



**HOW CAN POST-PRIMARY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
DO ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT,  
DO THEM TOGETHER AND DO THEM BOTH WELL?**

**Report on the Cross-border Conference on Religious Education held at  
St. Angela's College, Sligo on Friday, 15 2010**

Conference organised in partnership between St Angela's College Sligo (a College of N.U.I. Galway) and Stranmillis University College, Belfast.

Financial Support Provided by **SCoTENS**, The Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South.

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## **Introduction**

**Vince Murray**  
**St Angela's College, Sligo.**

In the Republic of Ireland the debate engendered by the introduction of post-primary Religious Education Examinations at Junior and Leaving Certificate Level tends to hinge around the perceived tension between the desire for academic status and the fear that an overly examination-focussed approach could detract from the personal development of learners where this development is understood as having spiritual and moral dimensions. In Northern Ireland public examinations are called “Religious Studies” and are structured to require skills of critical reflection in addition to knowledge and understanding. However, some Christian churches prefer a more confessional approach to the teaching of Religious Education and the four largest Christian denominations have been legally responsible for the joint preparation of a core RE Syllabus.

This conference aimed to explore, both theoretically and practically, the thesis that academic scholarship, supported by public examinations as well as faith development which engages with religious traditions and social action in the public sphere, are best achieved together because each needs the other to flourish. Despite the fact that the island of Ireland is a relatively small area there has been very little dialogue between those involved in post-primary Religious Education North and South of the Border. This conference is one small step in developing this dialogue, with the financial support of SCoTENS, and was based on the hope that, given our different histories and educational contexts, there might be much that we could learn from each other.

Each of the presentations engages with some aspect of the above thesis by exploring a particular form of integration of academic and personal development. Sean Goan locates contemporary post-primary Religious Education within a holistic vision of education inclusive of humanistic and scientific dimensions. Norman Richardson argues that learning for life can be enhanced through a constructive partnership between Religious Education and Education for Citizenship in which each retains their distinctive identity. Donna Finlay and Sean McIlroy describe how the approach to Religious Studies within the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment contributes to the integration of academic achievement and the capacity for critical reflection and evaluation. Sinéad Mannion explains how in her facilitation of students' preparation for the Junior Certificate Religious Education

journal she enables learners to meet the assessment criteria of the public examination while simultaneously engaging with their own personal development. Vince Murray and Sr. Moya Hegarty show how Initial Teacher Education in Religious Education can facilitate student teachers in integrating their own academic and personal development as a model of and a preparation for their future teaching in post-primary Religious Education.

The analysis of the feedback from the four conference workshops based on each of the presentations and the conference evaluations identifies emerging generative themes which form the basis for key recommendations to a range of stakeholders in the provision of post-primary Religious Education, North and South.

# **A Whole School Approach to Integrating Academic and Holistic Personal Development: Placing RE within a Holistic Vision of Education.**

**Sean Goan**

**Faith Development Officer of Le Cheila Schools Trust**

## Three Holy Men and a Bear

A priest, a Pentecostal preacher, and a rabbi all served as Chaplains at a local university. They would get together two or three times a week for coffee and to talk shop. One day, someone made the comment that preaching to people isn't really all that hard. A real challenge would be to preach to a bear. One thing led to another, and they decided to do an experiment. They would go out into the woods, find a bear, preach to it, and attempt to convert it. Seven days later, they all came together to discuss the experience. Father Flannery, who had his arm in a sling, was on crutches, and had various bandages on his body and limbs, went first. "Well," he said, "I went into the woods to find me a bear. And when I found him, I began to read to him from the Catechism. Well, that bear wanted nothing to do with me and began to slap me around. So I quickly grabbed my holy water, said a Hail Mary and sprinkled him and would you believe it, he became as gentle as a lamb." Reverend Billy Bob spoke next. He was in a wheelchair, had one arm and both legs in casts, and had an IV drip. He said "Well, brothers, you know that we don't do Hail Marys! So I went out and I found me a bear. And then I began to read to my bear from God's HOLY WORD! But that bear wanted nothing to do with me. So I took hold of him and we began to wrestle. We wrestled until we came to a creek. So I quickly dunked him and baptised his hairy soul. And just like that, he became as gentle as a lamb. We spent the rest of the day praising Jesus." The priest and the reverend both looked down at the rabbi, who was lying in a hospital bed. He was in a body cast and traction with IVs and monitors running in and out of him. He was in really bad shape. The Rabbi stared at them and said, "Looking back on it, circumcision may not have been the best way to start."

Knowing where to start is often a problem when faced with such a broad topic but I would like to thank you, Vince, and the RE department here at St Angela's for the invitation to address this conference, the theme of which is indeed close to my heart. For a long time RE teachers have laboured under the misconception of their peers that their subject is either a useful safety valve for the release of tension in an otherwise overcrowded and demanding curriculum or a half-hearted attempt on the part of church bodies to maintain their influence over young people that really should be abandoned in the enlightened times in which we live. The sense of struggle for legitimacy has been added to with the rise of so called militant atheism and people like Professor Richard Dawkins arguing that giving children a religious education is comparable to erecting a firewall in their minds against scientific truth. So the conference is timely indeed and takes place now as we enter the tenth year since the introduction of the Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus. Indeed, my preparation for today was greatly

helped by my attendance at a Colloquium organised by Lorraine Gillespie of RE Support Services in Kilkenny in mid-December the purpose of which was to initiate a review of the experience of those ten years and I will refer to this later.

The structure for what I propose to say today relates to the topic of the talk which is placing RE within a holistic view of education. I intend to consider what might be meant by a holistic view of education, and to reflect on how a whole school approach to integrating academic and personal development is both possible and indeed necessary if RE is not to fall between the two stools of either championing the academic approach which neglects the formative side or pursuing the personal development aspect in a way which undermines the intellectual credibility of a very important subject in the curriculum. In the last part of the paper I will consider ways in which the RE Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabi can help use to achieve the balance we are seeking. My own conviction is that these aspects can be done together and done well and I suggest this is in fact taking place in schools all over the country.

### **A Holistic View of Education**

In 1996 the International Commission on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century presented a report to UNESCO entitled: *Learning: The Treasure Within* and since then the commission has been promoting reflection and discussion on its ideas. In that report it was argued that education throughout life is based on four pillars: Learning to know, Learning to Do, Learning to Live Together and Learning to Be. The authors asserted at the outset that: “Education should contribute to every person’s complete development – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality.”<sup>1</sup>

They go on to say that: “The aim of this development is the complete fulfilment of the human person, in all the richness of her or her personality, the complexity of his or her forms of expression and his or her various commitments – as individual, member of a family and of a community, citizen and a producer, inventor of techniques and creative dreamer”.<sup>2</sup>

There can be no doubt that here at the highest international level we have a holistic view of education: the focus is on the development of the whole person. While the emphasis is on the individual it is not promoting individualism but rather is seeking to “ensure that everyone has

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<sup>1</sup> The Four Pillars of Education [www.unesco.org/delors](http://www.unesco.org/delors) p.8

<sup>2</sup> The Four Pillars of Education [www.unesco.org/delors](http://www.unesco.org/delors) p.8

the personal resources and intellectual tools needed to understand the world and behave as fair minded and responsible human beings.”<sup>3</sup>

However, just because such international reports are in the public arena does not mean that this view of education will inform policy makers around the world. We know that governments and other bodies involved in education can often be guided by political, economic or religious ideologies that are not concerned with the development of the whole person.

It is easy to think of totalitarian or fundamentalist regimes where education is entirely at the service of those in power but a recent report published in Britain focusing on the education and training of 14-19 year olds came up with very interesting conclusions in relation to the aims of education. The *Nuffield Review of Education* is an independent study, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, of education and training in England and Wales spanning a six year period from 2003 to 2009 and was published last May. It found that the concerns of the economy and the language of business and commerce were significant influences in shaping educational policy. In their conclusions the review body, headed by Dr. Richard Pring from the Education Department of the University of Oxford, argued that such an approach meant that education policy lacked coherence and an overall sense of purpose. In their conclusion the authors called for:

The re-assertion of a broader vision of education in which there is a profound respect for the whole person (not just the narrowly conceived “intellectual excellence” or “skills for economic prosperity”) irrespective of ability or cultural and social background, in which there is a broader vision of learning and in which the learning contributes to a more just and cohesive society.<sup>4</sup>

Under “aims and values” the review asserts that:

The impoverished language of “performance management” needs to be challenged as we help young people to find value in what is worthwhile, lead fulfilling lives, gain self esteem, make sense of experience and become responsible members of the community.<sup>5</sup>

So from the point of view of a teacher of Religious Education I find it very encouraging that significant secular bodies are wholeheartedly supporting a holistic view of education that sits very well with the aims and purposes of Religious Education as currently practiced on this island where we are trying to “help young people find value in what is worthwhile, lead

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<sup>3</sup> The Four Pillars of Education [www.unesco.org/delors](http://www.unesco.org/delors) p.9

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents206-1.pdf> p.4

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents206-1.pdf> p.10

fulfilling lives, gain self esteem, make sense of experience and become responsible members of the community.”

This brings us to the next point I would like to consider which is; the importance of a whole school approach to the integration of academic and personal development. It is necessary to give a little time to reflecting on the framework within which our schools operate and how they are required, under law, to carry out their responsibilities and functions. The reason for doing this is so that we might address the perception that RE is be viewed as an optional extra that can be left to the margins of school life or even simply handed over to parish groups to deal with outside school hours. Both of these opinions have been aired in recent discussion on the place of religion in schools

According to section 9 the Irish Education Act (1998) one of the functions of a school is:

“To promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.”

