to make them physically more comfortable and to break the standard patterns of managing school assemblies. Teachers must engage with the RO event too in enabling ways. When teachers and pupils at least share the discomfort and actively seek to overcome the inherent power imbalances then better RO events will follow. The temptation many of my faith-based practitioner interviewees seemed to be struggling with was to attempt to shift their audience in school RO events from being a class or a crowd to being a congregation such as they were more familiar with in their faith contexts. This reflected a setting in which they were more comfortable but the acts of worship a faith congregation engages in are normally intentional and consensual acts of worship. This is very different from a school RO setting in which the aim is to explore shared values and sensings. Neither an intent nor a consent to worship can be assumed in a school setting. The faith practitioners who were school chaplains in my sample naturally gravitated to formats for spirituality that they were more familiar with, without always recognising that what worked to take them into a different frame of mind in a church setting with a congregation sharing their faith is not generally replicated in a school setting with an audience not sharing their faith. Acts of worship are certainly permissible within Scottish Education but the guidelines insist that these should be a part of the informal curriculum. RO events are meant to be inclusive to those of all faiths

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

and accessible to all participants regardless of their personal faith stance.

**“Don’t make it so boring”**

Almost as frequent as references to physical discomfort was the sense of repetitiveness in content and format. Pupils found this boring. Staff presumably find it boring too but, by adult conventions, are generally too polite to say so. Pupils are also usually very polite and refrain from comment. However pupils sitting in apparent silence need not equate to listening and engagement. Given the opportunity to express themselves honestly in interview, the children and young people are blunt:

“Sometimes you hear the same stories that you heard a couple of weeks ago.” (Hillary 027PP221014)

“What I don’t like about it is they put on like clips on like which you’ve seen like a thousand times. You see that again, you see that again, but you feel like you’re just seeing the same one over and over again.” (Wallop 027PP221014)

“They just teach us the same things about Christians over and over again. It’s just the same thing. And it’s boring.” (Mark M 14.2 008PS230614)

Pupils were clearly bored by repetition and disengaged at both primary and secondary levels. Several pupils were articulate in expressing a sense of the lost opportunities this represented. A wistful regret at the time wasted could be glimpsed:

“I’ve been learning the same thing for the past four years. So I’ve not really learned anything else. I think it should be more about other religions ‘cos I’d show a bit more interest in that, in hearing about what other people believe rather than what the chaplains believe. I’ve heard that for four years. I’ve not got any disrespect towards them or anything. I’ve just heard it, the same thing, for years.” (Hannah (F 16.1) 008PS230614)

This repetitiveness of content and format was clearly breeding more contempt than familiarity. School staff routinely employ a huge variety of creativity and presentational techniques in classroom settings to deliver the curriculum for excellence. My observations in new-build schools in particular suggest the multi-media learning in classrooms is often in sharp and unfavourable contrast with the pupil experiences of RO events. I encountered a number of chaplains that were uncomfortable with the use of technology and electronic media yet they

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

were reluctant to ask for help from schools. A handful of faith practitioners I observed leading RO events in schools consistently seemed unable to adapt their style from what would have been more appropriate in a faith setting.

“The assemblies are more like people are lecturing you and it’s more like they’ve got an ulterior motive so it’s like our bad behaviour and things like that. So they say it to make us behave better....” (Sally 16.6 F - 022PS021014)

This inability of some faith-based practitioners of RO to distinguish between a school-setting and a faith-setting often seemed to lie behind those pupils who made negative comments that the assemblies were “boring”. Even those few pupils who also attended places of worship outside of school and who identified themselves as having faith struggled to maintain interest in school:

“I mean, I don’t think any of the Religious assemblies have stood out because they’re so, like kind of shouldered off in a way, I mean I’ll sit and I’ll enjoy them and I’ll listen but, like I mean, along with less than seven other people in my year, those are the only people that will take anything from it. So I think they’re just not much thoughts put into them. Like obviously by the people that deliver them a lot of thought is put in and it’s like they take it as of great importance but no-one actually listens.” (Vicky 007PS200614)

At least some of the practitioners were very aware of these flaws and were seeking positive ways to overcome them or alternatives to the existing assembly patterns:

“...some of the senior pupils were saying “We don’t like being told to sit in assemblies, we don’t like the fact that we’re sitting there listening to someone speak and there’s no chance of interaction. We can’t ask our questions. We can’t say to them, ‘Look, we don’t understand that’ or ‘we don’t agree with that’. There’s no interaction.” And so, with the roving chaplaincy we’re trying to provide that option.” (016SC010914)

More than one practitioner mentioned the notion of ‘roving chaplaincy’ in which chaplains supplemented their formal assemblies with informal ‘walkabouts’ at intervals and lunch-times. They felt this allowed them to interact with the pupils and build better relationships with them and the pupils seemed to agree. From the comments of pupils it is clear that some of those presenting RO events were making good connections with them, were mastering multi-media presentations,

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and were gaining the attention of pupils and engaging them in significant moments of sensing.

“Good. The chaplin [sic] makes it interesting. Uses references we understands [sic] and includes the use of technology. Bad. They take a while. Sometimes readings from the bible don’t make a lot of sense to me.” (008PS230614 Hannah F 16.1)

I would love to have witnessed the particular assembly referenced in this comment from one pupil who really enjoyed his school’s RO events -

“...when speakers tie in real life events or use visual aids to like convey the message that they’re trying to get across because when it’s just a story told blankly, even sometimes when it’s got a PowerPoint it’s still quite dull. If they maybe use something that’s been in the news or, like, we’ve had chainsaws used by Mister [name omitted] and that got our attention.” (Marcus 027PS221014)

The same pupil showed insight and perception, commenting that even such a memorable attempt to overcome the boredom could not guarantee engagement or understanding:

“A lot of people like just actually they’ll maybe watch the, like, listen to all the jokes and watch chainsaws being used and then when it actually gets to the bit, the most important bit of the assembly they’ll just turn off. There’s some people will sit and just twiddle their thumbs while the most important bit of the assembly is being said. I don’t really know if there’s a way round that but the more interesting it is and a lot of time that humour is used its better really.” (Marcus 027PS221014)

When questioned further, ‘Marcus’ could remember the chainsaw being used but could not remember why it had been used or what the point had been.

Other chaplaincy teams observed delivering RO events had opted to supplement their assemblies with classroom follow-up in RME periods. Other teams had abandoned assemblies entirely and sought to replace them with what were perceived to be better ‘quality’ events. There was an enormous amount of creativity. Wherever this creativity was allowed to flourish the response to RO events was dramatically transformed. These large-scale, better-planned events often seemed far more integrated into the capacities and aims of the curriculum for excellence. In several schools - primary and secondary - these events were

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being written in to school improvement plans and forward plans. School managers appreciated and welcomed RO events that dovetailed with some of the programmes the Scottish Government and their local Education Authorities were encouraging them to participate in: e.g. ‘Rights Respecting Award Scheme’, ‘Inspire-Aspire’, ‘Character Scotland’, ‘Peer Mediation’ training, and ‘Restorative Justice’ programmes. Practitioners (staff and faith-based chaplains) who could assist schools to deliver these programmes and link them to curriculum for excellence were invariably welcomed. These events were also well-received by pupils. Significantly these were also the events that had higher levels of pupil involvement in planning and delivery. Where pupils are given a measure of input and control they respond well. Where they are excluded from input and control they rebel. In as many words they frequently voiced their opposition to being told what to think and believe.

***“Don’t tell us what to think”***

Pupils readily perceived when there were efforts being made in RO events to indoctrinate them or to privilege one faith or belief over another. Interestingly though it was less that they question the place of ‘religion’ in assemblies and RO events and more that they wondered why there was not parity of religions. Schools were sometimes hoisted on their own successes in transmitting values such as ‘equality’ and ‘tolerance’: pupils could spot clearly when RO events showed inequality or intolerance and when they were being indoctrinated.

“But there’s [sic] some teachers that push their religion towards you, like “this needs to be your religion”, and you feel forced to take it on sometimes but you don’t want to because you don’t believe in the religion. Why do we get certain kinds of religious [sic]...why don’t we get religious assemblies for all different religions?”

(Sarah (F 13.11) 008PS230614)

Pupils can detect when they are being indoctrinated and also when they are simply not being respected. In one of the secondary school groups I interviewed, we drifted into a discussion on what makes a ‘good’ teacher. The main reasons for teachers being counted as ‘good’ were: they care about you, they respect

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you and treat you as a person, they listen to you, and you’re able to trust them. My enquiry “*Be honest: do you feel the same about assemblies? Do you ever get that feeling in an assembly?*” was met with an emphatic chorus of “No” and a universal shaking of heads (008PS230614).

However, pupils seemed to expect and simply accept that if the leader of an RO event has a personal faith stance then that person would speak from their faith perspective. The pupils readily gave respect even if they were not being shown respect. They genuinely wanted to know what RO practitioners who held a personal faith would have to say about some things. They just didn’t want to be told what to think. A typical comment came from ‘Dave’, a sixteen year-old boy,

“Yeah, I feel they try an’ make religion all fun and laughy. I just feel they should approach it as it is. Ah mean...they shouldn’t be afraid to cover the more controversial parts of the bible, since, like, I myself am very pro Gay rights, I’m extremely pro Gay Rights, an’ they seem to have, at religious assemblies, they seem to avoid talking about the parts of the bible that are negative against that kind of thing and I believe that they should bring it up ‘cos it would make for an interesting discussion and it would be interesting to hear people’s opinions on that.” (Dave 007PS200614)

Even more pointed was the recorded and transcribed view of fifteen years and six months old ‘Stephen’,

“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think it doesn’t make you go off and do your own but instead they tries [sic] to keep you to one strict mindset.” (008PS230614 Stephen M 15.7)

In a written comment, ‘Ash Ketchum’, a fifteen years and seven months old boy in another secondary school, wanted religious observance in which those leading showed equity and trusted pupils to make their own judgements,

“Making sure that no one gets particularly offended by anything. Ensuring no discrimination. Ensuring you keep an open mind towards faiths and opinions. Allowing people to make their own disisions (sic)” (027PS221014)

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

Pupils showed a healthy scepticism about faith-practitioners leading their RO events coupled with a genuine curiosity as to what these practitioners really believed and what their arguments and motives might be. ‘Gabriella’ (aged fourteen years and six months) wondered,

“Religious observance in schools, is it based on education or is it based on unity? Do they bring up religious observance in education to educate people on different beliefs throughout the world or is it to bring religions together into unity between each belief instead of rivalry?” (Gabriella 008PS230614)

This curiosity frequently cropped up in the discussions with pupils at primary and secondary schools. The RORG speaks of RO events as a place (or “space”) for six sensings. For primary school children, sensing mystery, values and challenge were the ones that they more readily identified with and they often voiced significant personal questions related to these. Secondary pupils could identify with these three but also with sensing meaningfulness, ‘otherness’ and a changed quality in awareness. Again their way in to exploring these seemed to be through curiosity and by voicing significant personal questions. Of the six sensings, ‘mystery’, ‘challenge’ and ‘values’ could be readily identified in the interviews with pupils of all ages. However, remaining sensings - ‘meaningfulness’, ‘otherness’ and a ‘changed quality in awareness’ - appeared to be largely absent in the interviews with Primary school-aged pupils. In reference to learning to think like a historian, Vermeer commented that,

“research in the field of historical reasoning has shown that the level of historical reasoning is indeed related to age.” (Vermeer 2012:344).

He contends that this age difference also applies to learning in Religious Education, that religious reasoning is also a learned skill, which implies his belief that the thinking skills required for religious reasoning may also be age-related:

“In my opinion, the cultural practice pupils must learn to participate in is not the cultural-religious practice of the religious believer, but the cultural-scientific practice of the religious scholar! Analogous to teaching the basic principles, meta-concepts and thinking skills of, for instance history, physics or biology, which enables pupils to consider reality from the perspective of these disciplines, religious education should help students to adopt a scholarly religious perspective on

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reality and to enhance their capacity for scholarly religious thought or religious reasoning. Hence the primary aim of religious education is not to facilitate the formation of a religious identity or a personal philosophy of life, but to facilitate religious reasoning.” (Vermeer 2012:338).

It is a small step from this to realising that some of the RO sensings - ‘meaningfulness’, ‘otherness’ and a ‘changed quality in awareness’ - may require higher order thinking skills that younger pupils may not yet have acquired and which older pupils may have greater facility in. The E’s and O’s for every other curricular area of CfE are arranged in age-related levels and there is no reason to think that experiencing the sensings would be any different. There is a tacit recognition of this issue of differences between ages and levels in some of the exemplar material that Education Scotland offers for Religious Education, e.g.

“In collaboration with staff in South Lanarkshire Council, this resource has been developed to provide exemplification in Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and to exemplify progression across Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) from early to fourth levels. It uses Christian Parables as contexts for learning.”<sup>19</sup>

The awareness of a link between age and thinking skills as an important factor in RO is even more explicit in CfE Briefing 16 (2014) on Religious Observance<sup>20</sup> which states that,

“RO helps learners to reflect upon “ultimate questions” (RME 3-09a, RERC 1-23a -4-23a) and in considering and reflecting upon topical social and moral issues (RME 1-09a, 1-09c, 3-09c)...Other attributes and skills can be promoted through RO. For example, skills such as reflection and evaluation benefit from relevant experiences across the curriculum....RO can also help learners to develop higher order skills including, for example, analysis and evaluation.” (CfE Briefing 16 2014)

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<sup>19</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/rme20-higher-order-thinking-in-rme-christian-parables.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> Available as a free pdf download from Education Scotland at [www.education.gov.scot](http://www.education.gov.scot)

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

My main point of interest though is that pupils of all ages - regardless of which sensing their interest might be assigned to - perceived RO events as the ideal space in which to explore their “big questions” and I turn now to this thought that questions are central to RO.

