

# UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Education

**'Teachers' Voices: An Investigation Into Secondary School Teachers' Experiences Of  
The Living Difference Agreed Syllabus.**

by

**Patrick Joseph Quirke**

Thesis for the degree of Doctorate of Education

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**ABSTRACT**

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This thesis examines the experiences of a range of teachers in and around an urban city in the South of England with regard to the 'Living Difference' agreed syllabus. Based upon a constructivist pedagogical point of view, it provides a conceptually based methodology claiming to improve standards of religious education. Due to a limited amount of research and literature, this investigation sought to expand the body of literature by adding the 'voices' of a wide range of opinions from practising teachers of religious education. The research took the form of semi-structured interviews and analysis of planning materials

The main findings suggest that the majority of participants follow the document in a limited way and adapt the syllabus to meet their individual needs. Moreover, there is a limited knowledge of the pedagogical basis of the document. The qualitative data supports the argument that due to a variety of factors, including time restraints, external pressures, and teachers requesting more emphasis on 'knowledge', Living Difference has been limited in fulfilling its potential

## Table of Contents

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| List of Figures and Tables.....  | p VII |
| Chapter1: Introduction.....  | p8    |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review: The Context of the Living Difference Agreed syllabus.. |       |
| Introduction.....  | p16   |
| The Development of Religious Education since 1944.....                               | p17   |
| The Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education.....                    | p20   |
| Pedagogy and Religious Education.....  | p37   |
| Clive Erricker and Living Difference.....  | p44   |
| ‘Living Difference’.....   | p69   |
| Research and Reviews of Living Difference.....                                       | p79   |
| Conclusion.....  | p93   |
| <b><u>Chapter 3: Methodology</u></b> .....   | p95   |
| Introduction.....  | p95   |
| Educational Context.....   | p95   |
| Research Gap.....  | p96   |
| Research Aims.....   | p97   |
| Philosophical positioning and approach.....  | p97   |
| Data Collection.....   | p114  |
| Data Analysis.....   | p124  |
| Ethical considerations.....  | p130  |
| Conclusion .....   | p131  |

|  |      |
|--|------|
| <b><u>Chapter 4: Findings From The Research</u></b> .....                          | p133 |
| Introduction.....  | p133 |
| The Participants.....  | p133 |
| Themes.....  | p133 |
| Supporting documents from the interviews.....                                      | P157 |
| Summary of Results.....  | P161 |
| <b><u>Chapter 5: Discussion On Findings: Research From The Chalkface</u></b> ..... | P165 |
| Introduction.....  | P165 |
| Wedell, Differences and Denzin.....  | P167 |
| Is informing the head teacher of the law enough?.....                              | P173 |
| “I Don’t Know What It Means To Be A Constructivist”.....                           | P175 |
| “It’s good but.....”.....  | P192 |
| Issues of Assessment.....  | P202 |
| Summary.....   | P208 |
| Some observations.....   | P211 |
| Finally.....   | P214 |
| <b><u>Chapter 6: Conclusion: Recommendations, Implications and</u></b>             |      |
| <b><u>Future Research</u></b> .....  | P215 |
| Introduction.....  | P215 |
| Recommendations.....   | P218 |
| a) Recommendations For Teaching Religious Education Locally.....                   | P219 |
| b) Recommendations For Teaching Religious Education Nationally ....                | P227 |
| Implications For The Stakeholders.....   | P229 |
| Reflections on the Research design.....  | P233 |
| Final Steps.....   | p237 |
| <b><u>References...</u></b> .....  | p241 |
| <b><u>Appendices</u></b> .....   | p259 |

## Declaration of Authorship

I, Patrick Quirke, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Teachers' Voices: An Investigation Into Secondary School Teachers' Experiences Of The Living  
Difference Agreed Syllabus.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

Signed:

Date:

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The thesis would never have been completed without the generosity of spirit and time of the participants. They were forthcoming in their openness, honesty and willingness to make a difference to the progress of religious education.

I must also dedicate this thesis to my family, Diane and Michael, who have sacrificed so much during the time of this research. I appreciate the cost that this has taken. Finally, to 'Mrs.C.' who had faith in me.

## List of Figures

Fig 1: Living Difference Pyramid of Concepts ..... P76.

Fig 2: Living Difference Methodological Cycle of Enquiry .....P77

## List of Tables

Table 1: Showing 'Progression From Comment To Code To Theme' ..... P127

Table 2: Table of Initial Responses .....P264

## **Chapter1: Introduction**

### **'Teachers' Voices: An Investigation into Secondary School Teachers' Experiences of the Living Difference Agreed Syllabus.**

If every piece of research is a story, then this one has its origins over thirty years ago, when a teacher of religious education (RE) demonstrated to me that to be a good teacher, it was essential that you were passionate about your subject and that you cared for the students you taught. In addition, to be a good teacher, you required good tools to help you to do the job. However, even if you had these pre-requisites, they are not a guarantee of success. To be a good teacher required something extra, something unquantifiable, almost magical. There were 'gods of education', who could walk into a classroom, teach and almost everyone would be in awe. This research is not about those people (if they exist). It is about those who have to work at being a good teacher of religious education, who acknowledge their limitations, have to work within government guidelines, and accept the help of their colleagues to enable students to learn.

After being in education for almost thirty years, I have witnessed the discussion of the qualities required to make a good teacher crop up in classrooms, at break times, departmental meetings, or where there are small groups of teachers discussing the merits of the profession. In a variety of schools, it has been witnessed that competent people struggle and, in their eyes, fail; hardworking individuals strive to attain satisfactory levels of work, whilst others seem to enjoy a natural ease that enables them to attain apparent mastery of the classroom. The responding question to this observation asks 'what makes a 'good teacher'? Thompson and Watson (2013) stated



“The most fundamental factor in effective RE, as in the effective teaching of any other subject, is the teacher. Guidelines, syllabuses, books, aids of various kinds, all depend upon the teacher who actually applies them within the classroom situation.”  
(Thompson and Watson, 2013, p.3)

I suggest that Thompson and Watson correctly identify the teacher as an essential component in the learning process. However, the focus of this study will be upon a planning document that aimed to change the way religious education is taught and provide a practical pedagogy to support all classroom practitioners.

RE has undergone a radical change in the last forty years, from its position as a subject which was considered essential and enshrined in law (1944 Education Act), to a status where it is often denigrated or viewed as irrelevant (APPG on RE 2013). As time has progressed little appears to have changed. The Commission on Religious education reflecting on the APPG report stated,

“Four years have not reversed that trend, and indeed have exacerbated it, a message strongly reinforced by teachers and students on the ground during our evidence gathering.”  
(CoRE 2017, p39)

Moves by the Government, such as not including it in the subjects for the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc), appeared to further undermine the status of RE. A NATRE survey (2012) stated

“Religious Studies in the curriculum continues to decline since the introduction of the English Baccalaureate, especially at key stage 4 where the impact of the EBacc is at its

greatest. This impact is seen not only in the reduction of past and planned examination entries, but also in the timetable where schools report that even though the subject is legally compulsory for all students unless withdrawn by their parents, students are not always receiving their entitlement to a religious education, especially in Key Stage 4. (NATRE Survey 2012,P2).

Subsequent surveys in 2015 and 2019 by NATRE reinforced the idea that, according to teachers of RE, the Ebacc had been detrimental to the provision of RE in England and Wales

Another example of this trend is the lack of people entering the profession to be RE specialists. The number of students training to be teachers of religious education has continued to fall short of the government target (RE Council website 2018). In 2012, John Keast, Chair of the Religious education Council for England and Wales, in a reply to the Minister of State to Schools, Nicholas Gibb (MP), said

“We are concerned that today there is a high risk of RE being marginalized in both secondary and primary schools by a series of wider reforms. Changes to teacher training provision have already taken away teachers and we risk a drop in student numbers as RE does not qualify as a GCSE option in the English Baccalaureate.” (Religious education Council 6/08/2012)

Despite several reports, including two from Ofsted (2010; 2013), little seems to have changed. An article in the Guardian highlighted the decline in the status of RE.

(<https://www.theguardian.com> July, 2017) The growing number of state schools that are not teaching the subject suggests that the subject may not only have lost the support of many parents, but also of an increasing number of senior managers. Yet this is not

something new. In 1980, 25% of Comprehensive state schools provided no religious education and many omitted it after year 9 (Cox, 1983.) Therefore, it may be ascertained, that a decline in a positive approach to the place of RE in the curriculum has been a feature of educational provision in England for at least the last four decades.

As a member of a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) and Senior teacher I have witnessed many teachers of Religious Education provide high quality, inspirational lessons. As demonstrated by the Hampshire Inspection and Advisory Service (HIAS) website for Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton Education Authorities, there are many examples of excellent practice in the local area. As Erricker states “Hampshire has always had a good reputation for RE” (Erricker, 2010, p.32) further more in contemporary SACRE reports good quality teaching is referred to (Extracts from Portsmouth Schools' Ofsted Inspection Reports 2015-16). In many ways, in this region, it may be a time to be more optimistic about religious education. At the heart of this progress, is an ongoing debate not only of the purpose of the subject, but a focus on pedagogy. By developing a strengthened sense of practice in the classroom and the reasons for engagement, the dynamics of classroom learning have become the kernel of religious education. In this sense, the subject may be considered to be ahead of others. Some agreed syllabi for RE, such as Birmingham and Hampshire, have gone further, providing a pedagogy for teaching and *raison d'être* for the philosophy underlying the document.

What this research hopes to do to is to focus on teachers' impressions of a locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Living Difference, legally, is the basis of all RE teachers' work, in Key Stage Three of Secondary Education (Years 7-9). It dictates the content of the work and methodology to be used in the classroom. Therefore, one of the main purposes of

the research is, in the case of a small unitary authority, to discover teachers' opinions on the challenges that the agreed syllabus presents.

Within the context of the teachers' opinions, the research will also investigate the difficulties of teaching a constructivist based syllabus in religious education, specifically the 'Living Difference' Hampshire Agreed Syllabus. What are the difficulties that individual teachers encounter in Living Difference and how is that reflected in dialogue regarding their professional practice? But Living Difference is not just a document about what should be taught in religious education; it includes a method of how the subject should be taught. Therefore, this research is also concerned with pedagogy and its implementation in the classroom environment, in relation to Living Difference. It has been assumed by the major contributors in the field, such as Baumfield, (2012), Erricker (2010), Grimmitt (2000), Wright (1993,1997,2000) and Jackson( 1997, 2004) that an understanding of pedagogy is an essential constituent of being a good teacher of religious education. Research into secondary teachers' experience of teaching the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus may shed light on the various points of view regarding this assertion.

On a local scale, since 2004 and the inception of the locally agreed syllabus, 'Living Difference', there was initially, an attempt to introduce a methodology of teaching religious education in Hampshire and to improve the experience of students and teachers engaged in practice. There is no independent quantitative data available that reflects how successful or otherwise this endeavour has been. However, through anecdotal evidence from the Portsmouth Standing Advisory Committee for Religious education (SACRE), teacher consortium meetings and staff Inset days, the effectiveness of 'Living Difference' has been called into question. After the retirement of the previous religious education advisor, the

energy with which this was initially pursued, dissipated and little significant monitoring of KS3 had taken place until more recently. Developing an understanding of the personal experience of religious education teachers in the city may suggest guidance regarding how this situation may be improved in terms of pedagogical practice and it may inform the next revised version of the agreed syllabus. It may determine how far the agreed syllabus is followed in schools in this urban area and to what extent the methodology is actually being implemented.