This too constitutes a holistic view of education and offers a rationale as to why Religious Education has a place in our curriculum but more importantly from the perspective of a whole school approach it recognizes the importance of what it calls the “characteristic spirit of the school” which is sometimes also referred to as the school’s ethos. Without going into detail on the governance of Irish secondary schools, it is worth pointing out that the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the school plan which is required under the Education Act is the responsibility of the Board of Management whose function is to:

“uphold the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school” (Education Act 15 b).

Therefore, when a school, through its staff and Board of Management, is engaged in the process of planning, it is appropriate to say that the whole enterprise should be guided by the values that underpin the very reason for its existence. This view will be expressed in the school mission statement and means that, theoretically at least, our educational system requires that the school plan supports the integration of the academic and personal development aspects of each child’s education. So that is why we can concur with the statement in the introduction to the syllabus:

“while it is the concern of the whole curriculum, built around the principles of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, to promote personal growth and to facilitate the spiritual development of students, Religious Education is well placed

to provide students with opportunities for reflection on human experience as well as for understanding and interpretation of that experience.”<sup>6</sup>

### **The Junior and Leaving Certificate Syllabi in Religious Education**

As noted at the outset it is now ten years since the Junior Certificate syllabus was introduced and even though there were some heated debates in religion department meetings over its introduction there can be no doubt that there was a readiness in the country for this development. The uptake of the subject for assessment at Junior Certificate was astounding with some 25,000 students sitting the examinations within a few years of its introduction. However, some RE teachers and indeed principals are arguing that it was at a cost. Some of the negative points being made about the introduction of the Syllabus could probably be summarized under the following headings:

- RE has suffered from becoming like the other subjects: namely exam driven.
- No time in a packed programme and wide ranging syllabus for reflection and personal formation
- The “religious studies” approach which is suitable for people of all faiths and none has led to a relativising of the particular traditions and a lack of familiarity with the students’ own tradition.

These broad headings can then be backed up by anecdotal evidence that has come my way which reports that retreats and pastoral aspects of the religion programme in school have been dropped or curtailed due to pressure of time. Others have suggested that because the major world religions, (Section C of the syllabus) are easier to learn and have a certain novelty value, Section B, dealing with Christianity, is being undermined especially in relation to examination preparation. Likewise, in the journal work the topics being chosen are selected on the basis of easier exam preparation. No doubt there are other criticisms that you are aware of but before going to address some of these points I would like to also comment on the positive aspects of the introduction of the religion syllabi:

- Children are benefitting from the stated aim of the programme and are exposed to a broad range of religious traditions and to non-religious interpretations of life. That is a very significant development given the changes in Irish society over the last ten years: we have become a more multicultural society, a more secular society and yet the religious / spiritual dimension remains strongly present at a personal level.
- Given these changes the introduction of the syllabus has helped in the promotion of tolerance and mutual understanding.

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<sup>6</sup> Junior Certificate RE Syllabus, p3

- It is developing in students the skills needed to engage in meaningful dialogue with those of other, or of no, religious traditions. In my experience this is something that is particularly noted by parents who express amazement at how their children are able to talk freely and respectfully to their fellow students from different religious traditions about their customs and religious practices.

At the outset I mentioned the RE Colloquium organised by RE Support services before Christmas. For me a highlight of that very beneficial get together was the brief input given by four students from a local school on their experience of Junior Certificate Religion. The girls are now in Transition year but each of them commented very favourably on the experience of Junior Certificate Religion:

- They enjoyed in particular coming to understand other religious traditions, the way in which this understanding made them think differently about their own religious tradition and in certain instances appreciate them more.
- Reflecting on the miracles of Jesus not simply amazing actions but as meaningful signs helped them to understand his mission and to read Scripture as documents of faith.
- They came to appreciate the importance of ritual in human behaviour.
- They were particularly challenged to think more deeply about morality and the consequences of their choices.

What was most impressive from my perspective was the capacity of these students to engage meaningfully in a reflection on RE. They had the language and they knew how to use it. That provided an eloquent testimony on the value of the course in promoting the holistic development of these young people. They were engaging with the world around them, reflecting on their experience, thinking about the search for meaning and appreciating the richness of a range of religious traditions as well as deepening their awareness of their own tradition.

However, as we might expect, the experience was not without its difficulties. They complained of what they saw as the massive course content, and the difficulty in revising for the examination – the awareness that “these are not answers that we can learn off” and concern over how to express one’s opinions appropriately. In short, it could be said that their problems related to the examination and their preparation for it.

This highlights the source of much of the perceived tension regarding the so called “academic” teaching of religion. It is important to say that the syllabus does not insist on or demand an exclusively academic approach to the teaching of religion but because we now have a state sponsored method of assessment the focus of much of the teaching and learning is shifting to the final examination. It is worth pointing out here that this is not just a problem for RE.

Emer Smyth’s longitudinal study of 900 students at second level which is funded by the NCCA is offering very valuable insights into the processes shaping student experiences of the educational system. Among other things, it has highlighted the student perception of the examination focus that tends to take over in Third Year and which has a negative impact on their experience of education.<sup>7</sup> There is more emphasis on covering the course and learning off; the classroom atmosphere changes, becomes more strict with less variety in teaching methodologies and forms of assessment. The relationship with the teacher also changes and school becomes less enjoyable. Students of higher ability can cope with this but for others it can lead to a disengagement from school work. These findings are important because they highlight how negative aspects of Junior Certificate RE are part of a broader problem within the system. While this debate is beyond the scope of today’s conference it does challenge us to consider ways in which the formative aspects of the course can be addressed while still teaching the particular objectives of each section of the syllabus.

To this end it is useful to consider the findings of the subject inspection reports from the Department of Education. In reviewing five inspection reports relating to the last two years there are valuable recommendations that would help schools and RE teachers in integrating the academic and formative aspects of the course.

In the reports two recommendations tend to recur and they relate to planning and assessment. The inspectors find that while there is very good planning relating to the topics to be taught within a particular time framework, there is much less or no attention being given to what the learning outcomes for that same period might be: in other words, the teacher will know what has been taught but will s/he know what the student has learned? These outcomes are given for each section of the syllabus and can be helpful in ensuring that the broad educational aims of the syllabus are achieved.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/ESRI\\_3rdYr.pdf](http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/ESRI_3rdYr.pdf)

In the light of this recommendation it is not surprising that the next area of concern for the inspectors is that of assessment. While teachers are widely praised for their setting and correction of homework and giving class tests for the purposes of revision it is suggested that students should be encouraged to develop their understanding and critical skills through the setting of questions that would facilitate reflection and developed thought. Even here the inspectors might be falling into the trap of considering assessment only in terms of settings questions. Might there not be more creative ways of discovering the impact of the course on our students?

### **Conclusion**

It has been said that education is about giving our young people “roots and wings” and it is a metaphor that can certainly be applied to Religious Education. At this time of change and uncertainty in Irish society we, as religious educators in a system that promotes a holistic view of education, are very well placed to offer a hugely significant service in this area but it is important that we rise to the challenge of the time. We are not in the business of erecting firewalls against scientific thought as Professor Dawkins would hold. Rather we are concerned with the development of what Howard Gardner almost called “spiritual intelligence”. We acknowledge and celebrate the human capacity and indeed the human need to reach for the skies while being wholly focussed on what is going on in our world. We know that to do this and to do it well is a process that involves the whole person, body, mind and spirit. That is who we are called to be in our teaching, a whole person, and it is also who we address in our teaching, the whole person. If we lose sight of that then there will be no proper integration of the academic and the holistic personal development.

# The Relationship between Academic Religious Education and Education for Citizenship

**Norman Richardson**

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*“Education is much more than a matter of imparting the knowledge and skills by which narrow goals are achieved. It is also about opening the child’s eyes to the needs and rights of others. We must show children that their actions have a universal dimension. And we must somehow find a way to build on their natural feelings of empathy so that they come to have a sense of responsibility towards others. Indeed, if we had to choose between learning and virtue the latter is definitely more valuable. The good heart which is the fruit of virtue is by itself a great benefit to humanity. Mere knowledge is not.” (The Dalai Lama, 2005:214-5)*

This perspective on education by the Dalai Lama offers us a helpful starting point for our discussion of the relationship between Religious Education and Citizenship Education. It is reminiscent of the statement in the Delors Report (UNESCO, 1996) that education is based upon four pillars: *“learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be”*. It raises the key issues of purpose and balance, and I would like to explore these by looking at some of the actual and possible approaches to religious, personal and social development that may be available to us in our various educational roles, as well as the structures that may permit or limit such approaches. My experience is largely confined to Northern Ireland, although I trained and initially taught in England and in more recent times I’ve been able to acquire some awareness of the wider international Religious Education scene. I will also limit my observations to what happens *outside* the sphere of public examinations, which is covered in other papers, and so I will focus mainly on how these matters impact on the age groups up to Key Stage 3 – pupils up to the age of 14.

## **Religious Education**

Public perception of Religious Education (RE) in schools in many parts of the world seems to me to be extremely confused. Over my 40 years as an educational professional I have become increasingly frustrated over the persistent view of many people that RE in schools is basically about promoting a particular religious view of life, whether that be Catholic, Protestant, just vaguely Christian or, indeed, Jewish, Muslim or whatever. The task of persuading people that there is, or should be, *an educational purpose* to including religion in the curriculum of schools is a very difficult one, and it is not made any easier by the actual experience of many parents and teachers (and even sometimes student teachers) in relation to religion in schools. People

may be able to acknowledge that education, like any other area of life, is subject to change and that their own experiences at school may have been very different from those of their children, but their perceptions of RE often seem to be more resistant to the recognition of that change. Whether it was Catholic catechesis / faith formation, or non-denominational Bible stories that they themselves experienced, the image of RE for many people (certainly in Northern Ireland and even in Britain) seems to have got stuck. Is this perhaps why many teachers find it hard to move on from these traditional approaches to teaching and learning religion? And is this, in turn, somehow connected with the reluctance of many otherwise intelligent people to engage in religious discussion and particularly in critical thought about religion?