***“Let us ask our big questions. Help us find some answers.”***

When the students themselves are invited to plan and create RO events that ‘scratch where they itch’ they do not shy away from controversy and they seize the opportunity to ask their big questions. Even primary school pupils came out with some very penetrating and disturbing questions. Their questions were overwhelmingly theological (existential, eschatological and soteriological) and ethical. Children and young people of all ages expressed intense curiosity about the obvious philosophical questions that might be expected such as our existence, the existence of ‘god’ or ‘gods’, and the problem of evil. A selection suffices:

“Is there a real purpose behind us all being here? Do we each really have a significance?” (008PS230614 Sarah F 13.11)

“What is life?” (Bert 17.3 F 022PS021014)

“Why was the world made and what is it for?” (027PP221014 - Hillary)

“How were we made and what were we made from?” (031PP241014 - Jasmine F 8.11)

“What proof is there of God?” (Daryl Dixon 15.2 M 022PS021014)

“Why can life be unfair and why are these viruses like Ebola, cancer, etc. in this world and why are they killing people all the time?” (027PP221014 Milly)

“Why is Jesus not coming to Earth? Like the world is currently really corrupt and there’s some really bad things going on and I think he should really come and help.” (027PP221014 Bob)

“Why can’t the world live in peace?” (027PP221014 Jen Jen)

The extent to which soteriological (“What must I do to be saved?”) and eschatological questions (questions about death and dying) dominated the thinking of even relatively young pupils within my sample is noteworthy and would be worthy of further research:

“If I die do I get to choose a reincarnation? If I die is that it?” (Steve 17.7 M 022PS021014)

“Do people really come back as different creatures depending on how they

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

live their lives?” (008PS230614 Mark M 14.2)

“Is everyone going to heaven or are some people going to hell?” (008PS230614 Megan F 17.3)

“What is the point in learn (sic) and doing stuff if once we are ‘gone’ it will be a waste?” (008PS230614 Louise F 13.10)

“Do we have a reincarnation?” (Vindaloo 14.6 M 022PS021014)

“Will we ever know what happens when we die, before we die?” (Katie Fan 12.1 F 022PS021014)

“Is there life after death?” (Bert 17.3 F 022PS021014)

At a ‘Challenging Perceptions of Faith’ event in one Secondary School, I invited 80 S5 and S6 pupils to anonymously write their big questions on post-it notes and place them on a discussion board. When I collected and analysed these questions later, one quarter of the questions related to death, dying, bereavement, near-death and after-death experiences. This is one of the topics that, arguably, has no other “space” in the curriculum for pupils to explore and which needs answers at the level of the sensings: meaningfulness, ‘otherness’ and ‘changed quality of awareness’. Although the vocabulary and the framing of these questions may appear to be theological, the answers the pupils need may not be theological. When it comes to questions about death and dying my discussions with the children and young people suggest they do not want a theological or philosophical debate: they want a space to explore and discuss without pressure to decide, and they want spiritual understanding and reassurance. They want and need something, essentially, that can only be found in the sensings.

Other common questions within my sample fell into more conventional, (if sometimes overlapping) categories of theology, of philosophical curiosity and of doctrinal enquiry. The theological questions, for example, related to standard issues of comparative religion:

“Why do we only learn about Christianity?” (008PS230614 Stephen M 15.7)

“Why do we focus on Christianity?” (Ro Ro Jam Jam 13.4 M 022PS021014)

The philosophical enquiries touched on the nature of religion and of spirituality and what role religion fills in human experience, for instance,

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

“Why is [sic] there so many religions?” (Amelia 13.6 F 022PS021014)

“Why do we need religion in the world today?” (Bobby 15.5 M 022PS021014)

There were also a host of doctrinal questions. E.g.,

“Then why do we get certain kinds of religious...why don’t we get religious assemblies for all different religions? As opposed to just Catholic or Christian?” (Sarah 13.11 F 008PS230614)

“Why does the school feel they need to teach us about religion?” (Sally 16.6 F 022PS021014)

“Why is Satan so, so negative? How has God lived forever even before the world started? How long has God lived?” (027PP221014 David)

“How long did it take people to write the Bible?” (027PP221014 Larry L)

The young people I spoke to had robust views on these issues and expressed a strong desire to explore some of the very issues schools would routinely avoid as pastorally risky, politically incorrect and potentially indoctrinatory - or as a toxic combination of all three. Referring back to the discussion we referenced earlier about what makes “good teachers” - these were the ones who pupils perceived as listening to them and with whom no topic was taboo.

A selection of direct quotes illustrates the pupils’ fearlessness and apparently shows them (even those declaring themselves ‘atheist’) spontaneously asking for more religion rather than less religion in RO/TfR events, perhaps perceiving that the potential answers to their big questions could not be found in any other realm of experience or area of the curriculum:

“...they [those leading RO events] don’t actually seem to try and bring anyone in to religion ‘cos, I respect religious people but I personally, due to some events in my life, ah amn’t religious due to some stuff that I don’t want to talk about but I believe they should try and do a better job of it, selling religion to people and why it is important.” (‘Dave’ 007PS200614)  
“I think they should get people in from all different religions to an assembly ‘cos a lot of people wonder why people have different religions, but if they maybe heard why each person’s picked that religion they’d understand it

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more.” (Louise F 13.10 008PS230614)

“I know that Christianity might be the most accessible to a school but ...I’m sure like a rabbi or something would be more than happy to come and talk in a school, you know, and try and inspire different people that haven’t found a religious path or chosen to be an atheist, so I think that’s definitely something that could be helped.” (‘Vicky’ 007PS200614)

“Well, I think that the purpose should be, even if you are a Muslim, you should, they should still let every single person talk about their views, even though the main thing is Christianity.” (Megan F 17.3 008PS230614)

In general, these pupils seem to be unafraid of the contested and the controversial. They want a place for their big questions to be explored and they want guidance on how to find answers. However, their big questions stray into theology, ethics, politics, religion, etc., all areas which adults in school are reluctant to deal with or afraid to enter into or feel ill-equipped to handle.

“As educators we cannot control what children will think or their response to the dangers and temptations they will face on the streets and in their private lives. We can, however, try to establish a safe place in which to share what they think, feel and experience, and in which their thoughts will be heard.” (Gardner, Cairns and Lawton 2000:52)

This issue of involving pupils as planners and participants and directors of RO events causes far more debate amongst the practitioners than it does amongst the pupils. The pupils are offering to help and they want to have a say in what is explored in RO events. It is the practitioners and the school staff who struggle to accommodate this. Partly there are time constraints. It might also be that arranging pupil participation in the planning of RO events takes a lower priority and is not subject to the same pressure as, for instance, including pupils in ‘Rights Respecting’ committees or Eco-School steering groups or Pupil Councils.

**“Don’t exclude us. Let us have a say. Let us help you.”**

In general it is probably the case that most pupils only currently experience RO/ TfR events passively and as spectators. RO events are things done *for* them and *to* them rather than *with* them. The pupils are rarely involved at the planning and preparation stages. Pupils are infrequently consulted on topics in advance and are often also omitted from any meaningful feedback after an event. The RO template for recording RO events, on Education

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Scotland’s own website, includes three spaces for ‘Evaluation’ of each event: one for the practitioner to complete, one for a member of the school SMT to complete, and one for Pupil feedback and comment. It would be an interesting study - beyond this research - to analyse the growing body of completed templates from schools across Scotland to see how many have included any evaluation by Pupils. Feedback on RO/TfR events most often either comes from those delivering the events or from staff managing the events rather than from the pupils themselves. Practitioners tend to talk in terms of things “going well” judged by a subjective impression of focussed listening. Staff tend to talk in terms of things “going well” judged by noise levels, quietness, physical stillness (lack of fidgeting) and ‘good’ behaviour. Few practitioners or staff in events I have observed seemed self-aware or self-critical of this lack of pupil voice and pupil input. In one of the larger-scale RO events I participated in for three hundred and fifty secondary school first-year pupils, anonymous and uncensored feedback was invited in the form of an on-line questionnaire run by the school’s IT department. A sample of one hundred and fifty of the pupils was given unmonitored time in an IT lesson to complete the questionnaire. Despite the concerns of some staff, not a single pupil abused this system or appropriated it for obscenity or offensiveness. Ninety percent of responses were positive. A wealth of usable and useful comments and suggestions were offered too which can be incorporated into the planning of the event for next year’s first-year cohort. This method is notable for two points: firstly its rarity and secondly its genuine usefulness. It is a rare comment to hear one practitioner admit:

“I think it’s important to get some feedback from the pupils because ...it’s a case of “well, the kids sat quietly therefore they were engaged” well, no, they sat quietly because they know they need to sit quietly. That just, and I know from other teachers that they’ll say, “see when these Chaplains are in the kids hate it” but the Chaplains are saying that the kids are quiet therefore they’re engaged.”  
(018SC040914)

If the aims and purposes of RO events are to explore sensings then feedback needs to relate directly to these sensings and it is the pupils themselves as spectators and subjects who are best placed to determine if they have experienced moments of sensing. In my interviews with pupils many

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expressed that they had been unaware of the sensings underlying RO events. Although the vocabulary of sensing needed adjusting for the pupils (as mentioned in chapters 2 and 3), they were keen to declare when they had experienced such moments. Once they knew a particular sensing was being explored in an event they were keen to evaluate and give comment on whether or not they had caught glimpses of it. Direct, honest feedback from pupils needs to be considered and gathered. That may mean training them in what to look for and teaching them a vocabulary of identification and assessment in much the same way as they are taught the vocabulary and skills of emotional intelligence.

"I think we need to have far more conversations as to what that ['good' RO] might look like with young people and children, with their experience of it, ...without the young person that's gone through the experience we can't actually assess its benefits for them. And that needs to be an ongoing thing that we do often if not always."  
(015SC280814)

It is also important that the children and young people - the intended beneficiaries and subjects of our RO events - have some sense of involvement from the very outset if these are to be meaningful events. This matters if the intent of RO is to move beyond an exploration of values or of moral education and enable the pupils to think for themselves:

"Kids can sit through whole school assemblies where they are lectured about litter or about bullying or about poverty. And what's that? It's an attempt to brainwash in a way, to influence. It's the adult in that situation standing up saying "I know best and I'm going to tell you how to behave when you've got rubbish in your hand. I'm going to tell you how to behave towards your community. I'm going to tell you how to behave towards children that are less fortunate. I'm going to tell you how you should behave towards people that are bullies to others," rather than the youngsters actually having some ownership and engaging with that and exploring for themselves the rights and wrongs and the ethics of all of that." (004PM030614)

It is even more important that there is real engagement if sensing is to occur. Schools are perhaps reluctant to involve pupils as the management teams cannot then manipulate or control or even anticipate what might happen. There are risks of course but perhaps more likely is simply a fear in staff that they will be out of their depth and comfort zone.

**“The system tries to make you think a certain way and not what you want to think. It doesn’t make you go off and do your own [thinking]”**

"I had a word with the Year Head that I am assigned to and we are going to ask the young people to tell us what are the sorts of things that they would like me to talk about, which is a little bit scary. ....The idea is speaking informally to people like the pupils about what they'd like to see, so we're having a bit of an experiment with the 5<sup>th</sup> years that I'm with, to think about well what do they want me to talk about, what sort of things do they want to think about, and tie it in with that."  
(019SC040914)

Yet this is a risk that the philosophy of Curriculum for Excellence surely encourages though few practitioners seemed insightful enough to realise this and even fewer bold enough to try to implement it,

"The more you hand the learning over to children and allow them to experience, the more the separation [between RO and RME] starts to become blurred. And if that's what curriculum for excellence is all about then it's maybe something we should think about more often."  
(003PM230514)

For some practitioners at least it's worth the risk:

"...there's something about exploring the life issues there and that can look quite messy and quite painful when they're given that space but actually there's a lot of healing and hope that comes out of exploring that with them."  
(006FG (1)110614)

Given that pupils are generally reacting to RO as events to be endured, as events that are boring and as something that they feel excluded from creating and delivering, it seemed appropriate to ask them how they felt about opting out of such events. This has a particular relevance in contemporary Scottish education as a number of vocal pressure groups are actively challenging the place of RO. The right of parents to opt their children out of RO has been in place since the primary legislation of 1872 (Sellar 2012), which included a 'Conscience Clause' (Section 68) allowing parents to withdraw their child from any instruction in religious subjects and from any religious observance.

Despite their general sense of RO events as normally to be passively endured and sometimes to be actively resented, only one of the pupils expressed any desire to opt out. Those that did discuss this at all thought that it should be their choice and their decision rather than a parental choice. In general though

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they were apparently keener to offer help in shaping more relevant RO than in escaping it. Despite the views expressed by some pressure groups, none of the parents I interviewed wanted to exercise an opt-out for their children and none of them viewed an opt-out as having any merit. Practitioners interviewed generally seemed to find discussion of opting out to be a distraction. Policy-makers interviewed generally viewed opting out as undesirable, poor educational practice, and an administrative inconvenience. Legislation allows for an opt-out of course but the impression I gained from talking to these pupils was that they and their families were generally unaware of this option. In the few instances I came across in the schools visited, in practice, schools had only accommodated an opt-out where parents had formally requested it and never when pupils had voiced it. Deeper discussion of an opt-out is beyond the parameters of this paper, though from my interviews with these fifty-two pupils only one expressed a desire to be allowed to opt out

“Why are we meant to go to assemblies when some people are atheist, for example? Why do some people have to go to Religious Assemblies, for example if an atheist wants to go or doesn’t want to go? ...Nothing is good from it [RO assemblies] they are boring and actually depressing. I would rather sit in a classroom, with the door locked, myself.”

(Ben M 17.4 008PS230614)

*The next chapter offers suggestions arising from the findings reported in chapters 4 and 5. These relate particularly to the training of RO practitioners and offer some tools for consideration. Chapter 6 will also offer an argument that the current list of sensings is incomplete: at least two more are valid - sensing stillness and sensing community.*

## CHAPTER 6

### ANALYSIS AND ADVANCES IN PRACTICAL APPLICATION



Figure 14 - a moment of quiet contemplation © Steve Younger

“Silence, stillness, and solitude have been almost eliminated from the lives of children...”

(Kessler 2000:37)

*In this chapter I reflect on the gaps discerned in the core text for religious observance within Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence. There is strong evidence in the literature and in my findings that there are an incomplete number of sensings listed in the ‘Religious Observance Review Group Report’. Stillness and Community should be taken into account as discrete sensings. I also reflect on the education of school staff and chaplains in both discerning spirituality and in delivering religious observance. I then go on to offer some tools for spiritual development that are compliant with the sensings and with the aims of the curriculum for excellence and reflect on my experiences of offering a practical application.*

### **Sensing Stillness**

All schools are microcosms of the wider cultures within which they are set. They are themselves systems within systems (Bronfenbrenner 1979:8) reflecting influences from the cultures which surround them and being shaped by them. In the UK, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) offer evidence of a societal shift from institutional forms of ‘religion’ to a growing exploration of ‘spirituality’ and ‘spiritual practices’ such as meditation. Heelas and Woodhead believe it significant enough to warrant calling it a “spiritual revolution.” They point to a rapid growth in alternative, non-traditional, and non-religious forms for exploring spirituality. In the US, Smith and Denton (2005) have found a parallel interest in what they call “soul searching” amongst younger generations in particular. Ireland’s schools are responding in number very positively to those offering expertise and training in meditation<sup>21</sup>. This questing after spiritual values and practices is increasingly being recognised in the UK too. Scottish schools reflect this with a growing number exploring such fields as Mindfulness<sup>22</sup>.