As stated earlier, 'Living Difference' is a document based upon a constructivist philosophy of pedagogy. There is a wide ranging argument regarding appropriate methods of teaching RE and this was the first agreed syllabus that suggests that the RE curriculum should not only be concept led, but also that that a specific, pedagogical based, method of teaching should be applied in the classroom. The 1988 Education Act is clear, that in local authority schools, it is compulsory not optional to follow the agreed syllabus. After informal discussions with colleagues both in local network groups and in conferences, this appeared to raise the issue of a conflict of philosophies between the teacher of RE and the pedagogical premise of the agreed syllabus itself. Interviewing teachers, discussing their experience of how they implement the methodology might shed light on how they resolve any perceived conflict.

This leads to the question of how to undertake the research. As previously mentioned, RE teachers that are seen to be effective, engage personally with the questions that they are going to offer to their students. In this sense, it is a personal subject, and as such research needs to address the reality of the perspectives of the teachers and their interpretations of their experiences. To investigate this project from the teachers' perspective will allow this research to reach at the heart of the matter. It is the teachers who have to read,

understand, plan and implement the methodology of 'Living Difference'. Therefore, data for this research will be based mainly on semi structured interviews, but also include analysis of planning materials which they have employed.

There will be six chapters in the thesis. Chapter 2 will be a literature review primarily looking at the context of the 'Living difference agreed syllabus and analyzing the pedagogical debates regarding religious education and the document. Chapter 3 will explain the methodology of the project and describe the analysis of the data based on grounded theory techniques. The fourth chapter will present the data of the study. The penultimate chapter will discuss the findings in relation to theoretical perspectives, particularly the work of Katherine Wedell (2009) and Clive Erricker (2001; 2006; 2010). The final chapter will provide conclusions and reflections on the project.

Finally, after extensive exploration, up to this date there appears to be a scarcity of research that has been published assessing the experiences of teachers implementing agreed syllabi and their connection to pedagogy from a localised perspective. Butler (2002) is a notable exception and Pett(2012) produced evaluation work of a variety of agreed syllabi. Apart from this, there has been a scarcity of academic scrutiny of agreed syllabi. One possible reason is that until recently, they have followed similar guidelines and have been content orientated. This assessment was highlighted by Dr Mark Chater in his speech to the AULRE in (2012). A report on the effectiveness of 'Living Difference', by Wedell (2009), it is observed, contained three fundamental flaws: the interview sample was limited to successful teachers; there were a limited number of respondents; there was no suggestion of the impact of the syllabus area by area, thereby a unitary authority had little idea which recommendations were relevant to it.

This investigation, based upon the experiences of the teachers using 'Living Difference', has several advantages compared to the single piece of qualitative research undertaken beforehand. It will deal with the everyday experiences from the teachers' perspectives, thereby encasing a wide range of viewpoints. It will take into account the personal narrative of the interviewee, to give context to the study. The sample will include a cross section of teachers, not just those who support the document and agree with its educational philosophy. Moreover, as a local study, it will enable the SACRE to make succinct and more accurate recommendations regarding future reviews. It is also hoped that this study may offer conclusions that aid future teachers to become more inspirational, for by sharing our thoughts, reflections and experiences of practice, we might all deepen our understanding of how and why we teach religious education.

## **Literature Review: The Context of the Living Difference Agreed syllabus**

### **1: Introduction**

What is meant by RE? When student teachers of the subject start their course, this will be one of the first questions they will be asked. In one sense, there is a coherent answer which may be found in government literature, or the locally agreed syllabus. In another it may be a matter of personal interpretation, with regard to a number of factors. Whichever is the case, it is essential to this investigation. A teacher's understanding of what RE is, influences not just what they teach and how they teach it, but also the relationship they have with their students and colleagues. As such, it also dictates their interpretation and response to any formal guidance given to them, such as an agreed syllabus.

Consequently, this section will analyze the different interpretations of the concept of RE. A brief investigation which attempts to define this subject may also bring to light to the effect the conflict between a postmodernist interpretation and a modernist view have had on its progress. However, the priority is to emphasise the intense complexity there is in defining the concept of RE, which provides a context for any agreed syllabus. Outside those who teach and work with it, assumptions vary in its definition from a form of Christian instruction, a general study of world religions, an attempt to indoctrinate, or an attempt to distance religions from their practice. Of course there are other viewpoints as well. As such, students of this area need to take care of the issue of dogmatism and attempt to enter such study with an open mind.



## **2: The Development of Religious Education since 1944**

Within the context of secondary education in England and Wales, it may be argued that RE started with the passing of the 1944 Education Act. Up to this point, a form of religious instruction was universally practised in government run schools (known at the time as 'County Schools') but it was not statutory. This was due to the conflict between different denominations and the fear of indoctrination. Despite this, the act made RE (the combination of religious instruction and whole school worship) obligatory. (Copley, 2008 ). Many commentators recognise this act as fundamental in the definition of the role of RE for the second half of the twentieth century e.g. Smith (1969). Erricker (1997), Owen-Cole and Mantin (1994), Barnes et al (2012).

Should 1944 be assumed to be the starting point of RE? Rudge claims that

"RE was effectively created by teachers and other educators during the period 1944 and 1988, and it was legally recognised and given its current name by the 1988 Education Reform Act." Rudge (2000, p11)

Technically, she is inaccurate, as demonstrated by Copley,

The phrase 'religious education' was not a later invention, but is present in name in the 1944 Act"(Copley, 2008, p.30).

This highlights the difference in understanding the concept of RE. It is accurate to explain that what was understood to be RE in 1944, was demonstrably different from that envisaged in the 1988 Act, which is responsible for the legal comprehension of the subject today.

The 1988 Education Reform Act was arguably, in terms of legislation, the next pivotal point in the twentieth century for religious education. In a background of huge social and economic reform, the conservative party under Margaret Thatcher also sought to change the education system in the country. 'O' levels and CSEs were removed, replaced by the combined General certificate for Secondary Education. Schools were allowed to be free of Local Education Authorities by virtue of becoming 'Grant Maintained', receiving their finance directly from central government. School budgets were now based on a per pupil basis and for all schools and there was now to be a 'National Curriculum'. The latter meant that all schools would have a core curriculum, so that wherever a pupil should attend school the main subjects would be the same. National attainment targets were created and standardised tests were imposed on pupils aged 11 and 14. It changed the nature of education in Britain irrevocably.

Copley(2008), Barnes(2012) and Priestly(2006), with different emphasis, detail the political argument that occurred during the creation of this legislation and there is need to delve into it in detail here. There were arguments within the Anglican establishment as to the nature of RE in schools, emphasising the dominance of Christianity in the curriculum, since it was perceived to be the main religion in Britain. Both Copley (2008) and Erricker (2012) point out that the National Census prior to the Act, may on a cursory view, seem to reinforce this opinion. However, a deeper study into the populous' understanding of Christianity and the fact that number of church going adherents had dropped to only one million, would suggest a flaw in the established Church's assumptions. The important aspects of the Act, to the teacher and which are in effect today, lay in how the Act continued to make RE a

compulsory subject and, contrary to national guidelines, was to be legally determined on a local level.

According to Copley (2008), Kenneth Baker's (Minister for Education) purpose was not to change the nature of RE that was being taught. He was an Anglican himself and saw the influence of left wing LEA's undermining RE by allowing schools under their control to disregard the subject. The result was that the legitimacy of RE as a core subject was reinforced, by being made compulsory for all students up the age of 16.

Ironically, in a move that was diametrically opposite to all other subjects, the content and guidance for RE was left at a local level. Furthermore, the legislation made it a legal obligation that SACRE must create or review an agreed syllabus every five years. Councils were forced to support, pay for and implement the work of SACRE. Parents could still withdraw their children from RE, but it would require a lengthy process and teachers could still refuse to teach RE, if it was an issue of conscience.

One other issue caused more concern than others and that was the place of Christianity in the curriculum. After lobbying from Christian pressure groups, the following was inserted into the Bill. RE "must reflect the fact that religious traditions in this country are in the main Christian, whilst taking into account the teaching and practices of other principal religions" (Section 8: 1988 Education Reform Act).

This had direct implications for agreed syllabi and the pedagogical and moral situation of the classroom teacher. It would appear that from 1989 (Circular 3/89) until 2010 (DCSF 20100) government guidance on what is to be taught as RE, focused on what meant by 'other principal religions.' This is still the case in 2021. The emphasis of this guidance influenced in

two areas. Firstly, the locally agreed syllabus is required to reflect the religious demographic of the LEA it is situated in. Circular 3/89 reaffirmed the position of Christianity as the dominant faith in the UK, but left the decision as to what other religions should be studied and how much time they should be given to the LEA, in effect the SACRE. Some authors have criticised this (Copley 1997, Lundie 2012) stating that it did not answer the questions that teachers and professionals really want answered. Another effect was that it gave freedom to teachers of RE, researchers and professionals in this sphere, to investigate different approaches to teaching the subject and research different pedagogical ideas. This is exemplified by the 'The Warwick Project; Bridges to religion' the first major attempt by Jackson to investigate what became known as the "Interpretative approach". Between 1989 and 2010, a plethora of different projects were published and it was possible for Blaylock (Blaylock, 2004, 27:1) to produce a summary of them. For the RE professional, guidance had shifted focus from who was in control of the RE curriculum, to what should be taught in the classroom. By 1994 ( Circular 1/94) it was deemed necessary that further clarification was required regarding which religions should be studied and the view that the main Christian denominations should be included in an agreed syllabus. Also, the inclusion of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism were also affirmed. This led to further complications among members of SACRE, where humanists were participating, but since such beliefs were not categorised as religious, they were not incorporated into the syllabus.

#### **4: The Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education(RE)**

The present situation of RE, reflects how government policy can change quickly and dramatically, affecting previous guidance and directives. In 2004 the incumbent Labour administration authorised the publication of the Non-statutory National Framework for

Religious education (QCA, 2004). Its purpose was to give guidance to SACREs and local authorities regarding the content and structure of agreed syllabi. At the time, it was the subject of wide discussion. Would it, in due time, take the place of local determination of RE? Was it to replace the syllabus which schools followed? These were some of the questions that were I witnessed being discussed in local RE network meetings.

The 'Framework' at one level sought to address the issue of the inconsistency regarding the variety of schemes of work being taught in secondary schools. It gave an overview of a key stage three curriculum and attempted to find a commonality in relation to what religious education should be about. To provide a context to this issue, a brief summary of what some authors understand as religious education and the related concept of spirituality will be of benefit.

In a sense, the framework attempted to settle the issue of the meaning of 'Religious Education'. Despite this, it is difficult to find a stated definition by Ofsted of what religious education actually is. In its most recent document, Ofsted views RE as providing opportunities for the study and analysis of religion as well as entering into ethical debates (Ofsted, 2013). Ofsted identifies evidence of good teaching of religious education within the context of the study of religious beliefs and practices as well as evaluation of ethical and philosophical issues. It may be suggested that this is due to variety of views and perception of what RE actually is and the wide range of approaches to the teaching of the subject that are promoted. As such, it appears that RE appears to be a subject that is defined relative to an individual's own opinion, be it in isolation or as part of a religious tradition.

The idea of a variety of perspectives relating to religious education may be exemplified by the following interpretations. Barnes sees the subject as "providing pupils with the

knowledge and understanding of RE”(Barnes 2012, p.2). He also cites Hargreaves presenting the subject as ‘ a mixed tour of religions’”(Barnes 2012, p.2). (1994) and John White(2004) as RE furthering the moral development of pupils. Gearon suggests that RE is now a political construct “Political agendas now determine the aims and rational of religious education” (Gearon, 2013 p.45). More recently, a more hermeneutical and philosophical explanation is presented by Biesta, Aldridge, Hannam and Whittle,

“This is when religion in religious education is not only considered as beliefs and practices, but also in existential terms has a significant place. ....Here religious education is to be understood in existential terms and as a ‘place of appearance.’ Religious education’s emancipatory purposes are taken seriously and understood in terms of Arendt’s ideas in relation to action. Further, religion is also conceptualised in existential terms as faith rather than only as belief and practice. (Biesta, Aldridge, Hannam, and Whittle, 2019, P16)

This quote and the assumptions that lay behind it that have been presented here are merely to exemplify that there appear to be different interpretations of what RE is supposed to be. An extensive itinerary of the wide variety of definitions of RE would not be purposeful at this juncture. However, it may be common sense to assume, considering the diversity of people teaching RE, there may also be a wide variety of interpretations according to differing perspectives.