In Northern Ireland the RE curriculum has long been defined by the Churches, and over the past 20 years the four largest Christian denominations (Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist) have been legally responsible for the *joint* preparation of a Core RE Syllabus. Many people welcomed this as a significant ecumenical achievement, though, as someone long involved in ecumenical activity, I personally doubt the ecumenical motivation. In several ways the process was significantly flawed – the Churches, supported by government, made no attempt to involve members of other faith communities; they decided on an “essentially Christian” syllabus; and perhaps worst of all they decided that they would not discuss the *purposes* of Religious Education. So inevitably what the Churches produced was a list of conservative Christian content with no rationale – a lowest common denominator syllabus. When the Churches reviewed and revised the syllabus a few years ago (Department of Education, 2007) very little actually changed in the process and the resulting content. A degree of political pressure led to the inclusion of a world religions element for pupils at Key Stage 3 only (ages 11-14), though still without any reference to members of other faith communities and with the rather grudging comment that the study of other faiths “will require only a modest amount of teaching time in each year of key stage 3” (Churches’ Working Party, 2003:11). But apart from their bullish defence of the need to retain a “Christian-centred Core Syllabus” the churches have deliberately and continually avoided the question of what RE is for!

There is, however, a “get-out” clause in the Northern Ireland legislation – the Core Syllabus is “only a Core”, and schools are permitted to teach outside or beyond the core – thus Catholic or Integrated schools, for instance, can teach in preparation for the sacraments and take a denominationally confessional approach and those schools that wish to include world religions at primary level or Key Stage 4 may do so. The problem is that the statutory core is very crowded and most teachers say that they don’t even have time to teach that. Teachers in

Catholic schools were reassured by the bishops back in the early 1990s that their own published RE materials already included everything that was in the core syllabus, so in effect they can – and do – ignore it!

If we look elsewhere in Europe we find a range of approaches to RE reflecting several different stages of development and understandings of purpose. Schools in England and Wales have for several decades now followed a substantially multicultural and inter-faith approach, with religious and other interest groups involved in the development of local area syllabuses guided by a non-statutory national framework. Scotland also follows a similarly broadly-based approach to RME – *Religious and Moral Education* (though slightly variable titles are used in different school sectors). In secular (*laïcité*) France the teaching of religion in state schools has been banned for over a century, though more recently the French system has begun to explore ways of including “*le fait religieux*” – literally ‘religious fact’ – in its schools, emphasising that this can be done neutrally and without recourse to religious proselytising. Germany, with its system largely based on church affiliation, has nevertheless significantly broadened the range of multicultural topics taught under the banner of RE. Norway, despite some teething problems and challenges based on human rights principles, has adopted a substantially multi-faith programme, though not to the neglect of Christianity. A number of countries that offer non-religious alternative ethics-based programmes have nevertheless insisted on the inclusion of some religious topics within the overall programme. Most interesting of all, perhaps, is the situation in a number of countries from the former anti-religious Soviet Bloc which are now at various stages in their discussion of how to re-establish Religious Education within their education systems. Several of these reflect a similar conflict between a system dominated by somewhat defensive religious interest groups (mainly churches) and alternative approaches which are concerned not with religious nurture but rather with inclusive awareness and understanding (see Kuyk et al, 2007). What they all do reflect, however, is openness to the discussion of **the purposes of RE**, still sadly lacking at an official level in relation to the Northern Ireland Core Syllabus.

Particularly significant in this process – and relevant to our own discussion – is the recent work of the Council of Europe in relation to what it has termed *the religious dimension of intercultural education* (CoE, 2004). Having traditionally largely avoided discussion of religious matters the Council has over the past decade devoted significant attention to this, recognising the significance of religion as a factor in national and international affairs, and recent publications have offered theoretical and pedagogical support for the development of

religious understanding in schools. This approach emphasises the importance of *knowledge about religion* as a means of countering prejudice and stereotyping, in support of the right of freedom of religion and belief as articulated in internationally recognised human rights instruments and as a contribution to education for democratic citizenship. These are well summed up in some passages from the Council's 2008 white paper on intercultural dialogue which acknowledges the place of "knowledge and understanding of the major world religions and non-religious convictions and their role in society" (CoE, 2008:5.3) as contributing to the development of *intercultural competences*. Another important document is the "Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools" (2007) issued by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (ODIHR/OSCE), which emphasises the importance of impartial teaching based on sound scholarship, consultation with all interested parties and the thorough preparation of teachers.

All these documents focus on accurate knowledge and are certainly based on the importance of informed religious awareness as a key dimension of social cohesion and the protection of people's rights to freedom of belief. The term "Religious Education", however, is significantly avoided in most of these documents, undoubtedly because of the fear of misunderstanding on the part of governments, teachers and the public. Perhaps the term "Religious Studies" helps a little here, though some suggest that it is too cold and clinical and possibly lacking in a personal dimension. The Toledo document, however, goes a little further by drawing attention to ethos:

'Effective teaching about religions and beliefs also benefits from a school ethos that focuses on human rights and democratic principles, intercultural respect and understanding, ... a safe learning environment for all students, and critical thinking' (OSCE/ODIHR 2007, 61).

The emphasis on knowledge and impartiality is understandable in relation to national and international bodies that do not under any circumstances wish to be seen to promote religious belief. Yet the Dalai Lama has reminded us – if we need reminding – that *knowledge* is not enough. Terminology initially introduced through pedagogical writings in England in the 1980s (notably through the work of such academics as Michael Grimmitt and John Hull) has now found its way widely around many other countries: this is the recognition that religious understanding should involve both *learning about religion* and *learning from religion*. The emphasis here is on learning that seeks a balance between the cognitive and the affective;

learning that is about the open formation of values and attitudes but which leaves the learner free and autonomous. The life-long journey of developing religious awareness must, of course, involve knowledge, but the very nature of religion means that it must also involve a more reflective process: *how can I make sense of these beliefs? what are the implications of people's beliefs and practices? what are the challenges that they entail? what is my response or that of my community or wider society?* Others have referred to this dimension of RE as “Personal Search” (as in the Scottish RME documentation). While this approach has been very influential in some places it has, however, been quite absent from the Churches’ thinking in relation to the Northern Ireland Core Syllabus.

### **Education for Citizenship**

When we turn to look at Citizenship Education we actually encounter many of these same issues in a somewhat different context. The motivation for, and the clear purpose of, models of citizenship education in most countries is the desire for social cohesion based on mutual respect for human rights and the promotion of democratic citizenship. Thus *Local & Global Citizenship* in Northern Ireland focuses on *Diversity and Inclusion, Equality and Social Justice* and *Democracy and Active Participation*, all within a framework of *Human Rights and Social Responsibility*.

The fact that many of these dimensions of citizenship education have close links and share a vision with broader and more inclusive approaches to Religious Education has been used by some to argue that there is no need for two areas of learning that cover significantly similar ground. Some secular critics of Religious Education have promoted the view that RE can be subsumed within the ethical dimensions of Citizenship; some teachers of religion have bemoaned the fact that some ethics topics formerly taught as RE are now just as easily termed ‘citizenship’, though without the need to artificially drag in a religious dimension. Some, indeed, have used this to argue against a more liberal approach to RE and in favour of returning to traditional confessional teaching. Behind all this there is a sense of threat and rivalry, of disputed curriculum territory.

More constructively, however, others have presented RE and Citizenship as being mutually supportive with both discrete and shared dimensions – a ‘positive partnership’ (Blaylock, 2002) that can enrich and extend both areas rather than limiting them. In Northern Ireland the interface between RE and Citizenship has the particular potential to help unlock RE from its Core Syllabus straight-jacket and to enable teachers who feel constrained by content-heavy RE

to teach a wider range of intercultural and faith-diversity topics in a joined-up manner, taking account of both cognitive and affective dimensions, encouraging critical thought and with recourse to an extended repertoire of interactive pedagogies and skills. Some teachers already do this instinctively; others may be in need of a degree of liberation towards that end.

### **Limitations and Possibilities**

Experience suggests that pupils and students who are exposed only to a limited range of ideas within a narrow religious framework and who do not have the opportunity to face up to the challenges of conflicting truth claims will be less willing and able to exercise these qualities and skills. This becomes more serious when those pupils move towards becoming teachers of RE. It is a sad reflection on our system in Northern Ireland that the vast majority of teacher education students presenting themselves as future specialists in RE at whatever level have never had any opportunity to study world religions and that their discussions about ethical matters have largely focused on personal morality rather than social, political, humanitarian and global issues. Additionally, of course, our still very separate parallel systems of education mean that opportunities to encounter and understand the different strands and styles of Christianity are also very limited. In research carried out over the past few years (Richardson, 2003; 2006) I have discovered that a significant number of student teachers would have liked to take a broader view and to have engaged much more with awareness and attitudes relating to religious and cultural diversity but have felt limited by the lack of opportunities so far.