It might be expected that in the realm of religious practices a sensing after stillness or the practice of solitude would emerge as a clear strand. The Monastic and meditative traditions of many faiths place a premium on stillness, peace, silent contemplation and quietness. The first word of the Rule of St. Benedict is “Listen” - a lost art for many. The writing on education frequently

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<sup>21</sup> For example, [www.christianmeditation.ie](http://www.christianmeditation.ie)

<sup>22</sup> For example, [mindfulnessinschools.org](http://mindfulnessinschools.org)

hints at the importance of stillness in Education as well. The lack of stillness is recognised as a deficit in the avidly secular educational systems of the US:

“Silence, stillness, and solitude have been almost eliminated from the lives of children and from U.S. culture in general.” (Kessler 2000:37)

The loss of quietness and contemplation can leave people fraught and un-refreshed. We seem little better in the UK’s experiences of education. Williams notes that the loss of stillness is damaging:

“The skills have been lost of being present for and in an ‘other’, and what remains is mistrust and violence. It sounds odd, I suspect, to talk of a ‘skill’ being involved in being present for an ‘other’, a ‘skill’ of being seen; but there is such a thing as a habit of relinquishing controlled self-presentation; or of that attentive stillness which is somehow bound up with being attended to.” (Williams 2003:214)

This seems to be borne out by those within education who see themselves as having a key role in training children and young people the “skill” of stillness:

“Since children often begin their formal schooling with little experience of silence and stillness, these can again be considered ‘skills’ which need to be taught and mastered by students if they are to engage with issues of meaning and value, and hence to use spiritual intelligence to address these issues. Therefore, opportunities for children to engage in silence and stillness need to be consciously planned and built into the curriculum by educators.” (Adams, Hyde and Woolley 2008:102)

Those whose task is counselling and guidance frequently speak of picking up the pieces of poor educational practices and repairing the damage caused by the omission of health-giving practices within the curriculum. They point particularly to the healing power of stillness:

“We shall see, again and again, in the journal notes of other children’s healing sessions, how a special place was created in which stillness and peace, calmness and quiet, could replace restlessness and disquiet - perhaps, metaphorically, like an oasis in which to stop and renew one’s energies on the demanding journey of life.” (Woodward 2007:32)

More relevant for our purposes here is their perception that stillness is a contributor to spiritual development,

“...we have seen the powerful effect on spiritual development, learning, and the building of community when students are given the

chance to stop the noise, quiet the mind, and still the body.” (Kessler 2000:57)

Some writers seem to instinctively place stillness alongside the familiar sensings of the RORG document.

A moot point would be then whether stillness is a catalyst for some of the sensings or a sensing in its own right. Dorr seems to suggest stillness is a pathway to sensing a changed quality of awareness -

“The soft values can be categorised into five different types. ....Finally, there are more overtly spiritual values, such as a sense of inner peace and serenity, as well as a sense of meaning in life in general and a sense of personal purpose or vocation. At their highest, these spiritual values are quasi-mystical values. For many people they involve having a personal relationship with God. But there are many others who associate them with a sense of harmony and oneness with nature or with some non-personal Absolute.” (Dorr 2006:51)

Hart similarly identifies stillness as a pathway to sensing, particularly the sense of mystery and, for some, a sense of a connection to a deity,

“In silence, we can begin to hear the beat of our own heart or the pulse of our passions more clearly and witness the stream of our consciousness. In silence, there is also room to listen to the voice of the ‘Other’. In silence and stillness, we notice what has always been there, but never attended to: feeling, sound, thought, habit, presence.” (Hart 2011:20)

My participant observation, recorded in my research journal, suggested stillness as a sensing in its own right rather than as only catalyst or subordinate for other sensings. This thought came after noting the effect of accidental opportunities for stillness. My research Journal entry for March 27<sup>th</sup> 2014 noted the stillness and quietness that came over a boisterous P7 group on a forest walk, and the May 21<sup>st</sup> 2014 entry noted the stresses on SMT members and asked where were their moments of stillness. Kessler (2000), who is quoted in the header for this chapter, was one of those in the literature who highlighted the value of quietness and stillness. A closer look at the literature found frequent allusions to the perceived value of stillness. Stillness was hailed as a valuable skill that could and should be taught to pupils (Adams, Hyde and Woolley 2008:102); as a means to access awe and otherness (Burns & Lamont 1996:129); as having potential to connect to the transcendent or to a Transcendent Other (Johnson & Neagley

2011); as an experience older students frequently yearned for and enjoyed as respite from busyness (Kessler 2000:13); and as an aid to healing (Woodward 2007:32). Lees (2012), writing in a UK context, has contributed a book on recovering the value of the practice of silence in whole school and classroom settings. In my own sampling, pupils themselves rarely seemed to refer in any explicit vocabulary to a need for reflective stillness (a seventeen year-old boy) was a rare exception when he spoke of assemblies as an opportunity to “stop”:

“I like the fact that they [referring to prefect-led assemblies in his school] can bring a moral message and it’s good to think about it and to cap the day and stop and think “well, what does that mean in my life?” And I like bigger questions so that kind of appeals to me to have that like half-way through the day and you think about it afterwards.” (027PS221014 Axel Male 17.2)

It was mostly in the participant observation of RO events and of other episodes within school life that I discerned a focus on stillness. My reflection on stillness as a missing sensing began with participant observation recorded in my Research Journal (March 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014) on a school residential trip which had involved taking a class of thirty P6 pupils to an Adventure Centre in the Cairngorms National Park. Staff from the Centre took us for a forest walk to the shores of a loch. There was no agenda or declared purpose other than a walk on a frosty, spring morning that happened to be bright and clear. For the children the excitement of piling into a convoy of minibuses and driving out of the Centre heightened their noise and energy levels. Released from the minibuses the childrens’ initial reaction was to shout and run like excited dogs let off the leash with a thousand scents to follow. As the Centre staff gathered us and we began the walk along a marked trail I noticed the effect of the forest on the children and the adults (both the Centre staff and the school staff). Though these children were noisy and boisterous to start with, every one of us quietened as we walked under the canopy of Scots Pines and deeper into the forest. We all began to walk quietly. I noticed that each child also had moments where they just stopped. This ‘stop’ was literal and metaphorical. Each, for a moment, seemed to find a moment of stillness or quietness. Even the most energetic and relentlessly active would pause for a short while. It reminded me that I have previously observed other people have the same reaction to instances such as

entering a Cathedral or encountering a painting in a Gallery or standing on an empty beach. I've felt the same moments myself in such places.

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence highlights the opportunities for exploration (physical and spiritual) arising in 'Outdoor Learning.'<sup>23</sup> Books such as Thomas's (2014) are easily found, her title saying it all - "How to get kids Offline, Outdoors and Connecting with Nature: 200+ creative activities to encourage self-esteem, mindfulness and wellbeing." But of course moments of stillness and places of contemplation and encounter and of 'otherness' and of spirituality are not solely confined to settings in Nature. Mecum's (2001) 168 Hawaiian children (joined by many of their parents who enthusiastically took part too), sent out with cameras to 'take a picture of God', inevitably brought back diverse images of the flora, fauna and beautiful natural wonders of their area, but they also "found God" in people (individual faces and crowds), in workplaces, in townscapes, and in the industrial/military landscape of the Naval base. Chang's (2013) anonymous respondents expressed their spirituality not in Nature but essentially through the medium of graffiti on urban walls and the boarding round derelict sites. Iyer (2011), a travelling companion of the fourteenth Dalai Lama for the last 30 years, drew together the collection of '100 Journeys for the Spirit', featuring places from across the world that visitors have found "sacred, inspiring, mysterious, enlightening". Roughly a third of these places are man-made shrines, temples, mosques, churches, palaces, and towns rather than natural wonders. Campo (2013) offers a wonderful exploration of the creative spiritualities, the art and music, and the performances of people using a disputed and derelict riverside area in the heart of Brooklyn. Art and architecture, music and movement, are also doorways to a contemplative, reflective stillness and spirituality<sup>24</sup>.

However, the instances, recorded above in my Research Journal, and the frequent references to "stillness" in the literature, make me posit that there is an innate need in each of us for stillness, a need for moments of peace, wherever and however we find it. It is not a peripheral experience and it is

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<sup>23</sup> A typical document is the 'Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning' (available in free pdf download from <https://education.gov.scot>)

<sup>24</sup> For example, simply entering 'Spirituality through Art' in an on-line search engine produced 49,300,000 hits (A Google search on 16.09.2017)

prevalent across cultures and age groups. It merits recognition as a sensing in its own right. “Stillness” is the best word I can offer for that combination of restfulness, peace, quietness, stilling of body and mind, contemplativeness, ease, relaxedness, and mindfulness. Over the course of that P6 high energy residential week of skiing, abseiling, climbing, swimming, orienteering and sports, the most frequent discussions on the bus on the way home all centred on the forest walk. The most repeated answer to the question “What did you enjoy most?” was “The Forest” - the one place where we had been quiet and slow and unhurried. Further participant observation and interview material reinforced the importance of these oasis moments of stillness and quietness. At least one of the practitioners interviewed preferred silence to applause as a marker of a “successful” RO event:

“Silence is an indicator. It is one of the indicators ...that it’s went [sic] well.” (016SC010914)

Practitioners frequently referred to feeling a need for stillness in assemblies, in classrooms and in other areas of school life. For example:

“OK. What do I mean by space? I mean by...not filling the programme with things. So almost deliberately taking time out, deliberately giving them that opportunity to sit quietly even if it’s with something in front of them or even just a thought, music, deliberately giving them that time to consider what’s just happened or to consider things around them. That’s what space is, that deliberate moment to reflect, rather than just rushing about like we do.” (020SC050914)

“It’s not a school assembly where somebody stands up and talks for ten minutes and then walks out and leaves kids thinking ‘what was all that about?’ There has to be some time built into it that is a moment of quiet or a moment of paired sharing with someone next to you or there’s some follow-up at the end of it.” (004PM030614)

It is not just the children that have lost their familiarity with stillness - many of the adults in school have as well. The definition of RO in the RORG speaks of spiritual development for the “whole school community”. That includes staff too. In the course of research I found that several of the schools I had contacted by email, with full permissions for research or participant observation visits, made no acknowledgement or reply. In following up by telephone I found that the reason for a lack of response was the same every

time: busyness. One Headteacher put it bluntly: “I have 300 emails a day. Remind me what yours was about.” Another, whom I knew well, said “I’ve had you red-flagged for 2 weeks but I’ve not had time to get round to it yet.” Both of these headteachers, after even the briefest one-to-one telephone discussions and contact, had no problems with the research and happily selected suitable pupils and students and events, and were willing to facilitate in practical ways. They simply hadn’t had time to take the initiative in responding. One Headteacher confessed her problem was also “Suspicion. I get lots of research requests and the last one who came just kept asking for more and more and taking more and more time. I don’t have staff-time to spare. What exactly do you want?” The office staff in another school advised that the Headteacher was simply “un-contactable - we know he’s in the school but he’s dealing with stuff just now. Can we take a message and get him to call you back? But don’t hold your breath. You could try again some other day. You might be lucky.” I have yet to meet a Headteacher who has not been stretched to the limits constantly, daily, relentlessly. RO/TfR is not a high priority for them and stillness is singularly lacking in their own lives. Staff could also benefit from oasis moments of quiet, something that other researchers have already noted:

“...headteachers are so publicly exposed that they are particularly in need of times of privacy and solitude.” (Stern 2009b:113)

It is difficult to visualise how they can ensure any of the sensings of spiritual development for students when the staff can’t find it for themselves. One respondent, when I asked them what they would include if they could create an ideal list for pupils of experiences and outcomes for RO/ TfR events, thought long and hard before answering:

“I’d want them to have the space to have a real quality time of reflection rather than just...I think we all have busy lives where we’re all running about, and just to stop and have that quality time of peace and reflection, whatever that is and in whatever way the event allows them to do it.” (020SC050914)

The need for staff stillness is a pastoral issue too. Another entry from my Research Journal (May 9<sup>th</sup> 2014) reflected on the pastoral needs of staff from one of the primary schools where I am school chaplain. This episode also highlighted again the benefits to this Research of being an ‘insider’ and of

having a long-term, in-depth relationship with a school. I have been chaplain to this school for 26 years. The headteacher phoned well before 9am to ask me to come in. The deputy headteacher (aged just 42) had suffered a heart attack the night before at a late end-of-day meeting with her in the school building. The HT called it “one of the worst days of my life ever”. She requested pastoral support personally and support for her staff as she addressed a meeting that morning before the bell rang in which she informed her staff of what had happened. I was struck in that moment by how artificial it is to try and separate the pastoral from the human and the educational from the spiritual. My roles on that morning shifted constantly between chaplain, colleague, friend, listener, and counsellor. Emotions are not easily parsed and dissecting this episode in order to classify it would only destroy it. At one level of course it had absolutely nothing to do with RO or any of the sensings. At another level it fundamentally had everything to do with the spiritual development of members of the school community that is a part of RO. There was a profound need for calmness and stillness. If we are offering RO that aids the spiritual development of the whole school community then the staff members also need to acquire resilience as much as students do. They also need core values and principles and resources to fall back on, particularly in crisis. They also needed the vocabulary and the space and the freedom that morning to explore big issues of meaning: the kind of thing that can only be done with time and stillness. It is in partnering with the school in delivering their RO over thirty years that the relationship with the staff has been built up. This was not an episode for which it was appropriate to complete an RO template but in essence this was a moment when as a staff group we were striving to sense. We needed space and time to sense meaning and in order to do that we first had to sense stillness.