One of the foremost concepts of the ‘Framework’ was the introduction of the eight levels of attainment. This reflected the method of assessment which was propagated in the statutory National Curriculum(1988). Levels of attainment were the method used to measure the progress of student in relation to the religious education curriculum. They were supposed to indicate some knowledge of religions (Attainment Target 1) but also enable measurement of

“Learning from Religion”(Attainment Target 2). Within this context, the intention was to provide educational opportunities regarding spiritual matters, A closer look at the framework appears to indicate this link clearly.

The link between ‘spirituality’ and the ‘Framework’ is demonstrated in its comments referring to ‘Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education’ (SMSC). It states “Religious education provides opportunities to promote spiritual development through:” and then makes a number of points including , “Developing their (*Students*) own views and ideas on religious and spiritual issues” (The Non-Statutory Framework for Religious Education. 2004, p13). Furthermore commenting on Key Stage four (14-16 year olds) it notes “. They investigate issues of diversity within and between religions and the ways in which religion and spirituality are expressed in philosophy, ethics, science and the arts.” (The Non-Statutory Framework for Religious Education. 2004, p30). Finally, reference is made specifically in the attainment targets by which a student may be measured to have made progress. From level 5, attainment target1, there is reference to spirituality for example “They explain how religious sources are used to provide answers to ultimate questions and ethical issues, recognising diversity in forms of religious, spiritual and moral expression, within and between religions.” (The Non-Statutory Framework for Religious Education. 2004, p36). Additionally at level 7 the document includes “They use some of the principal methods by which religion, spirituality and ethics are studied, including the use of a variety of sources, evidence and forms of expression.” (The Non-Statutory Framework for Religious Education. 2004, p37). It seems apparent that the authors appreciated an opportunity to incorporate elements of spirituality within the provision of RE generally and considered it an area in which a student was able to be evaluated in reference in the attainment targets

To further aid in the evaluation of spirituality Ofsted has presented a definition of the concept.

“Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal existence which are of enduring worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life and intimation of enduring reality (Ofsted 1994, p8)

And more recently, students should show the “ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people’s faith, feelings and values’ (Ofsted 2015, p36)

The initial definition held relevance over the time of initial interviews in this research, not including the terms ‘religion’ nor ‘faith’. However, the statements still echo those who hold that spirituality is an inclusive term, not necessarily pertaining solely to religions. Again this is symptomatic of the academic debate regarding the origins and meaning of spirituality as a concept.

In relation to the issue of the levels of attainment, the perspective of a practising teacher, the spirituality of a person is something that is difficult to quantify. To state that one student is more spiritual than another is something of a subjective statement. It depends on the definition of spirituality and the cultural context of both the student and the school. The area of children’s spirituality and its place in our educational system is one of consistent debate and research, as Ed Pawson eminently explains (Pawson 2018 p147-163).

Emphasising the work of Nye and Hay (2006) he carefully indicates the various views on the origins of spirituality. From the concept of a biological state, to an aspect of the human condition as transcendent (Hull, J. 1999, p3), the idea of spirituality is demonstrated to be



difficult to quantify, define and locate within a particular paradigm. As he states “ Spirituality is notoriously difficult to define, meaning different things to different people” (Pawson, 2018 p148).

Those such as Carr (1996) say that spirituality is inextricably linked to religion. Nigel Blake (1996) claims that the concept of ‘spiritual education’ is almost a contradiction in terms and Jack Priestly (1985) famously said that spirituality cannot be adequately defined where Bob Jackson (2014) view questions whether we should distinguish between spirituality and religion. Contrary to Carr, Watson (2008) eloquently argues that spirituality is not limited to religion and that, as an atheist, her assessment of her beliefs regarding a ‘god-free’ universe has been a spiritual journey. She argued that adhering to the Frameworks intention of providing spiritual education for all children,(The Non-Statutory Framework for Religious Education. 2004, p13) meant also including those who had no religious belief.

However, in some way, Ofsted Inspectors are required to assess the provision of this aspect of the curriculum. In fact in 2015, Ofsted made explicit links to religious forms of spirituality.

“ Inspectors may, however, gather evidence from anywhere relevant (including RE lessons and assemblies) to evaluate pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, personal development and/or behaviour and attitudes.”(Ofsted 2019 School Inspection Handbook: 35)

A fundamental question that is relevant to the secondary school, due to the necessity to inspect it, is ‘how can ‘spirituality’ relate to the various types of school that now exist in the state sector? This is relevant to both the non-statutory framework and Ofsted due to

“ The charge that Ofsted guidance on spiritual development pays too little recognition to religious definitions is unlikely to go away” (Pawson 2018, p159).

The Frameworks’ levels were based on the concepts of ‘Learning about Religion’ and ‘Learning from Religion’ These concepts, as observed by Fancourt (Fancourt, 2018) are two paradigms still paramount today. The second attainment target focus on learning from religion relates to some elements of the Ofsted criteria for good RE:

“Level 5: Attainment target 2 Pupils raise, and suggest answers to, questions of identity, belonging, meaning, purpose, truth, values and commitments. They apply their ideas to their own and other people’s lives. They describe what inspires and influences themselves and others” (QCA,DFES 2004, p36)

And furthermore,

Level 8: Attainment target 2 Pupils coherently analyse a wide range of viewpoints on questions of identity, belonging, meaning, purpose, truth, values and commitments. They synthesise a range of evidence, arguments, reflections and examples, fully justifying their own views and ideas and providing a detailed evaluation of the perspectives of others.

As such it may be possible, through the personal interpretation of the teacher or Ofsted Inspector to make some comment on the interaction between the student and an understanding of the Ofsted definition of spirituality. Despite this provision, there are still some difficulties.

However, it would appear that the tremendous effort to concur with an inclusive notion of spirituality and methods to assess it, neglect those students and their parents who view the concept from a purely religious stance. If the concept of spirituality is so broad so as to be

irrelevant to them, it may be seen as developmentally erroneous. Therefore in a an effort to cater for ,the possibly inaccurate, notion that the majority of students have a secular understanding of the concept, those of a religious origin are neglected. In support of this, Hannam (2019) in discussion regarding the idea of the plurality of pupils, points out that within the school there will be students who originate from a variety of backgrounds, including religious. The religious/ theological assumptions of these students need to be taken into account if education has meaning for them.

Returning to Pawson, he makes the observation that.

‘If the term ‘spirituality is interpreted too broadly, encompassing an understanding that is accepted by a variety of diverse religious traditions, and also by those who stand outside religious worldview, then what educational use can it have?’ (Pawson 2018, p157)

What is demonstrated here, simply, is that a definition, and application of ‘spiritual education, is an extremely complex one. The levels provided by the ‘Framework’ may indeed be used to provide some form of evidence to support academic conclusions within the context of a school and for Ofsted judgements, but these appear limited when considering the wider picture.

However, many writers, Copley, Watson and Thompson , Erricker and Aldridge point out, the ‘Framework’ was a landmark document for the religious education community. Copley commented that it was in many ways a summary of recent religious education. This is not surprising, since one of its main contributors was Alan Brine, the former RE advisor to Hampshire, author of the agreed syllabus ‘Visions of Life’ and colleague of Clive Erricker. It is clear from its favouring of a conceptual approach to religious education and reference to

the attainment targets in religious education as 'Living about RE' and 'Learning from RE', that the document referred clearly to contemporary pedagogical debates and the important work of Michael Grimmit (2000). Teachers had to take this document seriously. As Watson and Thompson comment, regarding the 'Frameworks' attainment targets,

"they are fundamental to the non-statutory national framework for RE and are found in most agreed syllabus"" (Watson and Thompson, 2007 p53)

Its importance is such that when Aldridge(2012) was writing his work on planning he indicates it as a major document that many teachers refer to when devising their departmental scheme of work. Later we will see that Erricker(2004;2011) and Wright (2000) attempt to create alternatives, however the very fact that they spend much time explaining their differences to the document, underlines its significance. Copley points out that up to this point, government legislation and guidance focused on the entitlement of students to RE and to content of the curriculum. For the first time, we start to see a government point of view on how it should be taught.

Despite its status, the 'Framework' did not go unopposed. Aldridge(2012) reminds us that the authors were writing to SACREs and that the 'Framework' is intended to be 'of interest to' teachers (QCA 2004,p55) but not written specifically for them. It was supposed to be a 'framework' not an instruction, which is supported by the official title of the document.

During Ofsted inspection of departments of RE which I have been involved with , the measurement of progress was based on the levels of attainment. If you were not following the 'Framework', you either had to have a very good reason for doing so or an excellent alternative agreed syllabus. This indirectly led to the formation of 'Living Difference'. This was first published in 2004, but Erricker had known the implications of the 'Framework' for

some time, and as part of his role as religious education advisor to Hampshire had decided to create an alternative (Erricker 2010). Another alternative was the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus produced in 2007. Its main variance to the 'Framework' was its attainment targets, which focused on skills but it did not publish a pedagogical base to its methodology.

Apart from pedagogical reasons, the 'Framework' was also opposed, because it could be seen to undermine Local determination of religious education. Barnes (2012) felt that its theological basis was dominated by a liberal protestant inspired view of religion conceptually incapable of developing respect for difference. This is referring to one of the aims of the framework that it should foster respect for all and open-mindedness . It seems that this highlights one of the fundamental difficulties of RE in the present educational system.

In the 1944 education act, there were various reasons for making religious education compulsory; those who see religion as a matter of personal truth claims and those who understand religious education as a subject in a secular society. A 'liberal protestant view' may be seen as seeking to find the commonality in religions, its emphasis is less dogmatic and more focused on how faith is reflected in the context of society. However, other traditions, such as evangelical and 'high church' Anglicans, emphasise the 'truth claims' of their traditions. In this view, difference is important and truth claims do not change to fit society. The elephant, in terms of religious education in state schools, was still in the room. What was religious education for? The 'Framework' may be seen as a guide for planning, but it could also be seen as indoctrination or a misguided paradigm with a simplified view of RE.

The 'Framework' did not explicitly suggest a pedagogical viewpoint of how to teach in the classroom and therefore, to a certain extent, teachers of religious education were able to develop different approaches regarding its implementation. It was possible to use a variety of pedagogical approaches from experiential techniques to the development of a phenomenologist strategy. It allowed for the personal points of view of teachers in this regard, simply because it gives no directives about a philosophical approach. If it was guilty of anything, it was the oversimplification of what is religious education. Ironically, by allowing local government determination in 1988, there was an appreciation that creating an agreed syllabus for a diverse, multicultural and multi-religious society was a complex task.

A national syllabus, by its own definition, undermines this approach. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding that at its core, the nature of RE, is a complex one. This is what the classroom teacher always has to cope with. Each teacher will have their own priorities and values regarding the transference of the 'Framework' into a scheme of work. Erricker noticed this when he was the religious education advisor for Hampshire. This observation is a core strand of the research element of this thesis. How do teachers weave the complexity of the subject, their own personal influences and the pressures of a contemporary school environment into delivering a positive learning experience for students?