If it is treated creatively, however, there is potential for an RE/Citizenship partnership both within the Core Syllabus framework and beyond it. In terms of the official RE Learning Objectives at Key Stage 3, these opportunities are particularly evident in **LO3: Morality**, which focuses on *Personal Identity, Relationships, Rights and Responsibilities and Choices*, but there are also many possibilities in relation to the other Learning Objectives. Some examples of possible extensions of these themes include:

- **Respect for Differences**

- relationships between people of different Christian traditions
- relationships between people of different religions
- religious attitudes and relationships between people of different racial & ethnic groups
- religious prejudice and stereotyping; countering sectarianism & racism
- the role of religion in building intercultural, inter-religious and cross-community trust and friendship

- **Religious Issues in Justice & Human Rights**

- religious perspectives on developing a sense of fairness and justice
- the causes of poverty and need in the developing world
- religious, cultural, ethnic and racial awareness
- the work of national and global agencies - the United Nations, UNICEF, Amnesty ...
- the work of faith-based agencies – Christian Aid, Trócaire, etc.
- religion as a factor in developing a sense of global citizenship

- **Conflict and Religion**

- understanding and dealing creatively with religious dimensions of conflict
- war: why people/nations fight – religious factors
- religions and peace – working for peace – case studies
- peace & reconciliation in Northern Ireland – case studies.

## **Ways Forward**

So where do we go from here in the promotion of the educational teaching of religion in schools and in order to ensure that there is a healthy and appropriate balance between the knowledge of religion and reflection on the values, attitudes and challenges of the subject matter?

I believe that we must air openly the discussion on the purposes of RE that the Churches in Northern Ireland have so far avoided. It may be uncomfortable, but as long as we neglect it we will suffer from continued misunderstanding about what RE is and what it is not. We will not necessarily find easy agreement between those in the different educational sectors – controlled, maintained, integrated – and we will probably have to agree to disagree, but we need to take forward constructive debate on the purposes of RE. In this process we need to take account of what is happening elsewhere – in Britain, in the Republic, in Europe – rather than sheltering in the misguided belief that everyone else is out of step. Those in the Churches who see themselves as the guardians of the gate, the ‘owners’ of RE, need to submit to a wider partnership so that the teaching of religion in schools is seen to serve all, not just some. An Advisory Group on RE, originally jointly set up in 2006 by the Churches and CCEA to develop some non-statutory guidance on the revised Core Syllabus, has begun to move in this direction and to open up some of that discussion at last. It will be interesting to see if the four

denominations who developed the Syllabus will allow that progress to continue or if they decide that they have to move in to curtail the ‘dissidents’!

In the longer term I believe that it is entirely healthy that denominational control of RE would give way and allow faith nurture to be done in and by the faith communities rather than in the publicly funded schools. Schools could then adopt an open and unambiguously educational approach, placing RE observably on the same basis as any other subject. If this does not happen then my fear is that Church control of the RE curriculum will continue to permit government to wash its hands of responsibility and thus marginalise RE further, which in turn could strengthen the case of those who argue for the complete removal of RE from the curriculum. It may also increase calls for minority groups to further splinter the system by setting up their own faith schools which, in the light of experience in Northern Ireland, leaves me with a sense of dismay!

Many of the students I work with are ultimately open and willing to move beyond the confines of the more traditional RE towards a broader world view once they have a sense of that broader vision. This is under threat, however, from those who perceive traditional RE as an anachronistic or marginal option, and training opportunities are already being squeezed in my own institution.

A comfortable and healthy partnership with other values-related areas of the curriculum – not least citizenship education – need not surrender any genuine distinctiveness of either area. Indeed, we need to work together with our natural partners to resist the utilitarianism that is inflicting too much of educational discussion, such as the undue emphasis on STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) at the expense of the humanities. This point has been highlighted in the recent Nuffield Review of 14-19 education which observed that:

"As the language of performance and management has advanced, so we have proportionately lost a language of education which recognises the intrinsic value of ... seeking understanding [and] of exploring through literature and the arts what it means to be human" (Pring et al, 2009).

Similarly the authors of the Cambridge review of primary education have commented that:

The initial promise ... of entitlement to a broad, balanced and rich curriculum has been sacrificed in pursuit of a narrowly-conceived ‘standards’ agenda. The most conspicuous casualties have been the arts, the humanities and those generic kinds of learning ... which require time for thinking, talking, problem-solving and that

depth of exploration which engages children and makes their learning meaningful and rewarding. (Cambridge Review, p.3).

Religious Education can be defensive, small-minded and ineffectual, making little impact on the thinking and decisions that people make about how to deal with life. But RE also has the potential to be informative, challenging, creative, humane and enjoyable, and, together with Education for Citizenship, to contribute significantly to the preparation of children and young people for life in a diverse and turbulent global society. I hope we can take the more positive option of joining in the task of ensuring that the balance within RE, and its constructive relationship with areas such as Citizenship, sustains its value as a significant contributor to the process of learning for life.

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# **Integration of Academic Achievement and the Capacity for Critical Reflection and Evaluation**

**Donna Finlay and Sean Mc Ilroy:  
Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.**

CCEA stands for the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. It is a public body which reports to the Department of Education and is quite a unique educational body in that it brings together the three areas of curriculum, assessment and examinations. At CCEA we aim to work towards the “integration of academic achievement and the capacity for critical reflection and evaluation” and we hope to show that this idea is reflected in our overall approach to Religious Studies.

We must say at the outset that we are grateful for this wonderful opportunity in being able to share where we are at in the North with you, our colleagues in the Republic of Ireland. We are also here to learn from you. The time is surely right for us to learn from one another given the new political dispensations that now exist on the island which makes our presence here today possible.

The Northern Ireland Examinations Council first began public examinations of Religious Education, as the subject was then called, in the early 1970s with the General Certificate of Education (GCE) ‘O’ (ordinary) and ‘A’ (advanced) level. This was replaced in the 1980s by a change of title to Religious Studies with two new examinations: GCSE for sixteen year olds and the new modular AS/A2 examination (the new modular ‘A’ level) for seventeen and eighteen year olds. In the 1970s there was certainly reluctance, by the universities throughout Ireland, to accept O and A levels for matriculation purposes. Religious Studies was viewed by many at that time as quite simply a ‘Cinderella’ subject and not really worthy of serious attention. It was therefore crucial that the specifications (syllabi) demonstrated academic rigour comparable to any other academic subject on offer. Gladly, the subject has thrived since then and indeed there is little doubt that it would be hard to find a single school or teacher in Northern Ireland who would wish to go back to a time when no examination in the subject was on offer. The subject now enjoys considerable vitality and interest and, perhaps most importantly, equal status with other subjects within the school curriculum.

The early syllabi were dominated by scripture and church history, but during the last twenty years there has been a move towards world religions, philosophy of religion and ethics. It is

quite interesting that Religious Studies is now in terms of the number of students who wish to take it to GCSE and A Level, the fastest growing subject in the UK. This is all the more remarkable given the pace of secularization in the UK as a whole. The change in subject content is certainly a reflection of British society which is now progressively secular, multi-racial and multi-religious. The interesting thing is that the faster the pace of secularization, the more interested the young seem to be in religious, spiritual and moral issues as subjects for enquiry. Perhaps it is just quite natural that human beings would wish to explore the moral, religious and spiritual side of life, while at the same time there is a strong tendency by many in society to reject such exploration as spurious and silly.

Irish society is also experiencing radical transformation and again rapid secularization is an important and distinguishing feature of our new culture. After the Ferns, Ryan and Murphy Reports there is more than ever a wave of scepticism, distrust and an acute sense of betrayal about religious institutions. There has also been a total transformation of the moral climate within Ireland. The once secure ethical certainties and moorings promulgated with such dour severity by the likes of John Charles Mc Quaid have completely gone. If John Charles came back he would barely recognise the Ireland that he left some forty years ago. Among many of the young, the moral climate now seems to be a heady mixture of hedonism, idealism, consumerism, relativism, materialism and now latterly the spluttering ethics of the Celtic tiger which so miserably failed to deliver all that it promised. Spirituality, if there is any, tends to be a much more private or group affair. Long gone are the days of churches full to the rafters with people.

There has also been a revolution within the Irish intellectual climate which affects all our schools and third level institutions. Not so long ago many educational establishments were dominated by the powerful forces of the Catholic Church. Our intellectual lives at that time saw everything through the interpretative prism given to us by the Church. Ireland is now witnessing the full, devastating and belated arrival of the European Enlightenment with its attendant anti-clericalism and opposition to religion and ‘superstition’ of every sort. The new intellectual climate is dominated by the centrality of reason, objectivity and science.

What I think is important is that we allow our teaching and examining to reflect these changes and that is what in part we have been struggling to do in the Northern Irish public examination system in Religious Studies. We quite simply cannot ignore these extraordinary changes and if we do, we do so at our peril. This means that at GCSE and A level we have to permit not just

the religious, but also the secular voice to speak and the Ethics and Philosophy of Religion courses are an attempt to do this. We must begin to teach our students how to think and not just what to think, for the latter may well face instant derision and certain rejection. It is our responsibility to prepare our students for a world of competing truth claims, many of which are, alas, completely counterfeit and often dangerous. The process of assessing and analysing what is available in this new competing marketplace of ideas, which is now so much part of the culture in which we find ourselves, must begin with us in schools and if we don't begin it there, then some more sinister forces may well seek to take over the space once occupied by traditional religious belief.