“I think that a good and welcoming side of religious observance today is ... the quiet, being still, which is a stress-buster but more than that it's a life-skill, which is to give yourself time to meditate, to be calm, to be still, to take time out to be still and to remember that life is sacred...” (017SC030914)

### *Sensing Community*

If there is a strong case for re-writing the sensings to include stillness, I believe there is an even stronger case to include sensing community. A sense of community or communion emerges in the relevant literature again and again (e.g. Burns & Lamont 1996:22, Johnson & Neagley 2011:7, Miller 2000:109, Parker 1999:27). Research elsewhere also points to this:

“Spiritual development does not happen in isolation. The exemplars all articulated that their journey of spiritual development occurred in relationship; the exemplars were very aware of being part of something greater than self. Although that sense of interconnection or belonging is to different things, the theme was present in almost all of the interviews.” (Roehlkepartain 2012:164)

Stern’s research into the differences between the ‘ethos’ and the ‘spirit’ of schools particularly highlighted the vital role of ‘community’:

“Research into spirituality involves, I believe, investigating three dimensions of humanity: community, learning, and dialogue. The spirit of the school is generated by and in turn supports and promotes all of these. It is underpinned, that is, by the meaning of life. Community is described by relationships, including opportunities for friendship.....The *Spirit of the School* project is primarily an investigation, at school-level, into the impact school has on the spirituality of members of the school community, and the impact the spirituality of members of the school community has on the school. These are brought together to answer the question ‘what promotes the spirit of the school?’” (Stern 2009b xv,14)

Relationship, the binding factor in community, is seen by many as constituting a fundamental part of being human:

“...the relational dimension of a person’s life - to self, to other in community, to other in the non-human world, and for many, to a transcendent other. A person’s relationship to self may entail knowing the ‘inner self’, that is, who one really is, or being comfortable with one’s self, or being accepting of self. A person’s relationship with other in community may entail a sense of caring, empathy and compassion for other people.” (Adams, Hyde and Woolley 2008:92)

From recognising this need for multiple level relationships as a phenomenon of the lived experience of being human, it is a relatively small step to seeing it as fundamental to the smooth functioning of school communities too. Some of the literature becomes quite idealistic and wistful, describing utopian idylls where it feels as though the word ‘sanctuary’ should be substituted for ‘school’ (e.g.

Kessler 2000, Lantieri 2001, and Parker 1998). Some, however, speak from a place where they have actually put their idealism into practice, thus proving that it is possible to attain a level of community better described as

‘communion’:

“People in the soulful school feel validated as human beings and can speak authentically from their hearts. Love predominates rather than fear. When people speak, they feel that they are heard, often at a heart-centred level. Most of all, there is a deep sense of community. In fact, in the sanctuary, people don’t just communicate or exchange ideas: they experience communion with one another. Communion is where soul touches soul.” (Miller 2000:109).

Some writers on education, enthusing about Community, resort to quoting theologians as they struggle to find the vocabulary and concepts to express themselves. Palmer (1999), for example, quotes the Cistercian monk Thomas Merton,

“...by recovering the sacred, we might recover our *sense of community* with each other and with all of creation, the community that Thomas Merton named so wonderfully as the “hidden wholeness”. I have become increasingly convinced that this recovery of community is at the heart of good teaching.” (Palmer 1999:27)

Burns and Lamont quote from the German theologian and biblical scholar Walter Breuggemann,

“‘Our culture is competent to implement almost anything but our culture is able to imagine almost nothing’. Schools do indeed exist where there is this quality of community, and if they did not exist we would need to imagine them and create them.” (Breuggemann quoted in Burns and Lamont 1996:22).

Even a secular psychologist ends up sounding more like a theologian when he writes:

“Relational spirituality is about communion, connection, community and compassion.” (Hart 2003:68)

Clearly there is an individual and personal aspect to spiritual development. In RO events we are aiming at each single member of the school community developing spiritually. Yet there is also a corporate aspect to this. Bellous (2007) seeks a balance when she writes:

“I suggest spiritual work is communal and personal in the sense that people must learn to individuate from and integrate within a community, in this case, a classroom.” (Bellous 2007:100)

This fine balance between the individual and the corporate aspects of spiritual development is important. One writer distinguishes

“between *consensual* and *differentiating* rituals ...consensual rituals are those which function to bind a school community together (examples: assemblies, ceremonies). Differentiating rituals function to mark off different groups within the school community (along: e.g. age, sex, age relations, house).” (Hamm 2014:10).

Good RO can contribute to sensing community through the consensual and shared experiences of the whole-school community as well as through the feelings of membership and identity experienced in the shared rituals of smaller groups: classroom groups, teams, peer-groups, dorm groups, practical groups, etc. Policy makers, practitioners, parents and pupils in my interview data frequently referred to RO as key to sensing community, expressing community, building community and preparing for life in wider community. This strongly affirmed Delors’ (1996) UNESCO research, referred to in chapter 1, in which he spoke of four pillars of wisdom fundamental to the purposes of education: first on his list being “learning to live together”. The RORG definition of RO uses the word “community” three times in a single sentence, making it all the more noticeable and puzzling that ‘community’ has not been included as a discrete sensing:

“community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.” (RORG 2004)

My interviewees identified a variety of benefits arising from RO events which could be categorised as grounded in a sense of community: firstly, creating a beneficial group identity or ethos for the school community; secondly, building pupil capacity as responsible citizens able to take their place in the wider community beyond the school gates; thirdly, enabling individual and group resilience in the face of crisis; fourthly, sharing emotional and spiritual experiences that could enrich the lives of all the participants; and, fifthly, acquisition and exploration of values together in a safe and protected

environment. The following table samples quotes illustrating each of these points, allowing the interviewees to speak for themselves. The highlighting is mine.

Table 5 - the benefits of RO

<p>RO events as a means to create a beneficial group identity or ethos for the school community</p>	<p>“...in most schools that’s the only time that you have the school coming together as a community or as a kind of family. Certainly in some of the Primary Schools you do get more of <i>a sense of it being a kind of family and having pride in their identity and who they are and in being part of that school.</i>” (018SC040914)</p> <p>“I used RO as <i>a time for my whole school to come together.</i> We also used to do it on a Monday morning because at that time no-one had had a chance to be bad yet so I could never talk about behaviour so <i>it always had to be about us as a community.</i>” (003PM230514)</p> <p>“...the 2005 Circular definition, I think it has that thing about it being a community event, you know, <i>a shared time together, a corporate thing. ...there’s something that everybody’s experiencing by going through this event together,</i> whatever the event might look like.” (015SC280814)</p> <p>“You would hope that it impinges on all different aspects of school life but <i>it’s a time</i> for them to give lots of information but also <i>for them to do something collectively as a group as well.</i>” (014SC270814)</p> <p>“[RO] should be treated with respect and be <i>part of the creation of an ethos in the school, an ethos that is about community and caring and connectedness.</i>” (009IG250614)</p>
<p>RO events as a means to build pupil capacity as responsible citizens who would be able to take their place in</p>	<p>“...the fact of what school’s are trying to achieve in <i>preparing children for Society,</i> the capacities they’re trying to promote, [RO] complements that</p>

<p>the wider community beyond the school gates</p>	<p>very well.” (018SC040914)</p> <p>“[RO events] can <i>help you understand the views on a certain religion’s point of view</i> like without just you and your personal friends and you can understand it from a more kind of communal point of view.” (027PS221014 - Axel Boy 17yrs 2m)</p> <p>“I might sound like a hippy here, but with the whole technological world it can be quite hard to establish community and so if there’s anything that we can do to help keep - I don’t want to say “real connections” because it’s not like the technological ones are not real - but if there’s anything we can do <i>to establish links in the community</i> ...I guess RO helps to open doors to make that happen or to help that happen or to give opportunities for that to happen...” (019SC040914)</p> <p>“RO should create <i>that sense of we’re part of the school but we’re also part of the human race and how are we going to contribute</i> in a way that’s meaningful and how are we going to develop an inner life that’s meaningful.” (009IG250614)</p>
<p>RO events as a means to enable individual and group resilience in the face of crisis</p>	<p>“...the RO was more about that sharing of a common experience across the school community so we were able to talk about celebrating individuals’ lives and achievements and so on. <i>It gave you somewhere to go when the tragedies struck in life</i> ...if you don’t have that then you struggle. We tried to build that sense of community.” (001PM190514)</p> <p>“Simple, simple things like I think giving thanks is a marvellous thing to do together in a group of people, I think <i>collective empathy, being in a safe place looking out</i>, and self-scrutiny, sort of being in that place looking in, can be done together differently from how it can be done when you’re alone.” (021PCP110914)</p>

	<p>“...the majority of staff would be supportive, but a significant number would not necessarily be as supportive and would actively say “there is no relevance here” and I think that’s reflective of society in general. But <b><i>when crisis comes, religious observance suddenly just comes right to the fore.</i></b>” (006FG(2)110614)</p>
<p>RO events as a means to share emotional and spiritual experiences that could enrich the lives of all the participants</p>	<p>“...it’s such an opportunity, a collective assembly is such an opportunity to do some of the things together that people don’t do together very much in very many circumstances and I think assemblies could be <b><i>a wonderful place to do some of these slightly on the edge things that would come under the general heading of spiritual development...</i></b>” (021PCP110914)</p> <p>“...Primary 6’s and 7’s they were at the time, said “remember we sang that song” and it was ‘I’m the only I’ by Fischy Music, “we’d all sing it in the playground all the time” and <b><i>that’s that kind of community spiritual development.</i></b> Singing’s just one example of how that might have happened because you remember and you share it together and experience it together.” (015SC280814)</p> <p>“[What do you like about assemblies?] Having a school <b><i>pray together, a sense of worship.</i></b>” (027PS221014 Derek M 17.4)</p>
<p>RO events as a means to acquire and explore values together in a safe and protected environment</p>	<p>“I think this is the critical bit: if the RO sits separate from everything else the School does then it’s pointless. <b><i>It’s got be part of that whole culture of a school, the ethos of the school, the building of the values of the school,</i></b> and all part and parcel of that. At the end of the day you are saying that all these different faith backgrounds and none have to work together for some kind of common good. ....You had to build a community.” (001PM190514)</p>

	<p>“Religious Observance has ...got a different purpose in terms of <i>exploring who we all are as a community and what our values are regardless of our faith background</i>. We all still have to live and work together and how can we do that in a positive way? I think it’s essential for schools, I really do.” (004PM030614)</p> <p>“the purpose of RO to me is ...an opportunity first of all <i>to acknowledge that we are spiritual beings and then to explore what does that mean together in community</i>, whether we’re young or old, whether we’re black or white, rich or poor, in a school community <i>to develop that safe environment with trusted people like chaplains</i>.” (006FG110614.1)</p> <p>“...those Monday mornings were mine with my staff and <i>it was about creating that community atmosphere. What was important to us, what was important to us, as a community, as a school and as people</i>.” (003PM230514)</p>
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Table 5 - the benefits of RO events

### *Sensing community*

#### *RO as creating a beneficial group identity or ethos for the school community*

The shared experiences of celebration and affirmation together, of singing and laughing together, of thinking and reflecting together, even of worshipping together, were seen as enhancing a school’s group identity. Regardless of the different stages of education (primary or secondary) and the different numbers on the school roll (the schools represented in this study ranged from less than 100 pupils to over 1500), my respondents frequently used the vocabulary of community when describing the benefit they perceived in RO. They spoke consistently of “community”, of “family”, of “group identity”, of “ethos”, and of “shared experiences”. Their responses made clear that they saw and experienced RO as qualitatively adding value to a communal sense of togetherness. Even though they were more often spectators rather than

participants, shared RO events were spoken of in terms reminiscent of *communitas* or *commune* rather than of crowd.

*RO as building pupil capacity as responsible citizens able to take their place in the wider community beyond the school gates*

Respondents in all four of the interview groups (policy makers, practitioners, pupils and parents) were articulate in expressing a role for RO in enculturation, socialisation and in capacity building. One of the four capacities of curriculum for excellence outlined in the Curriculum Review (2004) is the aspiration that every pupil should become a responsible citizen “with respect for others; commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life, and able to develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland’s place in it”. The sample quotes above show a clear perception that RO with its focus on a sense of community is an ideal vehicle for building and expressing this capacity.

*RO as enabling individual and group resilience in the face of crisis*

Schools are not immune from the events that impinge on the local, national and global communities they are a part of: events such as acts of terrorism, global issues, mass redundancies, sudden deaths, and a myriad other events intrude. RO events can help a school community grieve together and grow together. As news of the Dunblane shooting<sup>25</sup> filtered out, one of the schools I was chaplain to at the time organised an impromptu assembly. Pupils and staff needed a space together to express their shock and fear, to grieve, to offer prayer, to comfort one another. Multiple levels of community were apparent: one school community of pupils and staff feeling a need to respond together to their shared emotions; one school community feeling the wounds of another school community and empathising with what we thought they must be going through; one school community coming together to ask one another the same big questions the whole nation was asking - “How could this happen? Could it also happen here? How do we make sense of this?”

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<sup>25</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> March 1996

*RO as sharing emotional and spiritual experiences that could enrich the lives of all the participants*

In chapter 4 we explored some of the opposed pairs of contrasts that practitioners used when trying to distinguish RO from related fields such as ‘religious and moral education’ or ‘personal and social development’ or ‘moral/values acquisition’. Two of the differences expressed in that chapter were that RO was the more experiential and RME was the more explorative, and RO was more about practice and RME was about principle. My respondents seemed to affirm this in terms of sensing community too. It is as though, by mutual consent and for a brief time, the school community could try out some overtly religious rituals and spiritual practices: for example prayer, meditation, guided reflection, or hymn-singing.