This section started with an assertion that modern policy can dramatically change a situation. In 2010, new government guidelines on religious education effectively meant that Ofsted no longer had to report on the departmental status of Religious education. It states "....the inspection of maintained schools by Ofsted focuses on school improvement, on educational outcomes for subjects, and on the curriculum as a whole, rather than on the

time and detailed content devoted to individual subjects. “(Religious Education in English Schools: Non-Statutory Guidance 2010, p5)

As a consequence, SACREs had no independent data regarding the state of religious education in the local authority schools, apart from the GCSE results. Therefore, in practice, head teachers could do what they liked with the subject. As long as they could demonstrate that some RE was being taught up to the age of 16, there was no evidence of any consequences. This led to mapping the subject across the curriculum, whole year groups not being taught and religious education being part of a ‘round robin’ circus including PSHE and Citizenship. In many schools religious education stopped being taught at all. In one stroke, all the advances made by the ‘Framework’ were undermined. Of late, this situation has been reinforced, stating that the teaching of religious education must be within the requirements of a locally agreed syllabus. As such, this means they can choose the agreed syllabus that they wish to follow (<https://www.natre.org.uk>,2018). Academies will not have to adopt any agreed syllabus, as long as they can demonstrate that they are including RE in the school curriculum up to the age of 16. How much time is spent and how this is done is not elaborated upon. The ‘Framework’ therefore for state schools, that are not associated with a ‘Faith’ status, would appear to be redundant.

From my experience and discussions in religious education network groups and conventions, one of the most influential factors on the practice of a teacher is an Inspection from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The results of an inspection by this authority are influential to the point of closing a school down with immediate effect. Its scrutiny of a subject, or lack of, as seen above, can damage a subject on a national scale. In

2007, Ofsted produced a report of the state of teaching RE in England and Wales called “Making Sense of RE”.

It is interesting to demonstrate that the pedagogical stance of a writer can influence their interpretation of a text. As such, this can influence their audience, which is primarily students and practising teachers. Simplistically, Erricker may be described as a postmodern ‘constructivist’ where the starting point of religious education is the experience of the student; Copley views religious education as having a theological base; it has to contrast with humanism and secularism (Copley 2005). As a consequence, their views on the Ofsted document portray it as having differing verdicts. In their separate analysis of the document, both Erricker and Copley point out that it stresses importance of the impact of ‘recent world events’, referring to the attack of the Twin Towers on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2001 and the suicide bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005, on the profile of RE. The document more than suggested that the subject had to look at the ‘dark side ‘of religions.

“Recent world events have raised the profile of religious education significantly and schools have responsibilities to promote community cohesion”

The task of religious education, Ofsted stated, was to help young people.....

“to make sense of religion in the modern world and issues of identity and diversity”

Erricker views the report as very critical of the state of RE and highlights the statements

“RE cannot ignore controversy” and “RE cannot ignore the social reality of religion”

(Ofsted, 2007a p41)



Copley's analysis also refers to these points but is more optimistic with regard to its conclusions. He emphasises the increase in students taking the GCSE and 'A' level exams. Furthermore,

"Inspectors noted an overall improvement in standards in RE and in pupil attitudes towards the subject" (Copley, 2008, p196)

Erricker's assessment states that the results of RE in England were 'hit and miss' and that the report is critical of the 'SACRE system' in attending to the agreed syllabus. (Erricker, 2012, p30). He feels that this 'Argument is damning but justified'. This viewpoint is understandable in the personal context of Erricker. He had produced 'Living Difference, an agreed syllabus that was compulsory in Portsmouth, Southampton and Hampshire. All Local Authority schools were legally obliged to adhere to the document, but there was, at least anecdotal evidence to suggest that this was not the case. The Ofsted report, appeared to identify the weakness' that were occurring and supported Erricker's point of view, leaving him to suggest that an agreed syllabus that was pedagogical based was the answer to increasing standards of Religious education. It appears, that Erricker was agreeing with Ofsted that either a radical overhaul of the way Sacres produced their agreed syllabi was required or predicting the end of local determination for RE (Erricker, 2012, p31).

Copley(2008) doesn't make a comment on this, but he does quote the then Chair of the Association for RE Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants (AREIAC), Joyce Miller( Letter, 20 November 2007), emphasising that she was committed to continuing local determination for RE.

This analysis highlights a further issue for present day teachers of religious education. Not only do they have to contend with guidance from Department of Education, the local Sacre

and Ofsted, but also how it is interpreted can be presented in all manner of forms depending on the philosophical stance of advisors, lecturers and consultants. The point made, that religious education has to reflect the reality of the society it exists within, is still relevant today and is an important aspect of strategies used to engage students in the classroom. The teacher, therefore, has to contend with a multitude of influences, as well as any personal narratives that may be having an effect on their practise, in an attempt to deliver good quality religious education, as they perceive it to be. Possibly, this is an argument for a National Curriculum for religious education, but it may be suggested that this would not end the issue, since such a document would also need interpretation. To allow for the variety of differing religious views in the country, it would have to be extremely flexible. Such an open document would also require interpretation and therefore not solve the core of the problem. The question remains, how do we attain a consensus of what good religious education is, in such a diverse and changing religious demographic? It is not the place of this research to answer this question, but at least acknowledging its existence helps to empathise with the situation of the classroom teacher.

The issue of teachers following different forms of pedagogical processes was highlighted in the subsequent Ofsted Report "Transforming Religious education" (Ofsted 2010). It stated that the quality of teaching had decreased since the last report. This was due to the impact in changes to the wider curriculum, the lack of effectiveness of SACREs, and teachers of RE lacking a clear focus and structure (Ofsted 2010, 42). The report implied that a discussion regarding "what is religious education?" and lack of a unitary view, had a poor influence on classroom practice. Aldridge (2012) points out teachers were approaching their practice with different perspectives on the subject. This led to lack of cohesion and progression.

From my experience as a teacher advisor, I can identify with this situation within a wide range of schools. Indeed, such differences within departments can lead to conflict amongst staff. Alternatively, where departments worked together and followed a common consensus, teaching was accepted as good practice. I would advocate that with its support for the Non-statutory framework and concept led learning, (Ofsted 2010 p 44-46) the authors were more than implying that local determination was at fault. The 'Living Difference' agreed syllabus matched the recommendations of the report in no small way . Teachers following the Hampshire agreed syllabus appeared to have nothing to fear from this report.

However, the report did have its faults. One main issue was that it was based upon inspections of 94 Primary and 89 Secondary schools. This is a limited number upon which to base a report which would affect national religious education strategy.

In addition to this issue, as mentioned earlier, head teachers had no obligation to report to SACRE the standing of RE in their schools. SACRES could, and did, ask for information but they were often ignored. This situation was a direct result of DFE guidance which Ofsted was carrying out, yet they used it as a criticism in the report. As a result, the report reveals the politicisation of religious education, both in terms of pedagogy and government policy, more complications that teachers of religious education have to contend with.

Probably the most significant change of recent times that has affected religious education has been the introduction of the English Baccalaureate. Michael Gove, the Conservative minister for education in 2010, introduced this new measure for the performance of Schools. The effect on the provision of religious education across secondary schools in England was profound. Numerous reports in the media, including the Times and the

Guardian, reported the damage that had been done to the subject by this announcement. Although it was statutory to provide RE for all students up to the age of sixteen, the BBC (24/6/11) quoted an executive member of NATRE, Deborah Weston, as describing the situation as a “devastating picture”. The Minister’s defence against this was that the EBacc was supposed to raise the number of students taking history and geography, which had been in decline. The fact that religious education was a statutory part of the curriculum and outside the National Curriculum would be, as stated by the DFE on their website, enough protection for the subject. The other reason suggested by Vivienne Baumfield (BJRE Vol35, 1, Jan 2013 p1) was that they wanted to ensure that local determination of religious education should continue. This seems unlikely as both the 2007 and 2010 Ofsted reports, had discretely criticised SACREs and were definitely pointing to the adherence to a national document. However, protection of religious education was not to be the end product. Teachers were made redundant (BBC 24/6/11) and there was a reduction in teaching time of the subject. This was still the case in 2013 when a further survey by the NASUWT released in the beginning of the year saw that the teaching of religious education had indeed been reduced by 13% nationally and there were fewer specialised teachers teaching the subject (Independent 02/02/13).

There had been Parliamentary opposition to the exclusion of religious education from the EBacc; over a hundred members of parliament, across party lines had voiced their dissent. The All Party Parliamentary Group was set up for “Safeguarding the provision of RE in our schools “( Religious Education Council(REC) website 2013) which intended to press for the continuation of high quality religious education in state funded schools. Working with the REC they monitored the extent of the damage to RE and any further issues that were to

affect the subject. This came to light with the governments' review of the National Curriculum(NC). Again, due to local determination, religious education was left outside of this process. Those at the REC and NATRE felt that this could further damage the reputation of the subject and conducted their own review. The new version of the NC came into effect in September 2015, with the review of religious education running concurrently. A turning point for the struggle for religious education came at a meeting held at Lambeth Palace on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2013 organised by the Church of England. At the meeting Michael Gove admitted that " I think that RE has suffered as a result of my belief that the protection of it was sufficient and I don't think that I have done enough" (BBC, 2013).

Presently, as described in the introduction, the provision of religious education is in a perilous state. The subject's future is uncertain. It seems all that teachers' of the subject can do is to keep applying themselves assiduously to providing a good religious education experience for the students in their charge.

## **5: Pedagogy and RE**

This review of the development of religious education provides the setting for two fundamental questions for the subjects teachers' "What is religious education?" and "How do I teach it?" The picture that this research, so far, has drawn, is of a subject that is highly complicated and politicised. The definition of RE appears to change on a regular basis and is subject to the social situation of the times. The importance of the subject is reflected not in an inherent caring for its core values, since this differs depending on the political and religious perspective of the commentator, but what its purpose may be in terms of social engineering. As we have seen in both agreed syllabi and Ofsted documents, its present purpose is to foster an appreciation of others' religious perspectives. Yet, it may appear,

there are different views in religions that do not wish to appreciate the perspectives of others. As such, it may be seen to be inaccurate to educate a pupil that all religions are tolerant. With respect to the Ofsted perspective regarding the purpose of religious education (Ofsted, 2013, p.4), it may be suggested to be contradictory in its nature. It breeds intolerance of intolerance. When a religion may hold a view that seems at odds with present social conventions e.g. 'homosexuality is wrong', this is presented as abhorrent. Across the media, little attempt is made to try to understand the view of the religion. It appears that, in the objective of understanding others points of view, religious education, as presented by Ofsted, has failed. RE it seems, for the classroom teacher, is a mixture of religious, social and political influences. The working definition is usually taken from the agreed syllabus and referred to a national document. It may be observed therefore, that what is presented in the classroom is a very individual, personalised interpretation of the subject. It will be different, teacher to teacher and school to school. This is not necessarily a negative result of the development of religious education, since it emphasises the individual's response to the subject and that religions themselves are as varied as the many people who claim to follow them.

By necessity, such a circumstance of complexity impacts on the practice of the teacher. Whether it is a development of a phenomenologist point of view, a conflict with a confessionalist approach, or the 'liberal protestant' inculcated in the 'Framework' (Copley, 2008), there are practical implications for activities in the classroom. Questions raised concern about assessment of students, attainment targets, choice of skills to be developed and the selection of religious knowledge to be taught. For the classroom practitioner, achieving these aims has to be mapped out using a variety of strategies. The fundamental

question, it may be suggested, is 'what is the starting point?' This may be found in two areas. The first is in the DCSF guidance for religious education in 2010 .

"Religion and beliefs inform our values and are reflected in what we say and how we behave. RE is an important subject in itself, developing an individual's knowledge and understanding of its religion and beliefs which form part of contemporary society" (DCSF, 2010, p.7)

This asks the teacher to reflect not only upon the beliefs and values of the religions that are to be studied, but also those belonging to themselves and, ultimately, the students that they teach. This guidance for the teacher gives some direction to the question of what they are actually trying to achieve in the process of educating their students.