The GCSE specification is included in your pack. It is a new specification and schools started teaching it in September 2009. It has a choice of nine units and students sit one unit for the short course (half a GCSE) and two units for the full course. Each unit examination lasts for one hour and thirty minutes. There is no coursework or controlled assessment in this qualification. It is one hundred per cent external assessment. All students sit the same paper, so we make sure that the paper is accessible to all students. The choice of units is as follows: The Christian Church through a study of the Catholic Church and One Protestant Tradition; The Christian Church with a focus on either the Catholic Church OR the Protestant Tradition; The Revelation of God and the Christian Church; Christianity through a Study of the Gospel of Matthew; Christianity through a Study of the Gospel of Mark; World Religions – Islam; World Religions – Judaism; An introduction to Christian Ethics and An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion.

There are two assessment objectives for the GCSE specification and each of these objectives has to be reflected in the kind of question asked. Each assessment objective is worth fifty percent. Assessment objective one is to describe, explain and analyse using knowledge and understanding and assessment objective two is to use reasoned argument to express and evaluate personal responses, informed insights and differing viewpoints. These assessment objectives are reflected in the specimen assessment for Ethics (unit 8) which is included in your pack. What is important is that the ability to critically evaluate is equal in importance to that of acquiring and applying knowledge and understanding.

GCE Religious Studies is examined over a two-year period. In the first year of study, students study two units and sit two examinations for an AS qualification i.e. half an A Level and continue a more in-depth study of these units in their final (A2) year of study and sit two

examinations for the full A level award. In the AS examination, which lasts for one hour twenty minutes, the students answer two questions. The two assessment objectives are reflected in the examination papers. The content at AS and A2 must be chosen from two of the following options: An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke; An Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles; An Introduction to Old Testament Covenant and Prophecy; The Christian Church in the Roman Empire: Beginnings, Expansion and External Pressure; The Origins of the Celtic Church in Ireland and the beginnings of its missionary outreach; Religious Ethics: Foundations, Principles and Practice; An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion and finally An Introduction to the Study of Islam. The content at A2 is as follows and again two of these options must be chosen: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke; Study of Acts, Galatians and 1 Corinthians; The Covenant Community: Prophecy and Renewal; The Continued Development of the Christian Church in the Roman Empire to AD 325; A study of the Development and Impact of the Celtic Church in the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries; Ethics and Society; Religious Belief and Competing Claims (Philosophy of Religion) and Islam: Law, Tradition and Practice.

The form of assessment at A2 level is two, two hour examination papers. The first two questions on the A2 paper again examine knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation. There is a third and compulsory final question which is synoptic in nature in that it allows students to integrate and link their two areas of study and then to see how the ideas that they have come up with in their studies are relevant and/or significant in the modern world. Examples of the AS and A2 examination questions are provided in your pack. You also have exemplification of last summer's AS examinations for Ethics and Philosophy.

The support materials for both qualifications can be found on the CCEA website ([www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk)) and you are welcome to use them should they be of use to you. These materials have been written by experienced examiners who are teaching our Religious Studies specifications. If you would like any more information about what we do or would like to arrange a meeting then please do not hesitate to contact me at CCEA-my contact details are in your pack.

# Examination Religious Education Journals and the Integration of Academic Achievement and Spiritual and Moral Development

**Sinead Mannion:**

**Religious Education Teacher, Moate Community School, Co Westmeath**

The following is a synopsis of a Powerpoint presentation on teaching the Religious Education Junior Certificate Journal and Leaving Certificate Coursework:

## ❖ **Aims of Junior and Leaving Certificate RE**

This introduces the audience to the aims of the Junior and Senior RE syllabus whether familiar with curriculum or not. The audience gain an overall picture of the examination syllabus as well as the aims for the journal work aspect

## ❖ **Junior Cert RE Assessment Breakdown**

The assessment breakdown of the Junior Cert RE state examination (i.e. the two components – written paper 80%, journal work 20%) was presented.

## ❖ **Junior Cert. RE Syllabus**

This slide provides viewers with specific syllabus details relating to journal work requirements. It states that journal work relates to the third aim of the syllabus in particular and a title will be chosen annually by students from a choice of twelve titles

## ❖ **Skills Developed**

This addresses the various skills developed in journal work by the pupils.

## ❖ **State Examination Commission Guidelines**

These are the guidelines issued annually by the SEC to teachers relating to journal work procedures

## ❖ **Chief Examiner's Report**

The SEC Chief Examiner's Report provides teachers and a general audience with an insight into how previous RE examinations have been assessed. The report addresses the highlights and downfalls of pupils, providing a statistical and commentary breakdown of their performance on each section, including the journal of their RE examination.

## ❖ **RESS Journal Work Checklist for teachers**

The checklist found on the website [www.ress.ie](http://www.ress.ie) provides teachers and students with a practical method of carrying out each step of journal work in a methodical order

## ❖ **Useful Terms**

NCCA Leaving Certificate RE Guidelines for teachers outlines a list of useful terms when considering examination question and journal work prompts

## ❖ **Methods of Research**

The next part of my presentation focused on potential research methods to be used throughout journal work exploration such as internet, books, visits, surveys etc. These methods seek to fully engage students and challenge them to question their research

❖ **Useful Teacher Websites**

I have provided teachers with some valuable general websites which will aid them in their exploration of journal work

❖ **Step-by-Step suggestion to journal work**

This part of the presentation is a practical suggestion as to how to approach journal work exploration from the beginning. The step-by-step guide is one tried and tested by many teachers who agree that it's implementation is successful and promotes motivation of pupils'

❖ **Leaving Certificate RE Assessment Breakdown**

Presented was the assessment breakdown of the Leaving Cert RE state examination (i.e. the two components – written paper 80%, journal work 20%)

❖ **Leaving Certificate NCCA RE Teacher Guidelines**

These guidelines outline the aims of Leaving Cert Coursework

❖ **Leaving Cert RE Syllabus**

The syllabus structure and Coursework requirements for the examination course are outlined

❖ **Leaving Cert Syllabus & Coursework**

Highlights the importance of particular syllabus objectives. Reminds teachers to be mindful of the certain syllabus section requirements in their exploration of their Coursework titles

❖ **Useful Teacher Websites**

I have provided teachers with some valuable general websites which will aid them in their exploration of Coursework

❖ **State Examination Commission Guidelines**

These are the guidelines issued annually by the SEC to teachers relating to Coursework procedures

❖ **Chief Examiners Report**

The SEC Chief Examiners Report provides teachers and general audience with an insight into how previous RE examinations have been assessed. The report addresses the highlights and downfalls of pupils', providing a statistic and commentary breakdown of their performance on each section, including the Coursework part of their RE exam.

❖ **Step-by-Step suggestion to Coursework**

This part of the presentation is a practical suggestion as to how to approach Coursework exploration from the beginning. The step-by-step guide is one tried and tested by many teachers who agree that it's implementation is successful and promotes motivation of pupils'

❖ **Conclusion**

The presentation concluded with a summary and an opportunity for the audience to ask questions.

# **The Integration of Academic and Personal Development in Initial Teacher Education in Religious Education: Part 1**

**Vincent Murray:**

**Director of Religious Education Programmes, St Angela's College Sligo.**

The following presentation explains how the Initial Teacher Education Programme within the B.Ed. Degree at St Angela's College facilitates student teachers of Religious Education to integrate their personal, academic and professional development.

When I was at a very formative and vulnerable stage of my development as a young man, having decided to leave the seminary and thinking about becoming a teacher, I heard a psychologist make the distinction between two types of knowledge, 'notional' which can be obtained from a textbook and 'real' which is acquired through life and experience. This has profoundly influenced my development as an educator and in this presentation I wish to share how we implement the integration of academic, personal and professional learning within the Religious Education elective in the B.Ed. Programme at St Angela's.

Having briefly outlined the course philosophy I will explain how this integration is achieved within the teaching and learning processes of the programme. The significance the student assessment tasks in this integration will be highlighted using examples of students work which show different forms of integration. I will conclude with a few general comments and suggestions for further consideration by a range of stakeholders in post-primary Religious Education.

The course is based on the *shared praxis* approach to Religious Education developed by Thomas Groome which 'is a teaching dynamic that critically correlates life with the spiritual wisdom' of religion(s). It enables students to bring their lives to study a faith tradition, whether they are committed to that tradition or not, and to appropriate its spiritual wisdom to their own lives'. (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2005 p.111) Precisely how the spiritual wisdom of a faith tradition is or may be appropriated is centred on the learner and their relationship with that tradition. This philosophy of Religious Education is fully in harmony with the educational rationale for Religious Education as outlined in the NCCA's syllabus for Junior Certificate Religious EducationE which states that, 'Religious Education can justly claim to be an integral part of any curriculum that aims to promote the holistic development of the person.' (2000 p.4)

We hope to model integration by how we teach as well as what we teach. The person of the teacher and how they relate to students is considered the most influential dimension in the teaching and learning process. Thomas Groome invites us to see that ‘the educational encounter should reflect an “I/Thou” relationship”. (1998 p.99) Sr. Moya will explain how we build this specifically into the structure of our modules. Also at the end of each lesson or module we would ask the students to consider the following three questions which challenge the students to become more aware of their academic, personal and professional learning and the relationship between them:

- What have you learned about this topic?
- What are you taking away personally from studying this topic?
- How would you address this topic in the RE classroom?

We find that our greatest challenge in overcoming dualistic thinking among the students is in helping them to see the connection between their academic learning and preparation for teaching. One student very honestly told me, ‘Vince, lecture notes are for exams, school textbooks are for teaching’. To help them to bridge this gap we have constructed a template for a ‘Unit of Work’ which requires them to cite the academic sources they have used in preparing a series of lessons for Teaching Practice and to articulate how they will implement the shared praxis approach to Religious Education over the course of the Unit. We also strongly recommend that when they have completed a lesson plan, they mentally change roles and do the lesson tasks themselves in order to highlight what academic gaps and personal issues emerge for them as student teachers prior to engaging pupils with the same lesson topic. To further encourage integration of ‘real’ and ‘notional knowledge’ we would also model what we call ‘appropriate self-disclosure’ in our lecturing to encourage what Groome describes as the paradigm shift from ‘teaching as telling’ towards ‘creating conversation’. (1998 p.203) This conversation is between the lecturer and students and, at its best, among the students themselves.