Taking an experiential approach to RO also allowed respondents to tap into other media. The exercises in my box of ‘spiritual moments’ had an interesting effect as some of them engaged with other media (e.g. story-telling, drama, ritual) and with other senses (e.g. touch, taste, and smell.) England’s ‘Office for Standards in Education’ has long shown awareness of the role that the Arts can play in spiritual development. Their 2004 paper encouraged,

“Creativity - expressing innermost thoughts and feelings through, for example, art, music, literature and crafts; exercising the imagination, inspiration, intuition and insight; and Feelings and emotions - the sense of being moved by beauty or kindness; hurt by injustice or aggression; a growing awareness of when to it is important to control emotions and feelings, and how to learn to use such feelings as a source of growth.” (Ofsted 2004 HMI 2125)<sup>26</sup>

Practitioners and researchers consistently highlight the potential of the Arts for spiritual exploration and development too:

“Be aware that artistic media, such as painting, drama, dance, mime and music, may provide avenues for children through which the spiritual may

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<sup>26</sup> However, the ‘Evaluation of the work of the Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education’ in the same year noted that: “The spiritual dimension in this provision [in secondary schools] was generally weak, and this applied not only to the nature of worship but also to the failure to use music, poetry or other means of communication.” (Ofsted 2004 HMI 2269)

be expressed. These media may involve language, but often they will not. They do, however, enable children to express their spirituality through the ordinary, everyday activities of childhood.” (Adams, K., Hyde, B., & Woolley, R. 2008:130)

“Children’s spiritual awareness is revealed in many ways. Firstly, they are very aware; they can ‘feel’ a mood and are easily taken there by music or by looking at pictures. Light a candle and let a child hold it, and watch the rapture on his face as he looks into the flame.” (Lamont 2007:7)

“It is clear that improvisational drama may hold a valuable key to unlocking a range of processes, strategies and consequences for enriching children’s spiritual development.” (Grainger & Kendall 2003)

The key documents of CfE (All Outcomes and Experiences, Building the Curriculum) include comment on what they term ‘The Expressive Arts,’ noting their strong role in enhancing creative talent, developing artistic skills, and representing feelings and emotions. These documents particularly focus on the Arts as a means to Cultural development:

“The expressive arts play a central role in shaping our sense of our personal, social and cultural identity. Learning in the expressive arts also plays an important role in supporting children and young people to recognise and value the variety and vitality of culture locally, nationally and globally. Learning in, through and about the expressive arts enables children and young people to: ....develop an appreciation of aesthetic and cultural values, identities and ideas...” (Building the Curriculum 1)

However these Scottish documents, at the heart of CfE, seem to completely miss the potential of the Arts for Spiritual development<sup>27</sup>. Yet music in particular has well-established links to spirituality for all ages and many cultures (Foley 2015:638-641; Hart 2003:88; Woodward 2007:124f.), as does story-telling (Ådlandsvik in Goodson/Loveless/Stephens 2012:25; Graham, Walton & Ward 2005:68; Ingold 2011:164) and drama (Grainger & Kendall 2003; Paintner 2007).

### ***RO as acquisition and exploration of values together in a safe and protected environment***

RO also contributed to a sense of being a community that was very much

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<sup>27</sup> Useful material can be found online though, for instance ‘The Creating Space’ (<http://www.thecreatingpace.org/>), a non-profit dedicated to integrating spirituality and the arts

expressing its shared values. There can hardly be a non-denominational school in Scotland that has not at some time held an assembly series on the theme of values and some of the richest resources on the numerous websites offering material for school assemblies centre on values<sup>28</sup>. As I reflected on this during my research I began to think about how staff could be moved away from confusing values education with RO, and on how staff could be trained to recognise the sensings and create opportunities for their pupils to experience them. This next section reflects further on my experiences of training practitioners to recognise and deliver RO that truly touches the key sensings.

### Advances in practical application

Through my participant observation and interviews it became apparent that the confusions some practitioners expressed in defining spiritual development and in delivering RO events that shared the sensings had something to do with an inability to articulate their own spirituality and spiritual experiences. A majority of the school staff attending the first ‘RO: praxis’ training course run in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow confessed in the small group discussions in the first hour that they were “not religious” or “not spiritual”. They would be unlikely to succeed in delivering sensing-laden RO events without either a frame of reference or an experiential awareness of what they were aiming at. It was during this initial period of doubting and questioning that the notion of a ‘tool box’ aimed at generating glimpses of the sensings first emerged. The idea was simple enough: a small box containing appropriate tools and exercises that might prompt sensing-related discussions and experiences. If those tasked with delivering the new format of RO knew for themselves exactly what it was they were supposed to experience, then they would be better equipped to lead others in this process.

The first ‘Spiritual Moments Box’ contained 8 small items and an accompanying A4 fold-over sheet of instructions for brief meditations and activities based on the items. Nothing of this nature was identified on the market at that time and none seems to exist yet which meant that some level of creativity and ingenuity was necessary. The boxes themselves were hand-made

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<sup>28</sup> One of the most comprehensive on values must be the Virtues Project. [www.virtuesproject.com](http://www.virtuesproject.com)

to precisely fit the contents and the purpose. Each item was chosen to reflect one or more of the original six sensings and a variety of approaches were encouraged with the intent of touching emotion as well as intellect, of giving tactile experiences as well as visual and intellectual, of engaging the capacity for experiencing faith as well as exploring fact. The items were chosen to be non-denominational and non-religious even when sourced from various philosophical or faith traditions. The guidelines were written to try and avoid any impression of attempting to evangelise or indoctrinate while making my own evangelical Christian faith-position explicit. The introduction has remained largely unchanged through successive revisions of the box and is quoted in full in the following table:

This box contains items that will help us begin to experience (and define) what it is to have a “spiritual” experience and know what it is to be spiritually alert. Many people react negatively to the word ‘Religion’ but positively to the word ‘Spiritual’. We may not understand *why* we react and feel the way we do when these words are mentioned, but we all have an opinion on what *is* or *isn’t* ‘spiritual’. However: how do we define ‘spiritual’ and ‘spirituality’? Pressed to define these words we might find as many definitions as there are people defining. While the flavours and the ingredients of our definitions might vary widely from person to person some common denominators might be expected to emerge though. Good definitions should surely also go beyond merely informing one another into actually sharing with one another. We also need to respect one another’s beliefs and practices and experiences of spirituality. The diversity of experiences we share could open our minds, engage our hearts and equip us for a personal walk with our God and a deeper faith.

But taking hold of such spirituality feels a little like trying to catch a handful of sunlight or log the coordinates for the end of a rainbow or scoop up the sparkles from a clear mountain stream. What do Spiritual Moments taste like? What do they feel like? How do we create one? *Can* we create one? Even if - like a recipe - we could produce a precise list of quantified ingredients and step-by-step instructions for encounters with the Transcendent or moments of Sensing, can we guarantee the result? Even more troubling: how can we begin to lead others into a meaningful spirituality if we can’t identify it for ourselves and haven’t experienced it personally? And how do we avoid loading the concepts with our own prejudices and assumptions?

The ‘Report of the Religious Observance Review Group’ (Scott. Exec., 2004) shapes the current practice of Religious Observance within the Curriculum for Excellence. It defines Religious Observance for Scottish Schools as “community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.” It says that “The spiritual dimension is seen and expressed in many ways” and offers six ‘Sensings’ to help: sensing mystery, sensing values, sensing challenge, sensing meaningfulness, sensing a changed quality of awareness and

sensing otherness.

Whatever definition of ‘spirituality’ we have come up with for ourselves, the contents of this box are some tools and suggestions that will help us to sense and create our own ‘sacred moments’. When we can begin to recognise our own significant, Spiritual Moments then we can begin to intentionally create these and meaningfully share them with others. Potentially **anything** - and **everything** - is ‘spiritual’ and can help us sense mystery or awe or connectedness or challenge or God. Start by exploring the contents of this box. These items and tools come from many different traditions and roots. Not all of them will be immediately familiar. Some may seem pointless initially. Begin by selecting one that interests you or intrigues you. Don’t try more than one at a time and once started on a chosen task take the time to stick with it. Read the comments or guidelines where appropriate and follow the suggested steps. None of these exercises are “plug ‘n’ play” so don’t rush them. Don’t dismiss them. Savour each one. Respect each one. Experience it. Intentionally look for your own *sacred moment*.

Table 6 - introduction to the ‘spiritual Moments’ boxes

The first incarnation of these ‘Spiritual Moments’ boxes contained eight items. Even within the small RO course steering group these initial items prompted a range of reactions and clearly affected different people in different ways. These boxes have now developed over the four years they have been in use and now contain twenty-eight items. The additional items have come from further reading, and from suggestions and ideas offered by colleagues. Each individual item and exercise has been refined from experience of use in three main settings: the Glasgow University course in Religious Observance (six cohorts with an average of a dozen participants in each), students training for Christian Ministry and Youth Work at the International Christian College<sup>29</sup> (eight students in 3rd and 4th year who opted for an elective course), and with team members at eight Scripture Union Scotland weekend camps. The total number of individuals who have been closely observed using the ‘Spiritual Moment’ boxes is approximately eighty RO practitioners of all ages: school staff, chaplains and youth workers connected to schools. Complete boxes containing all twenty eight items, with an accompanying booklet linking each item to sensings, have been disseminated through several other channels too: to participants in one-day regional RO courses run for school staff by various Scottish Council Education Committees, to attendees at RO events for School Chaplains, to Probationer

<sup>29</sup> Now known as the ‘Scottish School of Mission’

Minister Conferences, and to school and ministerial colleagues. To date over six hundred of these boxes have been made and are now in circulation. Their intent is the equipping of RO practitioners by stimulating their own exploration and recognition of those Spiritual Moments that are central to grasping the notion of ‘sensings’. My reasoning is that if the practitioners and those delivering RO in schools are to succeed in meeting the goals of the RORG then they must be able to recognise, articulate and promote the experience of lived spirituality.

### *The ‘Spiritual Moments’ boxes*

A brief description of the twenty eight items, the sensings each one targets and the accompanying exercise for each is given in the following table.

<b>Natural River Stone</b>	<i>Sensings: meaningfulness</i>	A tactile reflection on the physical qualities of the stone led into a guided meditation on how time and gentleness can smooth even the hardest of experiences. A cathartic exercise of “speaking” to the stone is suggested such that the stone can absorb secrets and remain mute forever.
<b>A Toy Soldier</b>	<i>Sensings: values, challenge, meaningfulness, ‘Otherness’</i>	The toy became a prompt for a series of ethical and philosophical questions focussed on violence - its perpetrators and its victims.
<b>A Piece of Sponge (and the smooth river stone)</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, values, meaningfulness</i>	This is a classic Ignatian exercise on the absorbency of our lives and our thirst for new experiences.
<b>A Scented Tea Light</b>	<i>Sensings: values, meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, challenge</i>	Scents and smells can be the most powerful of prompts to memories and associations and emotions and spirituality.
<b>A Sea Shell</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, ‘Otherness’</i>	The reminiscence of a soundscape is prompted by the childhood practice of listening for the

		whispered sound of waves and wind in the shell. The act connected many users to their own ‘sacred’ moments of solitude or of memories.
<b>A Tea Bag</b>	<i>Sensings: values, meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, challenge</i>	The tea bag was used for a highly symbolic and simplified Japanese tea ceremony. Users were encouraged to make this a communal exploration. The accompanying notes pointed to the experiences of tranquillity and affirmation in company.
<b>A Foreign Coin</b>	<i>Sensings: values, meaningfulness, challenge</i>	This activity related to Chris Cleave’s book ‘The Other Hand’ [shortlisted for the 2008 Costa Novel Award], in which the leading character wishes she was a British pound rather than an African girl. Questions are explored: of identity, of respect, of the commodification of people, of what we count most valuable, of the journeys people undergo, of learning from the spirituality of others.
<b>A Faith Symbols Scroll</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, values, meaningfulness, ‘Otherness’</i>	This item was a paper scroll on which are printed symbols of many different faiths and philosophies. The exercise involves unrolling the scroll and seeing how many a user can identify. Users are challenged to think what practice of each faith they can draw on.
<b>A ‘Comfort Box’ and Card</b>	<i>Sensings: values, ‘Otherness’, challenge</i>	This smaller box within the larger ‘Spiritual Moments’ box related

		specifically to the experience of bereavement. Loss prompts multiple questions at many different levels. The accompanying card also offered pastoral exercises aimed at giving comfort from a Christian faith-stance.
<b>A ‘Golden Rule’ paper ruler</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, meaningfulness, ‘Otherness’</i>	These paper rulers quoted various forms of a simple teaching often called ‘The Golden Rule’ drawn from many different faiths and cultures but essentially contain the same point. The Ignatian technique of Ignatian prayer and the Christian monastic practice of <i>lectio divina</i> were applied.
<b>A Polished Semi-Precious Tumble stone</b>	<i>Sensings: values, meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, ‘Otherness’, challenge</i>	<b>A Polished Semi-Precious Tumble stone</b> This exercise involved a reflection on the pressures and unique circumstances that shape precious stones. Users reflected on the pressures in their past that have contributed to the unique value and beauty of their current lives.
<b>A Glass Marble</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, values, meaningfulness, challenge</i>	This related to the revelatory scene at the close of one of the ‘Men in Black’ films where it is suggested that there are universes within universes. Users could hold the marble on the open palm of their hand and imagine what kind of universe they would create or what they

		would do if they were God.
<b>A Celtic Knot Pattern</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, challenge</i>	This card, with a Celtic pattern printed on it, referenced Margaret Silf’s book ‘Sacred Spaces: Stations on a Celtic Way.’ It involved a reflection on the Celtic notions of life as a journey of many complex turns that create a beautiful pattern.
<b>A ‘Life’/’Death’ Card</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, values, meaningfulness</i>	It begins simply enough: “If you knew this moment was your last chance to pray or to speak before death - your ‘Last Will and Testament’ - what would you speak?”
<b>A Ticket from a Journey</b>	<i>Sensings: meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, challenge</i>	The ticket was used as a metaphor of life to reflect on the journey of life. Destinations, detours, travelling companions, fate, activity/passivity can all be explored.
<b>A Glass Heart</b>	<i>Sensings: meaningfulness, challenge</i>	The fragility of the heart and the importance of emotions and of dreams are explored through this item.
<b>A Clothes Peg</b>	<i>Sensings: values, meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, challenge</i>	Self-image, self-worth, self-identity, masques, facades, what makes us “real”...are explored through thinking about the images we portray of ourselves through what we wear.
<b>Some Beads</b>	<i>Sensings: values, meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness</i>	A handful of small beads are used for an exploration of our attitudes to one another.
<b>A Nail</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, meaningfulness, challenge</i>	This was an explicitly Christian meditation on crucifixion. It leads on to

		some of life’s “big questions” about the problem of evil, about redemption and forgiveness, about the place of faith in our lives.
<b>A Used Postage Stamp</b>	<i>Sensings: values, meaningfulness, challenge</i>	The stamp stood as symbolic of relationships and the messages people have spoken into our lives and the power of the words we have spoken to others.
<b>A Small Mirror</b>	<i>Sensings: values, meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, ‘Otherness’</i>	The mirror allows a very literal time of self-reflection.
<b>A Cross Pendant</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, values, meaningfulness, Otherness’</i>	Though obviously related to an overt Christian symbols this was a prompt to whether or not faith and beliefs are to be kept as purely internal values or are to be ‘visible’ externally. How far faith and values and beliefs shape our lives comes into view here.
<b>A Button</b>	<i>Sensings: values, meaningfulness, ‘Otherness’, challenge</i>	A utilitarian item symbolic of sensing one’s own worth and usefulness.
<b>A glass drop</b>	<i>Sensings: meaningfulness, challenge</i>	The way in which extreme events have influenced and shaped us is explored through considering the high temperatures and pressures involved in glass-making.
<b>A jigsaw puzzle piece</b>	<i>Sensings: meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, challenge</i>	The puzzle piece is a very obvious metaphor for seeing our own lives as tiny parts of a bigger picture. It also allows for reflection on the ‘fit’ with those closest to us and how we ‘place’

		ourselves in wider settings.
<b>A felt Hand/Foot shape</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, a changed quality of awareness, ‘Otherness’</i>	The felt hand or foot in this box is a symbolic reminder of birth and of the wonder of a new life and of the sacredness of life.
<b>A bottle top</b>	<i>Sensings: mystery, meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness</i>	This becomes a metaphor for the things we “bottle up” within us and the pressure that builds within our lives.
<b>A scrabble letter</b>	<i>Sensings: meaningfulness, a changed quality of awareness, challenge</i>	The game of scrabble is used as a metaphor for one of the basic spiritual tasks: meaning-making.