The second aspect of starting the educational process lay in deciding what methodology to apply in the action of teaching. There are many different theories relating to this process which is often referred to as 'Pedagogy'. The next section will focus on the concept of pedagogy for RE and the different views of what constitutes good pedagogy.

The reason for including this section relates to the agreed syllabus, 'Living Difference', which is the main document used by teachers in the area in which this research is situated.

The purpose of this research is to identify difficulties teachers have in implementing this constructivist agreed syllabus. Furthermore it is hoped to discover attitudes towards implementing an enforced methodology. According to its authors, 'Living Difference' is an agreed syllabus underpinned by a pedagogic methodology. Erricker says.

"What follows is the development of a constructivist pedagogy for religious education in Hampshire" (Erricker, 2012, P.80)

As a result of his previous research and as a reader at the University of Chichester, Erricker stated that he had observed a fundamental weakness in the teaching of RE: the practical application of classroom teaching lacked any consistent reference to pedagogy. Strategies that were used were varied and were based, according to Erricker, on what made the subject engaging to the students rather than rooted in any pedagogical process.

“What was clear was that there was no common purpose as to the function of RE in the curriculum and this was due to there being a disparity of approach in relation to what to teach, how to teach it and why it should be taught” (Erricker, 2010. p.34).

When given the opportunity of organising the agreed syllabus conference for the county, he decided that it was opportune to attempt strengthen the situation. Since Living Difference was a legally binding document on all teachers of RE, they would have to interact with the pedagogy and engage with the proposed methodology. To many teachers, this would mean a complete change in the way they taught and start to understand the meaning of ‘pedagogy’ itself. The term ‘pedagogy’ and whether it should have the influence it has, has been widely debated, and is relevant to this research.

In 2000, Michael Grimmitt published a text that has been a basic textbook for student teachers of religious education since. “Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in RE” analyses the different methodologies of teaching religious education that had been developing since the phenomenologist approach of Ninian Smart (1973). In detail, it explains the development of the work of Erricker, Jackson, Wright and others, painting a clear picture of the debates and varied work that was being carried out. Much of the book and Grimmitt’s observations are still relevant today. An example of this are the two attainment targets that are incorporated



into the 'Framework', specifically students' should be "Learning about" and "Learning from" Religions. This was directly taken from Grimmitt's work developed in the 1980s (Grimmitt, 1987, p213). Grimmitt's view on the importance of pedagogy as the basis of religious education has been echoed by many commentators, Barnes (2012), Aldridge (2012), Stern (2006), Erricker (2012), Baumfield (2013), to name but a few. Grimmitt is also important for this research because of the nature of his constructivist philosophy. Erricker, in his theoretical development for Living Difference, as demonstrated by the importance of enquiry, sympathised greatly with Grimmitt.

Grimmitt thought that having a pedagogy is the basis for the practice of teaching. This contradicts the view that teaching is "seen as a relatively simple skill that can be learned by imitation and improved by practice" (Grimmit 2000 p16); Grimmitt's understanding of the political view of teaching. Grimmitt justifies this by identifying that teacher training, up to that point consisted of studying agreed syllabi and model syllabi. This could be justified today, as demonstrated by the present governments cut in bursaries for teacher training and by encouraging the "School Direct Training Programme" (<https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk>). This latter course enables student teachers to enter the classroom directly. From a purely practical viewpoint, the time needed for study into the hermeneutical and pedagogical base of the profession is limited. The course provides evening lectures arranged with a partner university, but these, I suggest, would not provide the depth of investigation that a dedicated university course would provide. It is a pertinent point that the "Professional Standards for Teachers" published by the Department for Education (DFE 2018) does not mention the concept of pedagogy. The nearest relevant

requirement is point 3, “Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge”. Curriculum knowledge is not the same as pedagogical knowledge. As such the present administration has undermined the importance of pedagogical investigation. It would appear that Grimmitt’s description of the situation in 2000 may well be indicative of the situation in the near future.

The definition of pedagogy for Grimmitt is “ a theory of teaching and learning encompassing aims, curriculum content and methodology”(Grimmitt, 2000, p.16)

However, the integrity of the theory is essential to Grimmit. It must be hermeneutically based, that is, the origin of the theory must have a psychological understanding of what ‘Knowledge’ is and consequently, understanding of how humans learn. In the case of Grimmitt, he refers to the principles of ‘Piagetian constructivism’ but prefers Von Glaserfeld (1995) as his basis for understanding how children learn. Von Glaserfeld analysed the issue of the difference between what one *knows* and what is *real* (my italics). This issue is going to be a major point of analysis later on, since it is not only a theoretical issue but also, it is suggested, a practical one with which teachers have to struggle with on a daily basis. It is interaction of knowledge and theory that lies at the heart of Living Difference, but ironically, may be its flaw. Erricker, being a postmodernist, again has sympathies with this point of view. As he admits, his concepts originate from his understanding of knowledge from Lyotard, as a ‘radical constructivist’. He also views pedagogy as central to teacher training and identifies in the ‘Framework’ a recognition by education authorities, of agreement with this stance (Erricker, 2012, p.77).

Even advocates who disagree with a relativist approach, favouring a more confessionalist viewpoint agree with the need for teacher training to include theory as the basis for practice. Watson and Thompson (2007) commented

“ Because teaching RE effectively depends upon understanding the nature of RE and developing those skills and attitudes to it, there is a certain amount of theory to be mastered. This can sometimes be hastily dismissed as irrelevant to the classroom” (2007, p.12).

Within the parameters of academics and professionals, therefore, there is a unanimity of the need for pedagogy not only within teacher training, but also as a basis for ongoing classroom development. It had been demonstrated that there are different interpretations of what pedagogy is. However, Baumfield provides a useful overview for a working definition.

“pedagogy is the art of knowing’ as a teacher how to conduct intentional and systematic intervention in order to influence the development of the learner: It is a cultural activity that is never neutral” (Baumfield, 2012, p.205).

This observation reminds us that the education that is provided by any institution, political or otherwise, has distinct agendas. The construction of the curriculum and the methods of student interaction are determined to attain a goal of social engineering, which in its more idealistic incarnations should benefit both the individual and the society of which they are part. However, it may be argued that, as demonstrated in authoritarian systems and probably in democratic regimes, it has been used for purposes of indoctrination and passive control of the individual.

## **6: Clive Erricker and Living Difference**

Up to this point, this review has touched upon the work of and related to Erricker and Living Difference. Since the main focus of this study is to analyze teachers' reactions to Living Difference, in the light of their own biographies, an investigation into Erricker and his educational philosophy is valuable. It enlightens us to the epistemological background to the syllabus and also the various academic arguments that preceded its creation.

Erricker's research, investigation and publications cover a wide area in the area of RE, however his main concern has been the purpose of education itself and its relationship to the individual. For Erricker, education is about allowing a person to make meaning of the world themselves, teachers are facilitators not instructors.

"Religious education needs to be about how we make sense of the world and our place in it, and responding to how others do so as well. It is about the construction of meaning arising from experience" (Erricker, 2010, p.76).

This idea is a constant theme in his writings, from his early work to his collaboration with Mark Chater (2013). Another constant in his writings is the importance of a theoretical underpinning of classroom practice, a pedagogical philosophy, which justifies and makes meaning of educational praxis. He may disagree with others on an epistemological level or hermeneutical viewpoint, but he is in harmony with how essential it is that teachers have a theoretical understanding to make education effective for the learner.

Another constant theme in Erricker's writings, is that he resists the overwhelming control of education by governments/society for its own ends. He frequently warned of the dangers of

‘instruction ‘ of religious education for the purposes of the institution rather than investigation/enquiry for the benefit of the individual.

However, at the fundamental heart of his work, despite all critiques from other writers, Erricker places the student at the heart of an enquiry led approach to RE. He warns us of totalitarian indoctrination and forces us to face the sensitivities of the student. He asks us to question our own situation as teachers and reminds us that we are not the centre of all knowledge. He has undergone a theoretical journey of great depth, but it may be argued, Erricker still holds the fundamental position that religious education is important, it is radical and theoretical questions are important to underpin our practice.

This section will focus on four main areas of Erricker’s work, to provide a foundation of a later investigation into the “Living Difference” agreed syllabus itself.

- A) A brief account of Errickers history
- B) Erricker’s theoretical position in contrast to Bob Jackson and Andrew Wright
- C) The development of “Living Difference”.

### History

Erricker started his Religious Studies degree at the University of Lancaster in 1969. After his initial studies, he taught English as a foreign language in London for year, where he wrote his first book on the topic of Hotel Management. He felt it was not a success, due to its left wing nature, which was not appreciated by Hotel Management. Erricker then went into the teaching of RE, becoming a head of department and then ‘Reader of Religious Studies’ at the West Sussex Institute of Higher Education (later to become the University of Chichester). It is at this point that he started to become involved with the SHAP working party and

editing their academic journal regarding religious studies. After being senior lecturer at Chichester, in 2003 he became the County Advisor for Hampshire (Including the unitary authorities of Portsmouth and Southampton). It was during this time that he produced the agreed syllabus 'Living Difference' (2004) which saw him attempting to implement his theories into practice. Since 2009 he has retired, but continues to undertake consultancy work.

### Theoretical ideas

In his seminal work, 'Reconstructing Religious , Spiritual and Moral Education' (Erricker 2000), Erricker, together with his wife, declared that the academic and professional world have long been under the spell of modernism, in that it is held that there is a body of knowledge that can be known that is to the benefit of human progress. They criticise this belief on two levels. Firstly, that as such, a body of knowledge is a man made construct and secondly , this rationalist approach “ rules out the affective, emotions and feelings, and has always posed a threat to the educational importance of religious and moral education” (2000, p2). In Erricker’s article “Shall we Dance? (2001) Authority representation and voice: The place of spirituality in Religious education” he critiques the modernist view of knowledge and explains his sympathies with Foucault and other Post Modernists.

At the centre of his work, is Erricker’s epistemological viewpoint. In his main works, “The Education of the Whole Child” (1997); “Reconstructing, religious, spiritual and moral education’ (2000);The Children and the Worldview Project: A Narrative Pedagogy of Religious education”(2000) ; Religious education: A conceptual and interdisciplinary approach for secondary Level” (2010) and “Does Religious education Have a Future? Pedagogical and Policy Prospects (2012), Erricker always supports his arguments from an

epistemological point of view. He has also written extensively in Journals, I suggest his most important work which sets out his viewpoint with regard to religious education being “Shall we dance? (2001). In *Living Difference*, this approach is only fleetingly referred to, but it may be that an investigation into the philosophical basis of the document will also provide a platform to compare teachers’ understanding and interactions with the document when it is put into practice.

Erricker has stated that “If one has the desire to promote religious education within our school system then it is necessary to be able to articulate a reasoned and informed purpose for the subject” (2010, p.20). Erricker qualifies this as....

“The purpose of religious education .....is to support students in developing their own coherent patterns of values and principles, and to support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.” (*Living Difference*, 2004, p.17)

This entails encouragement of each student to interpret and respond to a variety of concepts, beliefs and practices within religions and to their own and others’ cultural and life experiences.

Erricker’s purpose automatically assumes an interaction with knowledge, specifically that of ‘concepts, beliefs and practices’. However this is problematic for Erricker since in ‘Shall we dance’ he questions the concept of knowledge itself.