The most influential scaffold for the integration of academic, personal and professional learning is the form of the student assignments. Based on Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, (1993) we attempt to explore the potential for interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences as well as the more dominant linguistic intelligence. Here are some examples of such assignments from the different years of the course and examples from

students' work which show how they have responded to the invitation inherent in the assignment.

### **Integrating academic and faith development.**

In a first year module we explore different theories of faith and faith development. The assignment requires students to trace and reflect upon their own faith development in the light of Westerhoff's four stage theory.

'From studying Westerhoff's theory I have come to realize that my faith development journey has matched what I have learned. I am happy to have studied Westerhoff's theory as I now feel less confused about my faith. I have learned that I am not alone in this 'Searching Faith' and that this stage is necessary to help strengthen one's faith. All these questions I am asking and confusion I am feeling is just a way of helping me to look deeper into my religion and search for my own meaning and values within my faith. I want to be able to move onto the 'Owned Faith' stage and feel confident where my trust lies but for now I will just have to stay at these crossroads searching until I discover the right path for me'.

The sample shows increased self-awareness and reassurance based on personal reflection on the theory. It is an example of the integration of academic and faith development.

### **Integrating academic learning and social commitment**

The third year assignment is based on a week long series of interfaith and ecumenical encounters in Belfast and Dublin. The student teacher must choose an area of research which emerges as of personal interest in the process of completing a reflective journal on the encounters. The first example of students work, following a visit to Forthspring Community Centre on the 'peace wall' in Belfast, was chosen by the student because of traumatic personal experiences during 'the Troubles';

'In conclusion, I would have to say that if it were not for my own experience, I would not have written this essay. I most likely would have very little interest in peace issues at all. But experience has led me into this situation. I have been in many a peace rally, I have been one of the children who stood and spelt out the letters S.T.O.P., stop terror, oppression and pain. I cannot blot out those memories. However I can eliminate my bitterness and be more optimistic and although this essay has taken me a very long time to compose, it has helped me to realise that peace and reconciliation are possible. I am not saying that for the sake of conclusion purposes, I am saying it because I mean it, I hope for it.'

As well as providing her with a deeper understanding of the Christian understanding and practice of reconciliation, it re-enforced her personal commitment to working for peace by

grounding it in this understanding. This is an example of the integration of academic learning and social commitment.

### **Integrating academic, spiritual and professional learning**

The following extract from a third year essay arose out of a visit to the Church of The Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Dublin as part of the same experience of ecumenical and interfaith encounter.

‘Personally myself I clicked with the icons very quickly and upon engaging with them on the iconostasis I felt this sense of spiritual guidance as the images did not reflect the problems of life, but rather answer them for me. For example upon looking at the teaching Christ icon I contemplated on the great fear I have of leaving this world and of what awaits us when we do have to depart. However, through the icon I received a sense of reassurance that we will reach peacefulness in body, soul and also with our God our creator while still leaving me with many questions I seek answers to. The icon touched me personally and helped me seek hope while still leaving me with more burning questions to one of the great mysteries of all time. This resulted in the iconographer (a person who creates icons) achieving what he wanted which was “To bring into being an icon, which will open up for others something of the mystery of Christ.” (Baggley 2007 P.34)

This icon (John the Baptist) kept drawing my attention to the icon of Christ whom everything on the iconostasis radiates as it is a window to God and heaven and each icon upon it reminds us of this. I found myself standing beside John turned toward the Lord in prayer asking for his mercy. I had allowed my relationship with him deteriorate of late and I stood before him seeking forgiveness as he had chosen to reveal himself to me through this medium as I took the time to join John in prayer. God’s love is never ending he is always there to listen and offer a medium through which we can connect with him be it prayer, art, music or any of the other mediums he provides. When I interviewed Irish iconographer Steve Higgins he said “The purpose of the collection of icons on the iconostasis is to deepen our encounter with God, to catch the imagination, to open our hearts and minds so that we may better hear the divine promptings.” This is exactly what I experienced upon engaging with the iconostasis and it has transformed my life as it has renewed my relationship with God through offering me a connection with the heavenly realm.

I was unaware this even existed until we visited the Church of the Annunciation and it has transformed my life as it has renewed my personal relationship with God. That is why I think it is paramount that in my teaching I introduce the young learners in my class to the iconostasis because many learners might be still searching like I was for God and the heavenly realm. It is only by trial and error that we can find which window works best for us. I must present them with windows to heaven such as prayer, meditation, music, the Bible and sacred art and allow them explore which one works best for them. This way even if I only open up a window to Heaven and God for one learner I have achieved what religious education is all about because if the learners are not introduced to and allowed explore each window I am not doing my job as a religion teacher as they have not been given the opportunity to experience God, which many might still be searching aimlessly for.

Here a spiritual awakening led the student to choosing to research Orthodox iconography through reading, contemplation and ecumenical encounter. This resulted, not only in a deepening of spiritual self-awareness, but also in a commitment to making the means of her faith journey available to her future pupils. This extract provides an example of a complex integration of academic, personal and professional learning.

### **Integration of spiritual and moral growth with professional development**

This fourth year Religious Education portfolio is based on a final year Teaching Placement in a Centre for Travellers. This assignment asked students to reflect on the ethical implications of and learning from their placement in the light of the two ethics modules which they had already completed. The reflection shown is based on an extremely difficult ethical decision which the student teacher had to make regarding a participant on the course.

‘Although this issue and the learner appeared insignificant to many of the teachers in the centre, it was this learning which surpassed every methodology class I have ever attended and reflective journal I have filled and called me to seek and find the kind of teacher and person I need to be. This issue has caused me to reflect on times when I have been treated in a negative way and times that I have used this as an excuse for the positive/negative treatment of others. After our death we are all one in Jesus Christ; we will all reside uniformly around the Lord’s Table. Therefore for me the challenging and rewarding task occurs now in this world through engaging in and assisting my future learners to engage with those they do not perceive to be equal, those who are marginalised because of their actions, disability, crime or sexual orientation.’

In summation, this placement was one which opened my eyes to the realities of life for those who are marginalised in our society. It also caused me to question my contribution to the marginalisation and oppression of those who are marginalised as well as my role as a Christian in reaching out to those who are the victims of oppression.’

This student teacher was confronted with and addressed the deepest questions regarding her own personal and professional values in the light of her inherited religious tradition. She accomplished a sophisticated integration of personal (spiritual and moral) and professional learning which she acknowledges is ‘real’ rather than ‘notional’.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, I would like to share how our learning at St Angela's might have potential for resolving any perceived conflict between personal (spiritual and moral) development and academic achievement in post-primary Religious Education. We have discovered that to achieve integration of academic and personal learning we have to:

- 1) agree a philosophy of Religious Education which promotes it
- 2) explicitly teach for it and
- 3) provide forms of assessment which require it.

We have also found that this learning is done best when it is done in harmony. Therefore, I suggest that those schools and teachers who reject public examinations in Religious Education should reconsider the potential contribution to faith development of the academic learning contained in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabi. To those who claim that teaching for the Religious Education examination precludes personal faith development, I suggest that purposeful personal engagement with the aims and content of the Junior and Leaving Certificate Syllabi enhances academic recall, increases religious understanding and develops the skills required by the syllabi themselves. Finally, to those responsible for the public assessment of Religious Education, I request that the generally accepted aim of Religious Education 'to learn about religion so as to learn from religion' (Roebben in Kieran & Hession eds. 1998 p.130) be given serious consideration in the forms of assessment of pupils in the written papers as well as the individual coursework tasks. From an educational perspective, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences should have at least equal educational value to linguistic intelligence both in the teaching and learning process within schools and in what is considered important within the assessment system.

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## **The Integration of Academic and Personal Development in Initial Teacher Education in Religious Education: Part 2**

**Sr. Moya Hegarty;**  
**St Angela's College, Sligo**

*The following presentation explores how the integration of personal and academic development within the student teachers of Religious Education can contribute to future teaching and learning which facilitates pupils in a parallel process. It is concerned with the "I" of the teacher in communication with the "I" of the learners.*

As I read the above statement, a question comes to mind. Have I, as a teacher, been in a situation of late where I experienced the reality of this statement? Having given it some thought I remembered a conference that I attended lately. The title of the conference was *The Sacred Art of Living and Dying* and the keynote speaker was Tommy Gorman, the RTE Northern Editor in Belfast. Tommie is a professional communicator and his presentation bore all the marks of his trade, but in this particular context he also spoke out of his own personal experience of living with cancer. I found myself as a "learner" very much in touch with "the teacher".

The challenge of this statement is something that the RE Department in St Angela's College have grappled with for some years. We met for a day in June 2008 to explore and plan in the light of our concerns around this statement.

We set ourselves as the aim of the day to evaluate the spiritual and faith development dimensions of the B.Ed. Religious Elective, in order to facilitate the integration of the personal and academic development of the teacher. I facilitated that day and it was structured in such a way that what we hoped would happen, for students in a classroom situation, would be paralleled in our way of proceeding with the task of the day; that is, besides evaluating the academic aspects of the programme, reflective time would inform and be factored into the task that we aimed at, so that our on- going learning would continue. Put in another way the "I" of each member of the team would be in communication with the "I" of the others.