Table 7 - brief descriptions of the contents of a ‘Spiritual Moments’ box

With the initial cohort of the RO course the boxes had been handed over with a minimal explanation at the end of one 24-hour study event and participants were left to explore the contents in their personal leisure time that evening. Participants were encouraged not to open the boxes until they had time away from the seminar room to do so and were warned that some items and exercises might provoke an emotional reaction within themselves which they should be aware of and could speak to the Course facilitators about in confidence the next day if they wished. It quickly became clear however that these boxes were prompting strong interest and for the second cohort they were given a more detailed introduction and explanation. This time space was allowed within the programme to open the boxes and select and use an item each. Participants were then invited without pressure or obligation to share briefly its personal import. Participants were then encouraged to use either that item or some other as a resource to stimulate the production of a RO event outline later in the course. The depth, openness and immediacy of responses to items chosen from the box was very noticeable and seemed to stimulate precisely the kind of discussions and expressions we had felt relevant to delivering quality RO. “Big” issues were raised (death, existential considerations, justice, faith, spirituality) in a way that had clearly engaged participants at a very personal, even an intimate level.

In the most recent cohort a full half-hour was set aside for this activity

and participants were in four small groups, each with a Facilitator. I was left free, after introducing the boxes, to move from table-to-table to listen in and to encourage responses and answer any queries. After a few moments the groups were again asked to focus together on what they had picked from the box and were offered a chance for one person from each group to volunteer a personal response. Allocated this time and space to utilise the exercises and experiences more fully than any previous cohort had been, we found that the intensity of reaction and the willingness (perhaps even the ‘hunger’) of the participants to share exceeded what we had anticipated. The strongest reactions were to the smaller ‘Comfort Box’ which allowed two participants in particular (one male and one female) to share tearfully their fears for family members who were currently seriously ill. It is important to reiterate that these responses were voluntary rather than compulsory: it was the participants themselves who initiated these explorations. It rapidly became clear that these were very personal matters, potentially uncomfortable ones, but that the creation of a sympathetic and nurturing and sharing environment had generated a sense of a ‘safe’ place to express their concerns. This is the sort of response I would have expected to find if the sensings had been engaged with.

### *Some comments on the use of the ‘Spiritual Moments’ boxes*

- (i) There is a fine line that requires alertness and carefulness in the leader of an RO event. This is because the box items can be catalysts for emotional responses. RO practitioners experiencing this emotional response from box users need to be sensitive to the opportunity for an empathetic exploration of the sensing that has been evoked while avoiding drifting into showmanship or sentimentality. The integrity and vulnerability of the people sharing their reactions must be respected and honoured.
  
- (ii) The facilitator cannot make assumptions about the faith, values or beliefs of those who respond. The role of facilitator and leader of an RO event is a different dynamic to a counsellor in a counselling situation or a faith leader in a worship setting. Roles and role expectations are a subtle undercurrent in training practitioners to explore the sensings using these boxes. An RO event

may create circumstances that lead to an unexpected moment of revelation or disclosure. Yet the RO event itself is not the place and venue for further investigation. It is not appropriate for the leader of a RO event to turn into a social worker or police officer in response to what emerges. Again a RO event may create opportunities for exploring existential and philosophical themes, yet this does not give the right to the practitioner to turn the venue into a theological lecture room and adopt the role of a theologian or an evangelist. Similarly, successful RO might generate strong emotional reactions but should not turn the event into an episode more suited to reality TV.

(iii) While acknowledging the risks in RO events exposing moments of ‘real’ and deeply emotive response, it should also be seen as a positive strength or a mark of success that such a response has been generated. To experience the sensings it is necessary, by their very nature, to engage with them at an emotional level. When sensing meaningfulness in, for example, such fundamental human experiences as loss and bereavement it is very difficult to engage solely on an intellectually detached level. As we saw in chapter five, many of the young people interviewed viewed RO as a place in which they could ask their big questions including those focussed on death. One of the consistent ‘big questions’ people of all ages and cultures have centre around death. There are limited opportunities in the curriculum in which to open this up and face the issues in the way in which some would want:

“Our society has no place where the ultimate questions are honoured as questions. Every institution and social form we have is devoted to either solving problems or to providing pleasure: the school, the family, the church, medicine, entertainment, our jobs. Even funerals are designed to comfort us rather than keep the questions before us: You too will die - for what purpose have you lived?” (Needleman 2001:90)

Previous generations were more direct:

“...they [the Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth century] worried incessantly about the state of their children’s souls. And what raised the anxiety level was the omnipresence of death. ‘Learn to die,’ wrote Thomas Becon in 1560, ‘should be one of the earliest sentences taught to a child.’ ‘Imagine yourselves on your death beds, in your coffins, in your graves’, John Norris told his children in his *Spiritual Counsel of 1694*.” (Cunningham 2006:68)

(iv) A fear sometimes expressed in the literature around spiritual development in schools is that this whole area of sensings and the activities designed to promote such moments risk stepping into areas that school staff are either not equipped for or that are not ‘legitimate’ educational areas. Schools may be apprehensive that follow-up to RO events that successfully engage the sensings may be more akin to counselling or guidance or religious instruction. Sometimes the view is expressed by school staff that spirituality is an area beyond their personal comfort-zone as well as outwith their professional competence. Some of them view RO as not an area in which they should be under any compulsion to participate. Some staff are not inclined to deal with RO as they think of it as an area of personal belief, choices and values. Senior Managers may also fear that the sensings open up issues of spirituality which may do more damage than good, potentially opening up irresolvable and painful emotional needs that schools and their staff are not able to handle. There does need to be some discernment on when an issue raised in a public realm should continue to be dealt with in the public realm or should be removed to a private and confidential setting. Much may depend on the competence and confidence of the person leading. My consistent conclusion was that when given space to explore the sensings and even the most emotive issues aroused by them, such opportunities are welcomed by the participants. In post-event discussion and feedback with participants who had experienced strong emotional reactions to items in the Spiritual Moments box, every single one had spoken in terms of the finding this “comforting”, “positive”, “helpful”, “liberating”, “stress-relieving” and “therapeutic”.

In the setting of International Christian College now known as the Scottish School of Mission), I had used the box items as a series of opening meditations before lectures with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students for a module entitled ‘Religious Observance with Children with Additional Support Needs’. This was as a way to focus thoughts and generate thinking on the sensings in RO. No exercise had lasted more than ten minutes and each was a prelude to a two-and-a-half hour study session. These were, in my mind, minor preparatory exercises to the lectures. However in course feedback fifty percent of the students rated these

“devotions” (as they termed them) as their first or only response to the enquiry “what was the best thing about this course?” While the fear of some is that RO will provoke uncontrolled, messy, unpredictable and potentially damaging moments, the reality in my experience has unfailingly been the opposite. The student feedback from the course called these moments of sensing “compassionate”, “healing”, “positive”, “affirming”, “enlightening”, “best thing we’ve ever done”, “enjoyable”, “illuminating”, “life-changing” and “really, really interesting”.

(v) On reviewing the items in the Spiritual Moments boxes and the reactions to them it is appropriate to comment on their matching to the sensings that they appear to have most frequently stimulated. Some items have consistently generated experiences and discussions that touched equally on more than one sensing (hence the apparently flawed arithmetic in the following sentence). The proportions are roughly as follows: seven items matched mystery sensing, eight matched to sensing values, fifteen to sensing meaningfulness, four to sensing a changed quality of awareness, six matched to sensing otherness and two related well to sensing challenge. This omits my suggested additional sensings of stillness and community which would need testing and research beyond the scope of this paper. Of the six RORG sensings, the box items do not engage or initiate an even spread. The reactions are weighted heavily towards sensing meaningfulness.

This uneven spread may reflect my inherent biases as the creator of these boxes and controller of their contents and of the suggestions as to how each item is used. It may also be that in the lived experiences and needs of the average person we are more interested in finding meaningfulness than we are in, for instance, sensing otherness. The weighting towards sensing meaningfulness may be due to an innate egotistic bias in normal human spirituality - we more readily focus on finding meaning for our own lives and are less interested in responding to the needs of others and the challenges our world presents us. If the sensings are aiming at the spiritual development of all members of the school community then we might make a case that the task of the RO practitioner is to offer a spiritually balanced diet viewing the sensings as a sort

of spiritual “six a day”<sup>30</sup>. It might be that the balance of sensings is different for different cultures or subcultures or age groups or genders or literacy levels. This is again beyond the scope of this paper but could be the subject of further research.

It may also be that the relative weighting of these sensings changes over time or according to meta-circumstance. For example, Maynes and Waltner, commenting on the impact of armed conflict note how it has changed society:

“World War II, like virtually all wars, brought serious changes in family life in the combatant nations. Families were broken up by the departure of troops and military fatalities, and also by massive civilian casualties and dislocations during and after the war. On the home front, workforce mobilisations brought new workers into factories that supplied the war effort, often with a lasting and permanent effect.”  
(Maynes & Waltner 2012:106)

It seems reasonable to posit that wars, natural disasters, and catastrophic events such as famine and plague would shift the balance of which sensings mattered most to the general populace. Future shifts in culture and society might bring fresh challenges and changes in the list of sensings. Age and life experience may be another factor in determining which sensings seems most relevant. While older respondents might be most drawn to sensing meaningfulness, younger participants might be more drawn to sensing mystery.

### *Educating school staff to experience and deliver the sensings*

The issue is one of helping secular staff in particular to find a spiritual context for exploration and development of the sensings. One of the principal purposes of the Spiritual Moments boxes was to initiate a process of discussion that would provide participants with a recognition and validation of their own spiritual experiences, a framework for exploring these experiences, an opportunity to develop a vocabulary of spiritual development, and ideas for generating spiritual development in others. In the initial small-group discussions with participants on the University of Glasgow RO course as the facilitators sat with their groups to begin establishing a relationship with them we had noted that a frequent comment was “I’m not religious”. While some assurance could

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<sup>30</sup> A reference that may, of course, date. It relates to the UK government’s health initiative aimed at encouraging everyone to eat five portions of vegetables a day. The tagline was “one of your five a day”.

be given at the outset that RO centres on spirituality rather than religion, the use of the boxes and their contents seemed to lead to some significant moments of self-revelation as participants realised that they already had had spiritual experiences themselves. The various items and exercises often led to “Aha!” moments in which participants, in one way or another, expressed the point of view that “if this is what spirituality is then, yes, I have had such moments”. The discussions and sharing of experiences based on these items quickly led to a vocabulary of sensings and of spiritual development and to agreed definitions. The language of values and of value acquisition frequently occurred and was focussed around concepts such as “respect”, “principles”, “belief” and “humanity”. This may have been a sign that the teachers were beginning to articulate where RO fitted into their context and understanding by working from more familiar conceptual frameworks.

The longer time span with later RO cohorts has offered glimpses of further potential for the use of the Spiritual Moments boxes. Those moments of self-revelation and the formation of a vocabulary would appear to be a necessary preliminary stage before it is possible for the teachers to create the conditions in which sensings might occur. After this initial stage, teachers were quick to begin adapting and applying what they had learned when subsequently they carried out classroom exercises on producing RO events aimed at expressing one or more of the sensings. A number of teachers used items from the boxes as their “stimulus” for mock RO events that they then created. This indicated that the items had hit the mark and were providing a relevant impetus.

While the largest portion of items in the box could be directly related to sensing meaningfulness, arguably the most readily accessible and identifiable of the sensings, participants reacted to the full range of activities and exercises. This was important as it showed that the box contents and exercises were successfully appealing to all kinds of learners. Some of the strongest and most positive reactions were to those items linked more to emotion than intellect, as well as to those that touched on multi-sensory sensations such as scent or taste or tactile or imaginative aspects. Religious Observance must appeal to more than the head if it is to succeed: it must also engage the heart and move the soul. This emotional quality to the box’s contents has also proved easily accessible to

those pupils with Additional Support Needs.

Creating the box and its contents, and the uses made of it by some teachers, shows the value of creativity and of intentionally targeting the spiritual (rather than religious) aspects of being human. The notions of emotional intelligence and moral intelligence already have considerable literature and research. Research into a potential spiritual intelligence has grown rapidly since Zohar & Marshall’s (2000) book ‘Spiritual Intelligence: The Ultimate Intelligence’, with numerous articles in the ‘International Journal of Children’s Spirituality’ generally favourable towards the notion of spiritual intelligence and in the ‘International Journal for the Psychology of Religion’ generally sceptical of the notion. While it is too early for a definitive judgement on spiritual intelligence, I am inclined to accept as axiomatic the insight Miller (2000) offers:

“The stuff that comes with the child, however, is not science, logic, or mechanical skill. It is soul stuff. It is imagination, heart, and creativity. It is spirit and vision.” (Miller 2000:vii)

This creativity, whether or not it can be classed as spiritual intelligence, was a part of the genesis of the Spiritual Moments boxes. The responses to the individual items appear to appeal to creativity as a route to spiritual development. This spiritual development through creativity steps outside of the norms of secular pedagogy and into areas less well-trodden in mainstream education. However, there seems to me a sufficient level of responsiveness to recommend that secular RO practitioners should learn to listen to insights from theology and the rich multi-faith traditions of spiritual direction and development. Another axiom I would offer is the thought that,

“The fundamental nature of spirit is creation; creativity is its human counterpart.” (Hart 2003:190)

Other fields such as cultural Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology may have much to add too.