“What we call knowledge has to be subjected to close scrutiny because it is always situated in political contexts and within political structures and climates”. (Erricker, 2001, p22)

Referring to Foucault, Erricker agrees that knowledge is organised and manipulated by the language that we use. Therefore those who control language as a consequence, control

knowledge. Such a situation is a power relationship. *Pure Knowledge* ( my italics) , therefore is unattainable. What we know is only our perception and an 'order of knowledge' imposed by the 'state'. Garvey and Stangoom (2012) clarify this further pointing out that Foucault refers to this system of control as 'Bio-power' a method of the 'management and administration of the human species or population'. All that we 'know' are classifications which are linked within a communication system. Erricker identifies other authors such as Lyotard (Erricker, 2001, p.25) who also reject the modernist method of interpreting knowledge as a means of progress. The underlying premise of this viewpoint is that knowledge depends on context and perspective of the individual and that this can be manipulated by ourselves and others. Foucault gives the example of authority figures such as doctors, psychiatrists, and priests as examples of people in authority who claim to make sense of our knowledge and consequently have power over us (Garvey and Stangoom, 2012 p.327).

Erricker considers that those that order knowledge have power over those that do not which "consigns them to silence" (Erricker, 2001, p22). The inference from this is quite disturbing, that is there is a body of people that have power over 'knowledge' and that they deliberately use this power to control the thoughts and actions of all other people.

However, this suggests that nothing apart from 'knowledge' controls people's actions.

Erricker goes on to also suggest that the subject of religious education and the influences upon religion in Britain today, are situated in a modernist paradigm which controls the 'knowledge' relating to its study. The perception given to us by the religious influences are illusionary since the only credible knowledge we can rely upon originates in ourselves, since



'knowledge' given to us is situated in the political environment in which we exist. It appears that from these epistemological premises originate the core of Erricker's thinking.

His deconstruction of 'knowledge' continue,

"the world of appearances cannot be understood according to any conceptual categories placed upon it, since that will construe it according to a framework imposed. There is no knowledge possible of such a world, only an order imposed on appearances. There is no order of things; there are only classifications....." (Erricker, 2001, P.23)

Erricker relates this to religion itself

".. but Foucault brings us to the realisation that religion itself is simply a construct that we erroneously place appearances upon to conform them to our own linguistic pattern of order". (Erricker, 2001, p.25)

As a consequence of this line of thought, Erricker determines that any 'knowledge' of value is determined by a person's own experiences, often referred to as narratives, which are used to construct our own understanding of the world. It is our own interpretation of 'experiences' that allow an individual to make progress and provide relevance to his/her own situatedness. This is a restatement of Errickers' position where in Grimmitt he said

"The first principle that underpins a narrative pedagogy (*his proposal*) is that all 'knowledge is relative. Relativism posits that there is no absolute or objective knowledge, in effect there is no 'contrary' to place in opposition to relativism" (Erricker in Grimmit, 2000, p.194)

Grimmitt (2000) summarises Errickers view, when referring to his research on the Children and worldviews project as

“They follow Foucault in holding that the meaning which the individual constructs represents reality and that truth is related to personal narratives constructed out of individual experiences” (Grimmitt, 2000, p.45)

In this way, Erricker is identified as a constructivist but what does this mean? The idea that we ‘construct’ our own understanding of reality through our own experience is known as ‘Constructivism’. Erricker firmly places himself within this school of thought. In 2010 he describes his work in Grimmitt (2000), as ‘radical constructivist’. This highlights another issue for Erricker, since there are different interpretations of constructivism. Stern (Stern, J. 2006 p69ff) categorises these carefully. Within this context, Erricker’s early views echo the ideas of Piaget in that learning is primarily an individual activity between the pupil and the teacher. However, Erricker’s view evolved between 2000 and 2012, possibly due to efforts attempting to put his ideas into practice. His views are more closely associated with Jerome Bruner’s (Bruner, 1977) idea of ‘Social Constructivism’ in that the process of learning involves groups of pupils working collaboratively. In other words, Erricker moves from an individualistic centred constructivism to a more social centred perspective. Erricker refers to this in his most recent work when questioning ‘Does Religious education have a future?’ (Erricker, 2013). “The Brunarian model; with its focus on conceptual development helps the teacher to recognise that concepts may be taught to pupils at any age provided that the structure of learning appropriate to that age has been understood” (Erricker, 2013, p.100).

This has also been noted by Aldridge,

“While he now draws on a constructivist model of learning he now presents a model that does not only rely on the postmodern form of instruction with which he has been associated with in the past (Aldridge, 2010, p.200).

The pedagogical model of starting the learning practice from the pupils own experience by introducing new concepts rather than external 'knowledge', is fundamental to the methodology of Living Difference. It is at this point that we can see the distinct connection between Erricker's epistemological stance and the agreed syllabus which is at the centre of this study.

Of course, Erricker's viewpoint has not been left un-critiqued. For the purposes of this study I will focus on two critics, Robert Jackson, who developed a Ethnographic research model and Andrew Wright who proposes a 'Critical Realist' methodology.'

### Robert Jackson

As mentioned previously, Robert Jackson is one of the foremost researchers of religious education. His work was based on the observation that teaching about a religious subject or person , when one is not situated in the religions environment gives a false perspective to the student attempting to learn about the topic. As Jackson says

"Behind the research was a concern that in religious education publications, religious traditions were often presented as exotic and remote from the experience of young people growing up in Britain." (Jackson, 1996, p.146)

Using an anthropological methodology, research into the experience of students studying Hinduism discovered a difference between their understanding of the religion and how Hindus see themselves (Jackson 1996 ). One example of this is the concept of Brahman. The idea that Brahma is one and infinite appears to be similar to the monotheistic idea found in Christianity, Judaism and Islam, a view taught in schools during the 1970s. However, when Hindus are asked, it is seen as something quite different. The subtleties and layered

meanings are quite different to the ideas provided by the religions cited. As a consequence, Jackson argues, the narrative that is offered to the student who is not a Hindu (outsiders) is disingenuous. The complexity of the cultural background and the varieties of different context are appreciated by the insider of the religion. Jackson encourages a pedagogy of interpretation and dialogue. Students need to be critically aware of their own cultural setting but also interpret materials that are presented to them. This critique of the phenomenologist also highlighted the difficulty with which students have in putting aside their own viewpoints and the influences which impact upon them. Jackson's work has underpinned the research of the Warwickshire Project and he undertaken further research for the EEC through the Redco project.

Like Erricker, Jackson places the learning of the student at the heart of his theory, yet he views a middle way between the implicit modernist view of Andrew Wright and the 'radical constructivist view of Erricker. Jackson neither perceives religions to be static edifices of core beliefs that do not change nor does he view them as unreal philosophies created by institutions that require deconstruction. Stern summarises Jackson's method accurately.

"In religious terms the focus is on internal diversity as well as religious plurality, and on a serious engagement with the layering of religion, culture and philosophy. In terms of learners and the key skills in interpretation" (Stern, 2006, P.77)

As is evident, Jackson's criticisms of Erricker are not as forthright as Andrew Wright. Jackson identifies that the Errickers' primary point is that learning should be a child centred interactive process and with this, he concurs. The 'World Views project', upon which Erricker went on to base all his later work sought to centre education around a child's personal narratives rather than any pre-set curriculum. In that, Erricker and his colleagues in

the project interviewed children in Southampton primary schools regarding personal events in their lives, this is an accurate summation. Erricker saw that any set curriculum is formulated by a form of constructed knowledge which may not be 'real' to the student. Jackson therefore comments "They adopt a non-realist and strongly relativist stance, embracing post-modernism fulsomely" (Jackson, 2004, p59), Jackson neatly compartmentalises Errickers' work without absolutely undermining it (Jackson, 2004) but epitomises his research saying that for Erricker

"The only authentic knowledge is knowledge that children construct for themselves. This knowledge is not final" (Jackson, 2004 p.63)

As Jackson points out, this is radically individualistic and probably is the key flaw in Errickers work. As demonstrated by the 'Living Difference' agreed syllabus and Jackson's own research, which had to incorporate students who, through their religious views, took a more modernist stance with regard to their worldviews, Erricker had to moderate his view.

Jackson points out several other points but the most relevant could be considered issues regarding self critique. It is suggested that at no point, until 2004 and Living Difference, does Erricker allow for a person's own experience to be counted or questioned. If 'knowledge' does not exist, it cannot be inaccurate, except when a version other than your own is imposed upon you. Jackson states that in this scenario, "There is no room for discrimination between better or worse construction of knowledge, no space for critical appraisal of different representations of reality" (Jackson, 2000, p67).

This reliance on a relativist paradigm by Erricker has been criticised by many, as demonstrated by Watson and Thompson (2007), Wright (2000). By making it a pre-requisite

for learning, it undermines positive issues from the research such as the examination of knowledge and materials that are passed on without questioning, investigation and consequent interpretation.

From a perspective of a secondary school practitioner, it cannot be ignored that the participants of the World Views project were primary aged students. It is a stretch to make conclusions pertaining to pupils aged 12 to 16 based on children aged 5 to 11. For example, on a psychological basis, most primary aged students are at the concrete level of development, they have not encountered and would find difficulty interpreting more abstract concepts; many 15 year old students have difficulty grasping, let alone interpreting complex moral ideas.

There is one final critique of Jackson on Erricker that needs to be raised,

“the Errickers’ approach forecloses the debate about modernity and postmodernity by requiring the adoption of a non-realist stance as a pre-condition, marginalising children holding realist views of religious truth.” (Jackson, 2004, p.73)

However, Jackson is not entirely critical of Erricker, indeed he suggests that important insights may be gained without adopting their ‘realist stance’ (Jackson, 2004, p.74). He totally agrees with Erricker’s view of making students and their concerns the main element of religious education. Furthermore, he agrees with the importance of ‘reflexivity and the importance of dealing with the emotional side of religion not merely the ‘rational’. It appears that implicit in Jackson’s work is another common feature, that of the skill of interpretation.

What Jackson and Erricker seem to have in common is that they put interpretation at the heart of learning in religious education as Cooling says, “Fundamentally to see RE as a

hermeneutical subject is to be an advocate for an approach to pedagogy that puts interpretation at the heart of learning” (Cooling, 2012, p.93).

Both understand that acceptance of religious literature or educational material, without an individual’s interpretation and critique, limits both the meaning and value of the study.

Jackson’s ethnographic view originates in the identification of a flaw in the acceptance of studying a religion without taking account of the complex cultural and anthropological issues involved, whilst Erricker’s originates in the questioning of accepted norms of knowledge. As a consequence both ask teachers to question their practice, be more reflective and place the student at the start of the learning process.

#### Andrew Wright and Critical Realism

At the time of the interviews, Andrew Wright was Professor of Religious and Theological Education at King’s College, London. His main concern was the development of public religious literacy, through education in schools. He has been active in the academic argument since 1993 and remains a significant figure to this day. His written works are expansive and include in-depth analysis of spirituality, hermeneutics, Christianity and ‘Critical Realism’. A detailed investigation of his works would not benefit this study, but good summaries are to be found in Grimm(2000), Jackson (2004),Erricker (2010), Wright (2012). He is important to this project not just because of his critique of Erricker but also because his theory of critical realism in the context of religious education. He has a growing group of adherents, e.g. Hookway(2004), Brenda Watson and Penny Thompson (2006), to name a few. He claims his theory is based on the ‘common sense’ assumption of acceptance of reality as it is; this is probably its most attractive characteristic. From discussions with other teachers, meetings at Religious studies consortia and interaction with students, the

application of 'common sense' to learning is considered a vital trait to 'good teaching'. What Wright appears to be saying, at a first look, seems to be an accepted truism.