Our day began with quiet reflective time as to how Ps.139 would invite us to proceed with our aim. It was followed by a time of listening and sharing with one another. Then we identified, evaluated, and reflected on the faith and spiritual development dimensions of the current academic programme. We went schematically through from first to fourth year to ensure that all aspects of the course were looked at. Examples from teaching practice and from class

situations were shared, which acted as gauges as to the effectiveness of our approach. As examples were looked at we noticed how as mentors and lecturers we too were influenced in our own lives by the “I” of the students.

Obstacles to faith and spiritual development were also explored. These were; the legacy of the points system; individualism and lack of community; competitiveness; pressure of time; lack of human development. We were aware that these can't be eradicated but that practices and experiences could be put in place that would help to temper the possibility of absolutising any of them. An example from teaching first years comes to mind. The first year students were asked to choose a picture from a series of nature pictures that would best capture their inner landscape in their present situation. One picked a picture of a huge rock that dominated the rest of the landscape and explained that that was how he felt during micro teaching. This offered an opportunity for personal and faith exploration with the class.

As a team we looked at and identified areas which would enhance and improve on the existing modules of the programme. We agreed that within the present structure blocks of time would be assigned to focus on the conscious integration of the academic with the faith and spiritual dimensions of the programme as well as aiming for more integration of the personal with the professional in the life of the students. At the end of the day it was agreed to submit these recommendations to the Head of the Education Department and the course committee subgroup which dealt with the review of the B.Ed. programme. It was also decided that the content of the various blocks would be worked out in the various modules of the programme by those involved. Vince Murray also offered to draw up a template as to how this integrative model would look like. Another example might help to ground the process of what we are trying to do to help integration. A block of time for integration was taken from the Biblical Studies module in first year, and using the genealogy of Jesus from Matthew's gospel, opportunities were given to link the question of identity, addressed in the genealogy, with each student's own sense of identity and the web of relationships that help to understand and claim that identity.

The recommendations were approved and these blocks of time are now part of the RE programme. There is a visual model that helps me to keep the focus of these blocks of time assigned to integrative time. It is called the Mobius strip. As readers you will have to use your imaginations to visualise what this looks like. I take a narrow strip of paper which is coloured on one side. The coloured side represents the professional, academic side of the teacher and the

plain side the personal faith side. I can show the coloured strip of paper to an audience by holding that side in front of them but they are not able to see the plain side. But if I give the strip a half twist and joint the ends together I create a new shape which is called the Mobius strip. This new shape allows the outer and the inner to seemingly flow in and out of one another. The question that the Mobius strip asks is how do the outside and the inside co-create reality? The question may be phrased “How does the personal/faith/spiritual inform the academic and visa versa”? The two sides of the Mobius strip keep co-creating reality for better or worse.

There are practices that help students in the work of integration: explanation of the purpose of the time allotted; silence; body, mind and spirit meditation; reflective questions; using poems from different traditions; an appreciation of the arts; the practise of lectio divina; being present to nature; listening and sharing in small groups and in large groups, looking at examples of people who made a difference through integrating the outer and inner realities of their lives. It is important that students are helped to appreciate the importance of integrative work by giving examples of people like Nelson Mandela who spent 38 years of his life in prison yet used the wisdom garnered from that time to he help break the power of apartheid. Sometimes a visual example can also help to see the social fruit of this integrative work, like the room in the heritage centre in Tennessee which contains 20 black rocking chairs, chairs occupied like people like Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and many others, people who rocked the racial system that helped to keep black people as second class citizens and that gave birth to the civil rights movement.

I have noticed that among the more mature students there is a deeper connecting with this process and an appreciation of time to integrate what is going on academically, personally and professionally. Timing is also a factor and that has been taken into account when the timetable is being drawn up. Last year I had the fourth years between the end of an assignment and the beginning of TP. There was resistance to engage in the process at the beginning and it took an hour for students to open up and engage. This year I was unfortunate to have the second years the morning after the Halloween party. Some were not there but those who turned up did good work.

Overall it has been very worth while. The challenge is to help students to see that attending to their inner personal world can offer other aspects of themselves a spaciousness that enhances their academic and professional work.

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## **Feedback from Workshops**

### **1) Placing RE within a Holistic Vision of Education**

The potential contribution of Religious Education to a holistic vision of education was acknowledged by several participants. For this contribution to be effective its importance needs to be affirmed by school leaders as well as the RE teachers themselves. Having a clear balance between the academic and holistic aspects of Religious Education would assist in the struggle for recognition of Religious Education as having a vision of education which could inform a dialogue on the purpose, aim and rationale of education within the island of Ireland and beyond. Thus there is a need for even more cross-border discussion on the different experiences of teaching Religious Education. While one participant claimed that the place of Religious Education in holistic education goes beyond any denominational approach, another wished for more emphasis on the documents of the Catholic Church which contained ‘much wisdom when seen in the light of love and guidance’. Several student teachers highlighted the role of active learning methods in RE as helping pupils become authors of their own learning. The discussion on the idea that respect for the whole person in education would lead to a more just society surprised one student teacher. While one teacher said that the new examination in RE in the South help teachers to teach and learners to focus, another student teacher shared her discovery that RE should teach the Syllabus and not just concentrate on preparing for the examination.

### **2) Integrating Academic Achievement and the Capacity for Critical Reflection.**

Given the roles of the participants in this workshop, the dialogue tended to focus on the similarities and differences between the examination systems North and South and how these could be mutually beneficial. Although there was more in common in these two systems than had been anticipated, there were also significant differences which provided much food for thought. On the one hand, the content of the Republic of Ireland Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus was considered to be very interesting and potentially relevant by the participants from the North. On the other hand, the difference within the two systems in the requirement for critical reflection in Religious Education was very marked. While the Northern Ireland CCEA clearly articulates in both the marking schemes and the wording/structure of the questions the delineation between knowledge/understanding and critical reflection, this transparency could be developed within the NCCA examination system. One specific suggestion was that the NCCA could follow the example of the CCEA in publishing detailed marking schemes and marked students’ scripts so that future examination

candidates could clearly see how they could accumulate marks in their terminal examination. In relation to the theme of the conference, there was agreement that an emphasis on critical reflection in Religious Education not only gives pupils a positive experience of the subject but they leave school ready for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was also agreed that RE as an examination subject is the way forward and that if the subject is to be taken seriously it must have an academic status similar to other subjects. Critical evaluation is vital to academic status and also to catechesis/faith development.

### **3) Using Public Examination Journals / Coursework to Integrate Academic Achievement and Spiritual and Moral Development**

This was by far the most popular of the workshops especially among the student teachers who were effusive in their praise of the presentation on Journal work for the Junior Certificate Religious Education syllabus. This presentation by an experienced RE teacher was considered to be ‘dynamic and encouraging’, having ‘great enthusiasm and excitement for its potential’ and informative, practical, relevant and useful. All of the RE teachers and student teachers found that the presentation was a great help in planning for what was considered a very complex element of the syllabus and would make an invaluable in-service day for more RE teachers. While one participant acknowledged ‘the importance of the personal gain that learners can achieve by doing Junior and Leaving Certificate Journals’, none of the written feedback referred to how the journals could contribute specifically to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils while also helping them to a high level of academic achievement.

### **4) The Teacher as Model and Facilitator of the Integration of Academic and Personal Development.**

This workshop proved popular with school chaplains and student teachers. The school chaplains, taking a whole-school perspective, highlighted the need for opportunities for on-going personal and spiritual development, not only for the RE teachers but for all staff including principals and ancillary staff. Everyone involved in education as service needs to replenish their own spirit to be able to support each other. This could be facilitated by closer working relationships between the third level colleges and secondary schools particularly for newly graduated teachers. This support could be in the form of summer schools or conference days. The student teachers argued strongly for encouraging the personal development of learners in the RE classroom through learning from each other as well as the teacher. ‘RE is about lifelong development, not just examinations or points’. One student teacher wished

that the idea of the communication between the 'I' of the teacher and the 'I' of the learner be highlighted to reflect the importance of personal faith development for both. In the future teachers need to become aware of where they can gain support for their own personal development. A classroom teacher of Art and RE reaffirmed the integration of pastoral development with examination RE as 'real engagement takes place during these precious moments and relationships and deep trust develop'.

## **Conference Evaluations**

### **1) Which part of the conference did you find most beneficial and why?**

The majority of respondents found the input from the Northern Ireland CCEA to be the most beneficial. As most of the conference participants were from the Republic of Ireland they found the approaches and norms of the Northern Ireland system extremely interesting, some feeling that the South could learn from the North particularly in the simplification of coursework and a building block methodology from Junior to Leaving Certificate. Others felt that the learning could be mutually beneficial without specifically articulating the areas where this mutual learning could take place. Many also appreciated the presentation on placing RE within a holistic vision of education as it provided access to contemporary thinking on the nature of holistic education, the role of school ethos in this and the specific contribution of Religious Education to education of the 'whole person'. Others benefitted from the presentation on the capacity of examination journal work to facilitate critical reflection or were inspired by the examples of integrating academic, personal and professional development in the Initial Teacher Education programme.

### **2) Which part of the conference did you find least useful and why?**

Some participants found the presentation on the Relationship between Religious Studies and Education for Citizenship the least useful because they found it difficult to understand or relate to due to its 'academic nature' and the lack of reference to the Republic of Ireland.