While many may not accept notions of spiritual intelligence or of creativity as a spiritual skill, touching on this illustrates a problem in teaching teachers to encourage the spiritual development of their pupils. To use an analogy, training RO practitioners in spiritual development is a bit like teaching

someone to skip who has never done it before or who has long ago left skipping behind and forgotten what it was like. Spiritual development, as we have noted before, has neither a fixed canon nor universal milestones. My respondents often voiced this caveat that,

“...spirituality can never be completed, you can never say you have become spiritual, you have become spiritually developed or you have ended that process: there is always somewhere to go. It’s always a journey and there’s always something else to add to the full picture.”  
(003PM230514)

and,

“Well, you want to come back to the six sensings, not that you can say someone **will** experience ‘otherness’. Full stop. They may.”  
(015SC280814)

The sensings also have the potential to be ‘messy’ and to invade other spaces and disciplines. There are no guarantees that any sensing will occur even in RO events planned with this in mind. Sensings may, however, occur unanticipated and unexpectedly. The notes in the following box of a participant observation recorded in my PhD journal illustrate this:

“I was invited to a large secondary school within my education authority to speak to two S1 classes. This was not in my capacity as a schools chaplain but as a trustee of Hamilton District Foodbank. A Modern Studies teacher from the school had contacted me through our Foodbank’s website to ask me to talk about our work. She saw this as an opportunity for community engagement and for practical learning about social issues. I gave a 15-minute Ppt presentation and then fielded questions (there were a lot of them) for the next 20 minutes. I had not thought - until that very active and robust Q&A took off - of this event at all in terms of RO/TfR. But the line of questioning and the repeated undertone of comments made were all clearly expressing sensings, principally sensing challenge and to a lesser extent sensing values. The young people had clearly perceived some sense of injustice in the impact of certain changes to the Welfare system. They were motivated to “do something” and were seeking understanding. They were expressing a profound and deeply-held sense of core values: compassion and care and fairness.”

Table 8 - Journal entry for 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2014

Reflecting on this incident suggests that an event aimed at social care, community partnership, capacity-building, topic work and modern studies instead shaded into the kind of sensing an RO event would be intended to explore. The acquisition and expression of values seemed to slide inexorably into

sensing-laden spiritual development. On the occasion I mentioned to the classes that my motivations for engaging in the Foodbank have to do with a combination of the human value of caring for others and my personal spiritual value of Christian faith. Neither the teachers nor the students had showed any sign of a faith motivation, but neither did they affirm or challenge my statement that for me a spiritual motivation also mattered. No-one completed an RO template after this event and yet it had become a moment steeped in sensings. An event that began with being ‘human’ became one that was also ‘spiritual’, a blurring of lines that was explored in chapter 1.

To recap, my earlier definition of spirituality in chapter 1 was “that uniquely human capacity and need for a sense of identity and integrity, of place and of purpose, which can only be fully satisfied in relationship with others *and* with a transcendent ‘Other’.” My “and” was carefully and deliberately chosen. I do not think any alternatives qualifying this “and” with the word “or” would be valid or true to human reality. My participant observation leads me to conclude that it is not only when we are being intentionally spiritual or intentionally seeking sensings that RO/TfR has taken place. Rather I think that the sensings are crying out to be explored. Sensings were pushing their way into the classroom event described above whether or not they were invited or wanted. Spiritual development and the sensings may initially be as welcome as gate-crashers at a party but frequently end up centre-stage as the life and soul of the party.

### ***Training faith representatives to experience and deliver the sensings***

The issue is one of helping faith practitioners to explore and develop the sensings in the secular educational framework. My participant observation and interviews frequently showed that the in-school (non-faith) staff were quicker to appreciate and understand the sensings and relate them to the curriculum for excellence than were the visiting (faith) chaplains and RO practitioners. It might have been expected that those for whom spiritual development is a core activity might have grasped the notions of spiritual development, of sensings and of shared values much more easily than the secular, liberal, non/alternate faith staff would. This was not the case and may be due to a number of factors. Some

of the faith-based practitioners struggled to grasp concepts of spiritual development that were simply not framed in the more precise and specialist theological and denominational language vocabularies that they were familiar with. Some of the faith-based practitioners also struggled to grasp the values context and educational purposes of the curriculum for excellence. For them any discussion of sensings and of spiritual development automatically shaded into an expression of their religion. Their instinct was then to seek a faith-decision rather than a faith-discussion. Older ministers found it harder than younger ones to bridge the gaps between a church context and a school context, and to understand the distinctions between operating in a faith community and operating in a school community. Many of the Christian school chaplains are also very busy with other Parish duties. While time pressures are an important factor, very few of them seemed embedded enough in schools to be fluent in curriculum-speak. Schools, like all large organisations, are prone to adopting acronyms and jargon incomprehensible to the ‘outsider’. Many of the chaplains I met seemed enthusiastic and keen to assist schools in RO events but uncertain of their own ability, lacking in confidence and un-aware of the educational context. There is a need to ensure Chaplains are as well-versed in RO as schools are becoming.

It may be that clergy in general are not the best people to engage with schools in RO. They are not all ‘gifted’, able, competent, interested or free enough of other tasks. While they have a certain expertise to offer in spiritual development, it often comes in a rigid denominational pattern and the average parish minister may not sufficiently comprehend the school context. Churches routinely fund and appoint a range of specialists such as youth pastors, musicians, community workers, child and family development workers, etc., but there are very few whose sole remit is to working alongside schools. The creation, training and funding of paid full-time, accredited, lay workers for RO in schools would be a step forward. In Lanarkshire, Hamilton Presbytery and Scripture Union (Scotland) have formed a unique partnership now in its eleventh year. Together they fund a full-time post with the remit of developing relationships between the local (non-denominational) schools and their local churches. Both South and North Lanarkshire education authorities have

benefitted enormously from this post with most of their Secondary schools now served by chaplaincy teams who are well-trained and able to provide significant CfE compliant input to their RO programmes. The schools have also gained strong networks of community partnerships with their local churches, providing them with a host of volunteers and helpers for a range of events. Scripture Union (Scotland) has a vision to provide Regional Workers who can assist every school in the country with assistance in delivering RO and chaplaincy, but the Lanarkshire Development Worker remains a unique post. East Kilbride (also within South Lanarkshire) also has a single, large evangelical church which funds two full-time workers who are currently providing RO and RME input to the town’s non-denominational Primary and Secondary Schools. Again, however, this is a localised and unique provision. As there is currently no centralised register of non-denominational school chaplains for Scotland and no single accrediting body it is not possible for me to make an unequivocal statement of the uniqueness of these posts. However, my research across Scotland has not made me aware of any comparable posts anywhere else.

The particular challenges for faith practitioners in providing RO events for schools can be illustrated with my comments on another participant observation in the following box. This incident relates to a RO training day provided by a Christian denomination for a Scottish education authority. The event was held in a hotel for approximately thirty delegates, with roughly two-thirds being teachers and one third chaplains. Delegates were split into four random groups around tables, each with a facilitator. After front-led presentations on the purpose of RO, the Church of Scotland’s ‘Stevenson Prize’, RO exemplars, and story-telling the groups were asked to work on a scenario to create a RO event for their school using the RO template found on the Education Scotland website. My group had four teachers who were all younger women representing two primary schools and two secondary schools, and two chaplains who were both older ordained men currently serving as school chaplains. My journal entry and sketch from the day (Feb. 6<sup>th</sup> 2014) reads:

“The teachers had very quickly grasped the possibilities for RO and understood the scenario. They were very quickly into discussion about a theme for a potential RO event and began completing the RO template and creating an

event. They rapidly placed their RO event within their context: matching it to Health and Wellbeing Outcomes, identifying the relevant CfE Capacities and locating cross-curricular opportunities and follow-up activities. They were becoming animated and excited and making positive comments: “I get this!”, “This is good. This makes sense now.”, “I see where this all fits in.” It became apparent that the two chaplains were struggling though. At one point the four teachers were having an animated discussion across the table about an issue of spirituality while a chaplain sat silent, disengaged and lost in their midst. The



Figure 16 - 'At one point' © Steve Younger

second chaplain had also stopped contributing and had become a spectator. I allowed the teachers to continue with the task and effectively created a sub-group to explore the Chaplains' hesitations.

In exploration with the Chaplains they confessed that they did not understand the educational context and the language the teachers were working within. The acronyms bandied about freely by the teachers were foreign to them and a substantial gap in comprehension was being compounded by their reticence to interrupt the flow of conversation and ask for clarifications. The Chaplains - whose business, ironically, is spirituality - were also having difficulty relating the teachers' discussion on spirituality to their own theological frameworks. A difference in terminology was hampering their ability to understand and contribute. I am profoundly disappointed that the Chaplains struggled to see spirituality when it was not presented in a form they were familiar with. One of the Chaplains clearly also still worked within an older understanding of Chaplaincy in which his assumptions and constructs were akin to a mini-church approach to assemblies: including prayers, hymns, and mini-sermons. His familiar patterns and traditions of working were no longer valid but he was having trouble analysing why this was the case.

Table 9 - Journal entry for 6<sup>th</sup> Feb., 2014

Further investigation has shown that there are significant gaps in ministerial training. Given that so many practising ministers end up as Chaplains

in Scottish schools surprisingly few have any mandatory school chaplaincy modules or school placement requirement during their theological training and probation periods. Those that elected for such modules and placements were comparatively rare. Scotland currently has no national scheme of assessment or accreditation for school chaplains. In the course of this research it was not unusual to find ministers serving as chaplains in multiple school settings who had received minimal training in school work and who had no requirement for ongoing learning and development in this field. The vast majority had learned “on the job” and, it should be noted in their defence, had often developed a high level of competence and good relationships with their schools.

### *The absence of CfE-compliant, Scottish context RO resources*

A significant finding is that there is a dearth of exemplar material tailored to the Scottish context for in-school staff and visiting chaplains to access. Many current websites link to the English ‘Key Stage’ structure. There is a wealth of English-context assembly and ‘Collective Worship’ material online but very few of these collections offer adaptations for the Scottish context. The teacher’s online network GLOW has a small bank of exemplars but these are not accessible to chaplains. ‘Christian Values in Education (Scotland)’<sup>31</sup> is one of the few Scottish groups creating a bank of RO exemplars with detailed links to the curriculum for excellence. Their material has over fifty tags which link to health and wellbeing, the SHANARRI indicators, the four capacities of curriculum for excellence, the sensings and the Scottish levels. The current curricular head with responsibility for RO welcomes suitable resources for inclusion in GLOW and is also willing to moderate the content to maximise its relevance. Perhaps HMIE inspectors could be asked to identify examples of good RO practice for inclusion on GLOW.

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<sup>31</sup> [www.cve-scotland.org.uk](http://www.cve-scotland.org.uk)



# Appendices

**Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects**  
**Staff Research Ethics Application**  **Postgraduate Student Research Ethics**  
**Application**

## Chapter 1

### Application Details

Application Number: 400130140  
 Applicant's Name Rev. Stephen Younger  
 Project Title Religious Observance and Spiritual Development within the Scottish 'Curriculum for Excellence'

### Application Status                      **Approved**                      **for Amendments to original approval**

Start Date of Approval (d.m.yr)                      30/05/2014

(blank if Changes Required/ Rejected)

End Date of Approval of Research Project (d.m.yr)                      05/05/2015

**Only** if the applicant has been given **approval** can they proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval.

### Recommendations (where Changes are Required)

- **Where changes are required all applicants must respond** in the relevant boxes to the recommendations of the Committee and upload this as the **Resubmission Document** online to explain the changes you have made to the application. All resubmitted application documents should then be uploaded.
- **(If application is Rejected a full new application must be submitted via the online system.** Where recommendations are provided, they should be responded to and this document uploaded as part of the new application. A new reference number will be generated.

(Shaded areas will expand as text is added)

**MAJOR RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**APPLICANT RESPONSE TO MAJOR**

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**MINOR RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**APPLICANT RESPONSE TO MINOR**

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**REVIEWER COMMENTS**  
**COMMENTS**

**APPLICANT RESPONSE TO REVIEWER**

**(OTHER THAN SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS)**

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Please retain this notification for future reference. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Terri Hume, Ethics Administrator.

End of Notification.

Rev. Stephen Younger  
163 Auchinraith Road  
High Blantyre  
South Lanarkshire  
G72 0XU

**Our ref:** EDU/RESEARCH/TK  
**Your ref:**  
**If calling ask for:** Tracy Kerr  
**Phone:** 01698 454434  
**Date:** 21 September 2017

Dear Rev. Younger

**Access to Undertake Research**

Thank you for returning the completed application to undertake research which has been passed to me for a response.

I am pleased to advise you that approval has been granted for you to contact the headteachers of primary and secondary schools in South Lanarkshire to ask if their school will take part in your project.

When you contact each headteacher you should enclose a copy of this letter as proof of authorisation. Each headteacher will have the final veto over whether or not his or her school shall participate.

You should ensure complete confidentiality of both establishments and individuals at all times.

It will be necessary for you to have parental consent for pupils to take part in your project and to assist you with this I enclose a copy of the form that you should use and a copy of the notes on parental consent procedure.

I wish you every success with your research and if I can be of any further assistance please contact me at the address below.

Yours

**John McMahon**  
**Management Information Co-ordinator**



Phone: Direct Line 0141-287-3556  
Fax: 0141-287 4945  
Email: [michele.mcclung@education.glasgow.gov.uk](mailto:michele.mcclung@education.glasgow.gov.uk)

Website: [www.glasgow.gov.uk](http://www.glasgow.gov.uk)

Our Ref : MM/Research/E29

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> February 2014

If phoning please ask for Dr Michele McClung

Rev. Stephen Younger,  
163 Auchinraith Road,  
High Blantyre,  
South Lanarkshire,  
G72 0XU

Dear Rev. Younger,

**Proposed Research Project – The Interpretation and Implementation of the Religious Observance Requirement within the Curriculum for Excellence**

Thank you for your completed research application form in respect of the above.

I now write to advise you that this department has no objection to you seeking assistance with your project from schools in Glasgow. I would confirm however that it is very much up to the Heads of Establishments to decide whether or not they participate and assist you in your research.

**A copy of this letter should be sent to the Heads of Establishments when contacting the schools.**

All researchers must have recently approved Disclosure Scotland checks.

I hope that this is helpful and that you have success with your project.

We would also request that you provide us with copies of your findings from your research once it is completed.