This most prominent of academics, it seems, is the most harsh in relation to Erricker's Theories. Wright responded to "Shall we Dance?" immediately with "Dancing in the fire: A deconstruction of Erricker's Postmodern spiritual pedagogy" (Wright, 2001). At length, he seeks to undermine Erricker's epistemological theory regarding a practice for religious education. At the heart of this analysis is his questioning of what Erricker deems, as a constructivist, to be reality. Wright, quoting Glaserfeld, describes constructivism,

"At its most radical, constructivism maintains that knowledge is exclusively an order and organisation of a world constituted by our own experience.... not a reflection of an objective ontological reality" (Wright, 2012, p.227)

However, to assess the validity of this to teachers, a deeper analysis of 'Critical Realism'(CR) is required. Wright has developed his explanation of this over the years, probably his most expansive explanation being in Grimmitt's text on pedagogies of RE (2000). However, his most succinct could be claimed to be in 2007 (Critical Religious education, multiculturalism, and the pursuit of Truth). Essentially, critical realism is a perspective on pedagogy of religious education and the place of faith in education, which incorporates an inclusiveness of spirituality. More fundamentally it appears to be a reaction to the extremes of Modernism and Post Modernist Realism.

One of Wright's earlier responses originated from a critique of religious education with regard to spirituality, up to the 1990s (Wright, 1999). His analysis was that secularism in education, had promoted a liberalist understanding of religion, undermining the legitimacy



of faith perspectives. Its end product reinforced an education system that emphasised skills of introspection that focus on the importance of the self and that a student's own perspective was the primary arbiter of all analysis. External knowledge such as religious doctrine was secondary to experience at best, since it was seen to be the construct of others' experience. A constructivist would view such 'knowledge' as the imposition of one set of views and values on the developing child. Wright rejected this perspective of knowledge, stating that Erricker and other constructivists fell into the 'epistemic fallacy', "the basic mistake of forcing knowledge to conform to our means of knowing" (Wright, 2012, p.232). Simply, it is a false assumption to consider that all knowledge originates in the experience of mankind. It may well be that knowledge exists outside our present parameters but we are unaware of it. For example, most medieval Britons were unaware of the existence of the American continent. This did not mean it did not exist, nor that it did not have an effect on those people. The weather patterns of America affected the weather of the British Isles during the time of the Plantagenets just as they do today: the difference is that we are now aware of them.

Alternatively, Wright proposed a view of knowledge in what he termed as 'common sense', basing his view on the 'Critical Realist view of Roy Bhasker (1998). Wright suggests "What if we accept the common sense intuition that we do indeed have some limited knowledge of the order of things even if it is beyond our limited human capacity to fully understand it?" (Wright, 2001, p.131). At this point, it may be observed that this is a statement of faith. Wright does not have an empirical proof of this statement, but is asking the reader to trust in this a priori assumption. In one sense this is similar to Erricker: both base their theory of

knowledge on assumptions of belief. It is ironic that both charge each other with the accusation of being confessionalists.

However, Wright expands his starting point further, stating that we must accept that academic disciplines have developed methods enabling us to begin to understand the universe about us. He does not state that we will ever be able to have knowledge of all things. However, to enable us to interact with the world around us, these assumptions are necessary. Aldridge suggests that this view 'leads to an emphasis on engagement with reality that is not present in Erricker's work' (Aldridge, 2012. P.202). This presents us with the difficulty of Wright. If we are to assume that there is a body of knowledge that exists that we are unaware of, who are we to trust to inform us of that knowledge. The 'truth' of scientific knowledge is in flux and as constructivists would point out, it is inherent in the viewpoint of others, who may be in error with their judgement. Alternatively, Wright asks us to look beyond ourselves. His method seems to be more about discernment of our world, rather than Erricker's emphasis on creating our own understanding of the world. Wright states "We are not dislocated spectators looking down on a world below us, but rather active participants in a reality we indwell" (Wright, 2012, p.228)

Such a distinction is important for teachers of KS3 when exam boards require a more thorough understanding, of what they consider 'knowledge'. Skills are deemed important, but this is based on the possession of a quantity of empirical information regarding the beliefs, practices and values of a range of religions. It is important, with regard to the examination system in England and Wales, that a common body of knowledge is accepted: creating our own understanding of these concepts may be superfluous to the exam board. This view may be contrary to what may be seen as an educational ideal, but presently it is a

situation with which teachers have to deal with. Therefore, it may be suggested that a teacher may adhere to an concept of pragmatism rather than of hermeneutical validity. Both Wright and Erricker went on to formulate processes that would translate their views into classroom practice.

Wright also intrinsically disagrees with Erricker over the subject matter of Religious education. Whereas Erricker concentrates on concepts, as the focus of students learning (Erricker, 2010), Wright sees the truth claims of religious and secular views as the main focal point of the study. His priority is to develop religious literacy not just amongst students but also the public at large. (Wright, 2018). For Wright, “The ultimate paradigm of our relationship to the world is one of faith seeking understanding” (Wright, 2007, p.61).

Wright understands religious literacy as originating in an awareness that the language of religions as expressions of their truth, holds a validity that should be accepted in its own right, but also requires scrutiny enabling the student to make an informed judgement. As such, the student needs to develop other skills of analysis. Aldridge describes this as ‘ the rigorous study of appropriate theological content from an alternate worldview’ (Aldridge, 2012, p.201).

As such, he later concluded that students can only make informed judgements about their beliefs and values (learning from religion) by engaging with the truth claims of various religious and secular traditions. (Wright, 2009, p.12). Translating his epistemological views on religious education to pedagogical principles, he foresaw that critical students would be empowered to make informed judgements about ultimate questions (Hella and Wright, 2009, p.62). Hella and Wright suggest that there are three stages that need to be incorporated into the learning process. Firstly, ontological realism. They argue that reality

exists independently of human perception. As discussed earlier on, it does not matter if we experience something or not, this does not alter the fact or otherwise of the existence of something e.g. God or the afterlife. Secondly, epistemic relativism accepts the contingency of our knowledge of the world. We have knowledge of the world, though such knowledge is always subject to revision and never complete, therefore “despite the fact that science has much still to learn, we are still able to walk on the moon and perform heart surgery.” (Hella and Wright, 2009, p.61). Finally, judgemental rationality is the basis of our investigation of the world around us; Wright uses the term ‘Informed Judgement’. His notion is that our understanding of our world is not based on absolute proof (one assumes he thinks this is not possible). An ironic assumption because, it concurs with the constructivist view, a philosophy with which he fundamentally disagrees with. According to both Hella and Wright this means that “the basic paradigm of our relationship to the world is one of faith seeking understanding” (Hella and Wright, 2009, p.61). This seems to be dangerous ground for Wright since it, at least, alludes to an apriori position of transcendental belief. This may isolate those people who profess an empirical approach to understanding their interaction with life and their surroundings. It may not be Wright’s intention, but the perception of his language may indicate his Christian theistic belief. Sometimes perception of what is written is more important than the intent of the author.

### Critics of Wright

As academically thorough as Wright is, his work has been critiqued. Watson and Thompson asserted their support for Wright (Watson and Thompson, 2006) but felt he did not go far enough. They felt that post modern pedagogies undermined the essence of religious education, replacing one form of confessionalism for another form of social engineering.

They felt that they echoed Wrights philosophy, but that their core values were wider. They preferred the notion of 'Critical Affirmation' (Watson had developed this idea as 'Evaluative RE' – Watson, 2000, p.70) as opposed to 'Critical Realism'. "This denotes a willingness to trust all ways of knowing, including experience and intuition, and is not dependent on reasoning" (Watson and Thompson, 2006, p63).

The issue, I suggest, that lies in this notion is the inclusiveness of intuition. This term is difficult to define in epistemological terms and varies from individual to individual. It is similar to the constructivist view that our personal knowledge originates from all types of experience, a view that they vigorously criticise.

Wright, they feel, undermines his whole project (Watson and Thompson, 2006, p.70) by allowing teachers to present a postmodern view, since "relativism in all its forms denies the possibility of truth." Wright wishes to assert the equality of all cultures whilst Watson and Thompson wish to demonstrate respect to all religions but allow them to be criticised in order to demonstrate 'truth'.

Watson and Thompsons' views are based from a viewpoint of religious faith and this immediately creates an issue for the observer. For them, 'truth' exists, not in factual terms but in relation to belief (Watson, 2006 ). There should not be a belief-fact divide. Their criticism of constructivism, it appears, assumes a malignant intent or at least believes it will lead to malignant outcomes. For them to suggest that all relativism ignores truth, displays a lack of comprehension of the philosophy. Wright understands the significance of the constructivism and argues for at least presenting it as an alternative to his position. Ignoring relativism will not make it go away. (Wright, 1998, pp.59-70).

Jackson's view is not sympathetic with Wright in the way that Watson and Thompson are , but he does espouse some commonalities. A teacher who would endorse Jackson's view may well find that Wright's hermeneutical analysis of the ethnographic approach, does not appreciate its basis in observable human behaviour. Wright directly confronted Jackson's work (Wright, 2008) and primarily this rebuttal is the focus of Jackson's critique. However, three points are worth mentioning in this situation. Firstly he accuses Wright of highly selective use of quotes (Jackson, 2008, p.2). An accusation that may be levelled at his critique of other authors, such as Erricker. Jackson also points out that there are several different interpretations of constructivism. Rarely does he define the term in relation to an author. For example, where does Wright differentiate between Grimmitt's view of constructivism and Erricker's radical constructivist stance? Finally, Jackson points that there are more similarities to their philosophical positions than Wright cares to admit.

"Moreover, whatever our differences, we share a commitment to a number of key principles and values in religious education" (Jackson, 2008, p.22).

Jackson points out that that neither believe in imposing their own pedagogical views on students and both believe in an inclusive approach to religious education. In one sense this perceptive observation undermines Wright's emphasis on how different his approach is. The fundamental aim of Wright is not indoctrination, but to develop students critical skills enabling them to form informed judgements, which is aligned with both Jacksons' and Erricker's standpoints.

### Back to Erricker

Which brings us back to Erricker. Erricker's responses in 2010 and 2012 give us a clear view of his perspective. Firstly, Erricker views Wright's position as a theological approach to religious education, not as a purely philosophical one. This changes the parameters of the argument, since a theological approach derives its origin from a belief in God not an empirical standpoint. This is the fundamental difference between the two writers: Erricker's apriori assumption believes knowledge originates from our own sense: Wright believes that knowledge can originate outside our own experience.

Erricker's in-depth criticism of Wright comes in regard to Wright's perception of truth. He notes that Wright's use of the word 'truth' is interchangeable with the term 'knowledge' (Erricker and Chater, 2012 p.83). As discussed earlier, Erricker's basic purpose of education is a search for meaning in our lives. As educators, we should be enabling students to find the meaning of their own experiences. As such he says of Wright's work "There is a serious problem in the way in which quests for meaning are translated into quests for truth" (Erricker and Chater, 2012, p.83).

As a consequence, we see the conflict between Erricker's and Wright's knowledge paradigm, with Erricker claiming that Wright does not base his methodology of knowledge in the same way as the natural and social sciences. For Erricker, Wright's concept is based on a metaphysical view of the world. Furthermore he feels that Wright's testament to the use of reason in his exposition is flawed by Wright's own Christian beliefs. At the very least, he suggests, that at a subconscious level this would compromise any form of objectivity and pure reason.

Erricker's criticism also seems to be based on his position as a supporter of including secularism within religious education. He claims that Wright not only does not support this view but also asserts there is no place for secularism within religious education. "Disguised within this argument is the idea that only religion can make truth claims" (Erricker, 2010, p.85). Erricker's analysis states that Wright perceives that our social relationship requires a moral perspective and that a viewpoint that does not include a metaphysical aspect is impoverished by it. Erricker further claims that Wright's position is "without religion we are without direction, mentally and morally" (Erricker, and Chater, 2012, p.85)

To sum up Erricker's view, he views Wright as a neo- modernist confessionalist, albeit an unintentional one. Wright clearly refutes any idea of indoctrination and asks students to critically analyse religious beliefs and practices. However, whereas Erricker is critical of the idea of religion itself, Wright sees value in religion. Erricker's view therefore is not that Wright is a confessionalist with regard to Christianity, but in regard to the concept of religion, within the context of religious education (Erricker, 2010, p.86).