### **3) Any other comments on the conference?**

The comments on the conference as a whole were generally very favourable with the hospitality, quality of presentations / resources and the opportunity for cross-border dialogue cited as the most positive features. Some felt that the day was too crowded with little time to digest the vast amount of information provided or to have prayer for guidance in all of the conference proceedings. Some also felt that the workshops could have been longer and that a final open forum would have allowed participants to hear from the other workshops. One participant felt that the conference was beneficial as it helped to put together all the complex pieces of the jigsaw to present a complete picture of the role and responsibility of Religious Education in the school.

#### **4) What do you intend to take away from this conference for implementation in your own context?**

The following comments were made:

- to reflect on the presentations and see what I can share with RE Departments in the diocese
- to adjust the Learning Outcomes of the school's RE programme in the light of the vision and information given by the CCEA
- to review how I approach journal work in Junior Certificate RE
- to look again at the value of examination RE and its advantages
- to continue to develop ways of combining formal and informal ways of implementing the RE Syllabus.
- A greater focus on promoting reflective thinking and evaluation in my students
- The nitty gritty of Journaling in Junior and Leaving Certificate Syllabi
- The information from Northern Ireland. I really see how it could be applied in the Irish context especially for Leaving Certificate learners not sitting the exam as it allows learners to critically engage more. I want to promote the Leaving Certificate Religious education examination in schools, to bring more 'me' as a learner into the classroom and to utilize the strengths of the Northern Ireland system while bearing in mind holistic education by not getting too exam focussed.
- Reflective practice and awareness of the 'I' in this world we live in and build up a critical awareness of who we are and what we do.
- The invaluable resources from the Junior Certificate presentation and the Northern Ireland RE Syllabus particularly ideas for personal reflection questions. A passion for the subject as displayed by all the speakers today. Avoid focussing solely on examinations holistic approach.
- I intend to integrate the theme of the day more into my teaching. I will include the AO1 and AO2 plus the St Angela's assessment ideas into my journal work guidance for students. Possibly be involved in the role of support for RE teachers in co-operation with the colleges of teacher education.

### 5) **How would you like St Angela's to follow up this conference?**

The following comments were made:

- In-service day for RE teachers where we could hear more on the Junior Certificate RE Journal
- A longer presentation on the RE examination system in Northern Ireland.
- More professional development for teachers of RE with a focus on reaffirming their capacity to integrate their academic work with the possibility of personal development of themselves and their students. Perhaps involve Boards of Management of schools particularly school principals at such days/ half days or evening programmes
- Perhaps a follow-up with emails would be helpful, e.g. updating new resources, seminars etc. Put all the presentations on the St Angela's website
- Senior Cycle approaches
- Continue it on a yearly basis if possible.
- Make the St Angela's integrated teaching style more publically and widely available to practicing teachers.
- A further conference; greater emphasis also from practitioners, teachers, diocesan advisers, inspectorate, support service etc.

### 6) **Any other suggestions for further constructive action arising from this conference?**

- A summer course or evening courses for non-RE staff who are actually taking RE classes as there are not sufficient RE teachers qualified in some schools.
- More input from actual teachers – their experiences in today's class
- Longer in duration...perhaps over two days and to have more individual workshops.
- More practical examples and input; more time for each speaker to go into more depth.
- Further development of today's work.

## **Emerging Themes and Recommendations**

### **Vincent Murray; St. Angela's College, Sligo**

- **Technical and Critical Consciousness**

An overview of the all of the proceedings of the conference suggests that there was a degree of dichotomy between the technical consciousness evident in the feedback from the workshops and evaluations and the critical consciousness contained in most of the presentations. While most conference participants expressed appreciation of the two presentations on placing Religious Education within a holistic vision of education and on the technical aspects of teaching examination coursework, little connection was made between the insights contained within these two presentations. This would suggest that while integration of holistic and examination driven learning is applauded at a theoretical level, its implementation within the examination system in the Republic of Ireland remains problematic. Perhaps this could be addressed by turning the problem into the solution. At the Kilkenny Colloquium to review Junior Certificate Religious Education ten years after the introduction of the state examination, the Transition Year students said that they enjoyed following the syllabus but did not enjoy cramming for the final examination. If the NCCA's fifth aim of Religious Education, 'to contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the student' could be more explicitly articulated within their 'educational rationale' for RE in the curriculum, then the forms of assessment of the subsequent syllabus aims, objectives and content would require motivating and challenging personal engagement of the students as a necessary dimension.

- **The relationship between Religious Education and Education for Citizenship**

The presentation on the relationship between Religious Education and Education for citizenship was considered by some to be "too academic" and not applicable to the Republic of Ireland. However, the presentation itself indicated clear areas of integration between the two subject disciplines and the NCCA's educational rationale for the inclusion of Religious Education in the curriculum contains quite specific social aims.

However, effective functioning in an increasingly complex culture demands that people have an understanding of a variety of religious traditions and an appreciation of the richness of the major religious traditions encountered not just in Ireland but in Europe and in the wider world. Increasingly, modern culture also calls for engagement with the secular response to human experience (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2000 p.3)

The negative feedback to the Norman Richardson's presentation suggests a lack of vision regarding the potential of inclusive forms of Religious Education to contribute to socially desirable expressions of citizenship. In addition, other presentations also called for the need to develop consciousness of action in the social sphere as one aim of Religious Education for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If the NCCA were to formulate its social agenda within its educational rationale into a specific aim of Religious Education this would increase the emphasis on the socially related attitudes and skills in the syllabus and ensure that these socially desirable aims are explicitly embedded in the teaching and learning process and then assessed by appropriate assignment tasks.

- **The Examination Systems, North and South.**

A very clear distinction emerged between the content-driven but more contemporary Religious Education Syllabus and Assessment in the South and the highly refined balance between understanding and personal critical reflection required in the NICCEA's Religious Studies Syllabus and Assessment. The presentation from the CCEA highlighted the high degree of transparency and detail in the examination marking schemes and how the public accessibility to examples of marked students' scripts provided very clear and specific information on what is expected from examination candidates to achieve the range of achievement grades. There was a feeling among the conference participants that the NCCA could learn much from this.

Many participants were extremely enthusiastic about the presentation from the NICCEA and expressed a need for more dialogue and mutual learning in the future. The RE teachers in the South expressed a desire that there be much more differentiation in the public examinations in RE between knowledge and understanding on the one hand and skills of critical reflection on the other. The idea of dividing all learning outcomes into Assessment Objective 1 (knowledge and understanding) and Assessment Objective 3 (reasoned argument to express and evaluate personal responses, informed insights and differing viewpoints) was very well received. Conversely, the NICCEA might develop modules the content of which would reflect contemporary religious practice and experience even more sharply, e.g. a modified form of the NCCA's Leaving Certificate Section on "Religion – the Irish Experience". (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2003, pp.90-93)

The presentation from St Angela's College on Initial Teacher Education in Religious Education provided a philosophy and an approach to Religious Education which integrated

academic development and spiritual and moral development. While this takes place within a third level institution with a particular Catholic Christian ethos and mission statement, it prepares student teachers for a variety of post-primary schools and access to the Religious Education course is open to all with the required academic qualifications. Its inclusivity stems from a particular understanding of Catholicity. What learning might this approach provide to both public examination systems, North and South? St. Angela's explicitly teaches for and assesses spiritual and moral development as well as for traditional academic achievement. One recommendation suggested by this approach is that both examination systems reflect on the relationship between their current understandings of the purpose of Religious Education and what they consider desirable to assess for public certification. This would achieve a coherence and direct correspondence between the articulated purpose and aims of Religious Education and what learning outcomes are both desired and assessed.

- **What is the purpose of Religious Education?**

The presentations, workshops and evaluations expressed a range of understandings of the purpose of Religious Education in post-primary schools, some explicitly, others implicitly, but all in engagement with their specific educational context. Sean Goan saw it as contributing to the holistic development of the person in ways that transcend denominational identification. Norman Richardson called for Religious Education to be educational in the broadest sense, to be accessible to all, not denominational or the property of the churches yet concerned with the development of virtue and having profound social benefits. Donna Finlay and Sean McIlroy from the NICCEA presented a philosophy which develops a deep understanding of and critical approach to the study of religion so as to encourage autonomous, reflective world citizens. Sinead Mannion, teacher in a post-primary school, prepares her students to become skilful researchers of and writers on religious themes to satisfy criteria for examination journals and wider examination criteria. Vince Murray from St Angela's College sees the purpose of Religious Education as the integration of personal (spiritual, moral, social and community) academic and professional dimensions of student teachers as models for post-primary teaching. Sr. Moya Hegarty conceives of Religious Education as the integration of the interior learning and exterior learning of persons so as to create a new reality which is not possible by attending to each separately.

Several comments in the workshops and evaluations (the request to start the conference with a prayer, the reference to Diocesan Advisers and Church Documents) suggested an assumption of shared identification with and agenda of a particular faith community. However, given the positions clearly articulated in the presentations, this is obviously not the case. The following recommendations, arising out of these observations, therefore relate to different educational contexts.

- Public examination Religious Education in both jurisdictions must have an inclusive purpose so as to provide universal access to the Religious Education curriculum. This inclusive purpose must provide the guiding principles for the teaching and learning within all schools entering students for the state examinations and it must be open to all students wishing to take the examination.
- The core Religious Education Syllabus in Northern Ireland needs to be based on a clearly articulated purpose and this should have a social dimension similar to that articulated in the NCCA educational rationale for the inclusion of Religious Education in the post-primary school curriculum.
- As one of the explicit aims of Religious Education within the NCCA Syllabus is ‘to foster the spiritual and moral development of the students’ (2000 p.5), schools sponsored by specific faith communities need to decide if they accept this as a responsibility that they have towards all their students and, if they do, to develop policies and practices for their provision of Religious Education which implement their decision.

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