Yours sincerely

*Michele McClung*

Dr Michele McClung  
Principal Officer  
Planning, Performance and Research Unit

Your Ref:  
My Ref: **TMcE/AL**  
Contact: Tony McEwan  
Tel: 0141 618 7198  
Fax: 0141 842 5655  
E-mail: [tony.mcewan-els@renfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:tony.mcewan-els@renfrewshire.gov.uk)  
Date: 29 May 2014



E-mail: [steve@highblantyre.fsbusiness.co.uk](mailto:steve@highblantyre.fsbusiness.co.uk)

Dear Mr Younger

Re: **The practice of Religious Observance and Spiritual Development  
within the Curriculum for Excellence within Scottish Schools (non-  
denominational and Catholic)**

Thank you for your application relation to the above.

I am pleased to give you consent to approach Renfrewshire schools to participate in your research. However, please note that while I can grant permission to approach the school, they are under no obligation to participate.

I should be grateful if you could provide me with a copy of your findings when they have been finalised.

Yours sincerely



**Tony McEwan**  
Education Manager (planning and performance)

Director of Education and Leisure: Robert Naylor  
Council Headquarters, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley PA1 1LE



From: Margaret Clarke[SMTP:MCLARKE@HAMILTONCOLLEGE.CO.UK]  
Sent: 22 January 2014 17:56:35  
To: STEPHEN YOUNGER  
Subject: Research request  
Auto forwarded by a Rule  
Dear Rev Younger

Further to our recent email 'conversations' I am pleased to confirm that Hamilton College is willing to support your request to undertake research here for your PhD in Education, currently being undertaken on a part-time basis at the University of Glasgow.

In due course, further contact about this will be very welcome so that we can discuss and agree the number of pupils/staff/parents who will be involved and the arrangements and timing for you to undertake this aspect of your research.

Yours sincerely,  
*Margaret Clarke*

*Principal*  
Hamilton College Bothwell Road Hamilton ML3 0AY  
Tel: 01698 282700 Fax: 01698 281589  
[mclarke@hamiltoncollege.co.uk](mailto:mclarke@hamiltoncollege.co.uk)  
[www.hamiltoncollege.co.uk](http://www.hamiltoncollege.co.uk)  
[www.facebook.com/HamiltonCollegeScotland](http://www.facebook.com/HamiltonCollegeScotland)

To help save our planet, play your part! Switch off! Bin it! Reuse it! Be smart! Do not print off this email unless necessary.

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Christian Schools (Scotland) Limited (known as Hamilton College) is an educational charity registered in Scotland. Charity Number SC 006206. Our registered office is at Bothwell Road, Hamilton ML3 0AY.

Your Ref:

Our Ref: Schools Central\Schools Gen Corresp\Misc-  
CGKRLet230

21<sup>st</sup> May 2014

Rev Younger  
University of Glasgow  
College of Social Sciences  
GLASGOW  
G12 8QQ

**Education Services**

Woodbank  
30 Edinburgh Road  
DUMFRIES  
DG1 1NW

Any enquiries please contact

**Gillian Brydson**

Direct Dial (01387) 260432

Fax (01387) 260453

E-mail [Gillian.Brydson@dumgal.gov.uk](mailto:Gillian.Brydson@dumgal.gov.uk)

Dear Rev Younger

**Research: The Interpretation and Implementation of the Religious Observance Requirement within the Curriculum for Excellence.**

Education Services Management team have considered your request to conduct research as named above and give approval to approach schools in our authority to participate. We note that this research has full approval from the University of Glasgow's Ethics Committee.

We would not expect formal acceptance in writing from each Head Teacher but would expect that the offer for participation be made by you and that if any Head Teacher chose to be involved, approval was implied by this agreement.

We wish you well with this timely research and we look forward to hearing of your findings.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Brydson  
Head of Strategic Support

# Religious Observance and Spiritual Development in Scottish Schools

PhD Research by Rev. Stephen Younger [01698 823584 *or* [s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk)]  
Supervised by Prof. Alison Phipps [0141 330 5284 *or* [Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk)]

## Interview Outlines

### **Primary School pupils would be asked to write about/talk about/draw:**

What comes into your mind when the word 'God' is mentioned?

What are the things in this world that make you go "Wow!", "How...?" and "Ow!"?

What do you like best about Assemblies?

What do you like least about Assemblies?

If you could ask the wisest person in the world one **BIG** question about absolutely anything, what would you ask?

### **Secondary School Pupils would be asked to write about/talk about/draw:**

What do you think (Insert here the means by which their school implements its Religious Observance events) are for?

What do you like best about (Insert here the means by which their school implements its Religious Observance events)...?

What do you like least about (Insert here the means by which their school implements its Religious Observance events)...?

If you could ask the wisest person in the world one **BIG** question about absolutely anything, what would you ask?

### **Staff members and School Chaplains will be asked:**

Describe how Religious Observance (RO) is planned, practised and assessed in your school.

What do you think is the purpose of RO?

Where would you see Religious Observance and Spiritual Development fitting in the Curriculum for Excellence?

How do you think RO differs from RME/PSD/Values Education?

What do you think are the criteria for a 'successful' RO event?

What are your views on the current 'opt-out' vs. 'opt-in' debate?

### **Parents will be asked:**

How important do you think values, beliefs and faith are for your child?

What place do you think Religious Observance and Spiritual Development have within 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scottish Schools?

What do you think would be the best way to develop your child's spirituality?

Who is the best person to deliver RO and Spiritual Development for your child?

# Religious Observance and Spiritual Development in Scottish Schools

PhD Research by Rev. Stephen Younger [01698 823584 *or* [s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk)]  
Supervised by Prof. Alison Phipps [0141 330 5284 *or* [Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk)]

## Participant Observation Schedule

1. Date and location of event
2. Purpose of event (*e.g. School RO Assembly, classroom discussion of spiritual values, Circle Time*)
3. Person responsible for event
4. Event programme
5. Reactions of Participants
6. Observations
7. How did this event enhance Religious Observance and/or Spiritual Development?
8. Which of the six sensings in the Report of the Religious Observance Review Group were evident?
9. At what points did this event comply with/diverge from the Guidelines and Advice Notes on implementation of Religious Observance?

# Religious Observance and Spiritual Development in Scottish Schools

PhD Research by Rev. Stephen Younger [01698 823584 *or* [s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk)]

Supervised by Prof. Alison Phipps [0141 330 5284 *or* [Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk)]

## Participant Observation Consent

On behalf of (*Name of educational Establishment*)

---

I confirm that Rev. Stephen Younger has permission to make a digital audio/visual recording of (*please specify the event*)

---



---

for the purposes of academic research.

I confirm that only pupils for whom the school has full photo consent have been filmed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**CONSENT TO THE USE OF DATA**

University of Glasgow, College of Arts Research Ethics Committee

# Religious Observance and Spiritual Development in Scottish Schools

I understand that Rev. Stephen Younger is collecting data in the form of digitally recorded interviews and participant observation for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow. This research is to find out how the statutory requirements of Religious Observance and Spiritual Development within Scottish Schools are being done at the moment. It will also explore regional variations and the accommodations that are made for different constituencies. From this research proposals will be made as to how they can be done better, more effectively and inclusively within the context of the Curriculum for Excellence.

**I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:**

- My name and any material likely to identify me as an individual will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.
- Analysis of the material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Signed by the contributor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

**Researcher's name and email contact:**

Rev. Stephen Younger  
s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk

**Supervisor's name and email contact:**

Prof. Alison Phipps  
Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk

**Department address:**

University of Glasgow College of Social Science, School of Education, St. Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street, Glasgow G3 6NH

[2 Copies of this form are signed. One is for you to keep and one is for me.]

**CONSENT TO THE USE OF DATA**

University of Glasgow, College of Arts Research Ethics Committee

# Religious Observance and Spiritual Development in Scottish Schools

I understand that Rev. Stephen Younger is collecting data in the form of digitally recorded interviews and participant observation for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow. This research is to find out how the statutory requirements of Religious Observance and Spiritual Development within Scottish Schools are being done at the moment. It will also explore regional variations and the accommodations that are made for different constituencies. From this research proposals will be made as to how they can be done better, more effectively and inclusively within the context of the Curriculum for Excellence.

**I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:**

- My child's name and any material likely to identify him/her as an individual will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.
- Analysis of the material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Signed by the contributor's parent/guardian:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>Researcher's name and email contact:</b>            Rev. Stephen Younger            s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk  <b>Supervisor's name and email contact:</b>            Prof. Alison Phipps            Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk  <b>Department address:</b>            University of Glasgow College of Social Science, School of Education, St. Andrew's Building, 11            Eldon Street, Glasgow G3 6NH</p>
--

[2 Copies of this form are signed. One is for you to keep and one is for me.]

# Religious Observance and Spiritual Development in Scottish Schools

PhD Research by Rev. Stephen Younger [01698 823584 *or* [s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk)]  
 Supervised by Prof. Alison Phipps [0141 330 5284 *or* [Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk)]

You are being invited to take part in a research study into how Religious Observance and Spiritual Development are done in Scottish Schools. Religious Observance and Spiritual Development are a legally required part of the Scottish Educational system. This research involves recorded interviews with school staff, pupils, chaplains, lecturers and law-makers. It also involves attending and recording Religious Observance events in schools. You can read more about it here. Please take time to read this information carefully. Talk about it with other people if you want to. Ask me if there is anything you are not sure about or would like more information about. Take time to decide if you want to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

## What is the purpose of the study?

I am a part-time PhD student with an interest in the place of Religious Observance within the Curriculum for Excellence. This field research is to find out how Religious Observance and Spiritual Development are being done at the moment, and how it can be done better, more effectively and inclusively. It will also explore regional variations and the accommodations that are made for different constituencies: e.g. adaptations for Denominational schools rather than non-Denominational Schools; adaptations for Independent Schools with an explicit 'Faith' basis; adaptations for a non-heterogeneous school roll (e.g. a large refugee community, a large faith-defined community). The bulk of the research will be completed in May-June and August-September 2014 for presentation of a PhD Thesis.

## Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen so that I have a mixture of people who are involved in or interested in Religious Observance and Spiritual Development in schools. You have been identified as someone who might like to take part and who would have useful and helpful things to say about the subject. This study covers a sample of urban, rural and Island situations across Scotland. They are picked from several Education Authorities.

## Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this research at all if you do not want to. If you do go ahead, then you can ask for the interview to be stopped at any point and for the data you have given to be removed from my records. You can choose not to answer a question if you want to. I will only go ahead if you agree to take part and if you sign a Consent Form.

## What will happen to me if I take part?

You will talk to me and answer some questions. It should not take more than one hour. Our talk together will be recorded digitally. You will not be penalised by your school or your employer in any way if you decide not to take part.

## Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. Your real name will not be used in anything that is written afterwards. Apart from us, only your Headteacher will know that you have been involved. You are free to tell anyone else that you have been involved. If I use in print anything that you tell me, your real name will not be used and no-one will be able to identify you. A pseudonym will be used instead of your real name. All information I collect from these interviews will be kept strictly confidential and in compliance with relevant Data Protection legislation.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

An anonymised summary of this research will be given to your Education Authority at the end of this fieldwork period as a condition of permission to research within their jurisdiction. A Thesis will be written using this research for the purpose of examination for the award of a PhD (c.2016). The Thesis will be accessible in Glasgow University Library. Articles and a book are planned (from 2014 to 2016) on the basis of this research to help guide Scottish Schools in putting good Religious Observance and Spiritual Development into practice.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This research is reviewed by Professor Alison Phipps (Lecturer in Inter-Cultural Studies) at the University of Glasgow. It has been reviewed by the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Where appropriate, permission has also been sought from your Education Authority.

**Contact for Further Information**

If you are unhappy with anything that happens during this interview, you can contact Professor Phipps (Tel. 0141 330 5284 or email [Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk)) or Glasgow University's *College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer* by contacting Muir Houston at [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

# Religious Observance and Spiritual Development in Scottish Schools

PhD Research by Rev. Stephen Younger [01698 823584 *or* [s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:s.younger.1@research.gla.ac.uk)]  
 Supervised by Prof. Alison Phipps [0141 330 5284 *or* [Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk)]

You are taking part in a study of how Religious Observance and Spiritual Development are done in Scottish Schools. Your School has to have Religious Observance such as Assemblies. This study involves interviews with people in schools: teachers, chaplains, pupils, and parents. It also involves me attending and recording Religious Observance events in schools. You can read more about it here. Please take time to read this carefully. Talk about it with other people if you want to. Ask me if there is anything you are not sure about or would like more information about. Take time to decide if you want to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

## **What is this all about?**

I want to find out how Religious Observance is done in your school. I want to find ways to make it even better and more interesting. I want to find ways to make sure everyone can be included and can take part. I also want to find out how Religious Observance differs from school to school depending on where the school is and who goes to it.

## **Why was I picked?**

You have been chosen so that I have a mixture of people who can tell me what they think. You have been picked as someone who might like to take part and who would have useful and helpful things to say about the subject. I have chosen people from different parts of Scotland and from a dozen different schools.

## **Do I have to take part?**

You do not have to take part at all if you do not want to. If you do go ahead, then you can ask me to stop at any time and to delete anything you have said. If you don't like a question, or don't want to answer it for any reason, then you can choose not to answer. We will only start if you agree to take part and if your parent/guardian signs a Consent Form.

## **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will talk to me, and draw some pictures and answer some questions. It should not take more than half an hour. Our talk together will be recorded digitally. You will not be in trouble with your school in any way if you decide not to take part.

## **Will my taking part in this study be kept secret?**

Yes. Your real name will not be used in anything that is written afterwards. Apart from us, only your Headteacher/your class teacher/your parent/your guardian will know that you have taken part. You are free to tell anyone else that you have been involved. If I print anything that you tell me, your real name will not be used and no-one will know it was you. A made-up name will be used instead of your real name.

**What will happen to the things you write and record?**

I will tell your Education Authority about this study but without using any names. I will also write a long essay about this study for an exam I want to pass in 2016. I will also write articles and a book in the next few years to help Scottish Schools do good Religious Observance.

**Who makes sure you do this properly?**

This study is checked by my teacher, Professor Alison Phipps (Lecturer in Inter-Cultural Studies) at the University of Glasgow. It has been checked by the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee whose job is to make sure that I do this properly. And I have asked permission from your Education Authority and your school.

**Contact for Further Information**

If you are unhappy with anything that happens during this interview, you can contact my teacher Professor Phipps (Tel. 0141 330 5284 or email [Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.Phipps@glasgow.ac.uk)) Or you can speak with Glasgow University's *School of Education Ethics Officer* by contacting Muir Houston at [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

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