Despite this theoretical contestation, recently, Wright's 'critical realist' approach has now been put into practice. Goodman (2018) states that a syllabus based on Wright's theories, has been met positively and seeks for it to be extended to other schools. Further research may look at a comparison between the two approaches in practice to establish which seems more appropriate in the present educational setting.

### Reflections upon the Theory

Prior to analysing the document that is the outcome of Erricker's theoretical investigations, it is worth airing some reflections.



Two main points can be made. Firstly, the emphasis of the debate regarding religious education has focused on the student, the personal perspective of the teacher now needs to be fully addressed.

Secondly, that the experience of religious education by both teachers and students, as demonstrated in a classroom, is a fluid, almost organic matter. To have a strict definition of religious education, within this context, could be seen to be academically and pragmatically irrelevant to the teacher of the subject.

A primary observation with all the theoretical premise presented so far, is that the human perspective of the teacher is, at best, placed as second to the pupil and in some cases ignored. Erricker's view is characterised by an emphasis on the experience of the student in the construction of their own knowledge. Wright's hermeneutical emphasis concerns what religious knowledge is, and Jackson prioritises the anthropological aspects of religion.

Despite these complex and interesting debates, it is Aldridge who suggests,

"It is time to include the classroom teacher in this debate" (Aldridge, 2012, p.203)

He makes the point that since the work of Loukes ( Loukes, 1961 ) theorists have acknowledged the need to make the experience of the students their starting point in planning religious education. However, this makes the delivery of RE a one sided affair. To make the classroom an effective environment for learning, it is suggested that, a larger perspective needs to be considered. Fundamentally, it is the classroom practitioner that creates the environment where the student can achieve the most effective learning. This environment is not just the physical classroom, but also the psychological and social situations with which the student finds themselves in. As such, the situatedness of the

teacher becomes a primary regard for the teaching of religious education. This, it is suggested, inherently begins with their personal biography, values and beliefs.

Homo sapiens is an extraordinarily complex species. Although we conform to various social conventions, we are also unique. Our characters change through contact with our social environment; we are not the same individuals that we were in previous days, even hours. Moments can change our outlook on life. In analyzing the biography of a person, Norman Denzin characterised these points as 'epiphanies' and suggested that they impact all aspects of a person's life thereafter (Denzin, 1989). This is part of a larger psychological argument regarding the meaning of knowledge, when referring to the biography of an individual. However, when reflecting upon the role of the teacher of religious education, the three main theoretical proponents fail to mention the situatedness of the teacher.

Denzin also said "When a writer writes a biography, he or she writes him or herself into the life of the subject written about" (Denzin, 1989, p.26). This may also be said of the teacher relating to students. Taking a constructivist viewpoint, the very presence of the teacher impacts on the experience of the students, consequently the biography of the teacher influences the meaning and construction of the religious education that they are providing, regardless of the methodology that they are attempting to adhere to. Therefore, as Aldridge intimated, is it time to include the teacher in the debate?

Closely linked with this observation, is the question of taking into account the unquantifiable in the classroom situation. By this, I mean the aspects of the situation which are unforeseen and are largely uncontrollable. One specific example is our emotions.

Paulo Friere suggested that we teach with our emotions as well as our hearts (1972). As such, education is not merely about the rational presentation of information, through a range of different pedagogical strategies; it also incorporates the psychological and emotional interactions at play within the environment. Added to this we may also revisit Baumfield's (2012, p.205) comment that 'pedagogy is never a neutral or innocent activity'. This reinforces the place of the teacher as a complex personality with a variety of motivations, who is the sole interpreter of the concept of religious education in the classroom. The experience of religious education from classroom to classroom, person to person and a changing sociological context therefore is an extremely fluid one.

It seems apparent then, from a review of the literature, that a universally agreed definition of religious education is actually unlikely. However, Erricker has said what it should be about "how we make sense of the world and our place in it and responding to how others do so as well. It is about the construction of meaning from experience" (Erricker, 2010, p.76).

The question that comes to mind is, what if an individual finds no meaning from experience? This statement seems to depend on a form of rationalism, not all experiences can be explained or appear to have meaning. Individuals who have loved ones who die unexpectedly often feel a sensation of meaninglessness; such people would not fit into the parameters of Errickers logic. Additionally, there is an element of all religions that cannot be expressed within the limitations of language, that element referred to by Rudolf Otto (1917) as the 'numinous'. This is described as a spiritual experience that cannot be explained in rational terms, arousing religious emotions. An example may be the experience of a miracle or the feelings of an encounter outside logical parameters such as 'prayer'. Otto's concept

of the 'numinous' accepts that it is an experience that has limitations in its explanation but is highly personal in its encounter. As such, investigations into how others respond to such encounters are going to be limited unless the investigator has similar beliefs and possibly has had a similar encounter themselves. This highlights the difficulty that Erricker's position presents; fundamentally it seems to be too simplistic. It neither takes into account the complexity of the human situation nor the vast experiences of the human state. It would seem to be, anthropologically, naïve.

Another point that appears to undermine a universal definition of religious education is the relationship between a teacher's practice and their values. Fred Glennon said of teachers "Underlying their practical concerns are the values and commitment that they bring to their teaching" (CSSR Bulletin: April 1995 p1). Values vary from person to person, as a result of their own diverse experiences of life. Teachers may find some common values but logically they are never identical. As such, a comprehensive definition of religious education may be an ideal, but how far would it be relevant to everyday educational practitioners? If we link this idea with Denzin's concept of studying the human biography, we are faced with the difficulty of identifying a concept of religious education that is relevant to the life story of all students. Such an undertaking should, at its heart, realise its limitations in terms of factual accuracy, pedagogical bias, sociological relevancy and individual pertinence.

So far, this review has looked at the philosophical ideas of Erricker, Wright and Jackson with regard to the meaning of religious education and how it should be taught. These are the main influences on the theory of religious education in the UK today upon teachers, being part of PGCE courses (e.g. Chichester University, Roehampton University) and inherent in the study of RE pedagogy. They influence the content of RE Conferences, Dr Joyce Millar

referring to Bob Jackson in her Lecture to Hampshire Head of RE conference (October 2014), and influence Government advice on the methodology of religious education (Ofsted, 2013, p.23). The pedagogical argument was the foundation of the Agreed Syllabus which is the next point of analysis.

## **7: 'Living Difference'**

### **A) History of Living difference**

Although printed in 2004, the origins of Living Difference do not begin with Clive Erricker. He, himself, acknowledges the work of his predecessors, David Naylor and Alan Brine as County Advisors of religious studies in Hampshire. Also there are strong similarities between the Agreed Syllabus, 'Visions and Insight', and Living Difference, as will be demonstrated later on.

Its origins lay in the legal determination of the 1988 Education Act, that stated that there should be a national curriculum for all subjects, with the exception being religious education. The latter should be determined by a working party organised by the local SACRE. The reasons for this appear to be twofold, as previously described. Firstly, to transfer responsibility from central government to a local body, because the issue of religious education was too contentious. Secondly, it did give the opportunity for local areas to deal with specific characteristics of religion, pertaining to the nature of the local geographic and demographic area.

From the outset, the SACREs of Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton worked in unison to produce their own agreed syllabus. This was probably due to the historical precedent that they had previously been one united education authority (prior to the 1972 Local Government Act). Furthermore the costs and organisation of constructing the different

agreed syllabi, would have been considerable; producing a single document obviously reduced those costs. Further still, even prior to the 1988 Education act, RE handbooks for teachers had been produced to be used for all three areas (Paths to Understanding, 1980, and Following the Paths, 1986).

Visions of Life (1992) was the first agreed syllabus to be produced under the auspices of the 1988 Education Act. As such, it was the first legal document that teachers of religious education in all areas of Hampshire had to follow, according to the law. Attainment targets were mandatory and uniform, following Grimmitt's model (2000), of 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion'. There was still a variety of religious topics to choose from, which the RE teacher could adapt, according to the specific situation of their school. Its successor, Visions and Insight (1998), reinforced the use of attainment targets but also focused on the teaching of concepts, with an emphasis on skills development.

The document says "the development of pupils' understanding of concepts is central to the process of learning in religious education"(Visions and Insight, 1998, p.14).

This idea has become the kernel of religious education in Hampshire ever since. It is reiterated in all agreed syllabi since and is now embedded in national documents on the teaching of religious education. It is no coincidence that the orchestrator of both the 1992 and 1998 syllabi was the county advisor for the subject, Alan Brine, who went on to become a chief Inspector for Ofsted for Religious Education.

After, Alan Brine's promotion, Erricker became the new County Advisor for RE. He also had a reputation for being an academic and had been employed as a lecturer at Chichester Institute of Higher Education, supporting the RE Post Graduate Certificate in Education course.

In his article, “Bike Riding for beginners” (Erricker,2005), which discusses Living Difference, he states that despite evidence of good practice in the county, there was no development plan for the county and no pedagogical principles behind good practice. Therefore the review of ‘Visions and Insight’ was an opportunity to develop his pedagogical theories further and link them to everyday practice of teaching in schools.

B) Structure of Living Difference

To a certain extent, there is a standard format which every agreed syllabus needs to follow. A comparison between several agreed syllabi, for example Birmingham (2007), Buckinghamshire (2011/14) and Cornwall (2014) demonstrates this. This should cover, aims and purpose of religious education, the legal situation, religious education at the various key stages (1,2,3,4), programmes of study and the attainment targets. Also to be covered should be relevance and provision for, special educational needs. Finally, a section demonstrating the impact and application of the agreed syllabus on cross curricular links. How this is laid out and the emphasis on each section depends on the religious and philosophical stance of the SACRE which countenances its authorship. For example, Cornwall does prescribe a particular pedagogy/methodology to teach its programmes of study . “How schools deliver the programme of study is their business but it must have certain features.....” (Cornwall, 2014, p.9). Alternatively, both Hampshire (2004 and 2011) and Buckinghamshire (2011), both incorporate a methodology for teaching their programme of study.

At one hundred and seventy six pages long, “Living Difference” is the longest of all the agreed syllabi. This is because of the detail in which it describes its methodology and explains the educational theory of conceptual enquiry which underpins the extensive programme of study. The agreed syllabus even incorporates examples of how to construct

units of work on concepts from the different religions (Living Difference, 2004, Section 5).

Essentially the structure emphasises, Erricker's aim of resolving the missing link between the theory of teaching religious education and the practice of teaching it in the classroom.

Erricker states that there is a systemic malfunction in the system and "As a result it (*Religious education*) does not have a clear pedagogic vision or a methodology that that gives practical purpose to learning and the outcomes of learning on the ground" (Erricker, 2010, pp.67-68)

From beginning to end, the objective of providing a solution to this issue is at the core of Living Difference. Each section is related to the educational theory. Regarding the 'Purpose of religious education' it says, "It is essential that the process of teaching and learning must be applicable to learning for life, in a broad sense, as well as within the context of RE" (Living Difference, 2004. P.7). Note the inclusion of the word 'process'. For this agreed syllabus, the statement of a programme of study and how this can be measured is not enough; the process has to be explained as well.

The programme of study is based around the investigation of concepts through the use of key skills; knowledge alone would be a factor of limitation. The methodology is based around an analytical cycle of these factors and the structure reflects this.

Section 1 provides an overview of the syllabus and is the theoretical explanation of what is to follow. This includes the introduction of a new idea regarding a 'hierarchy of concept development' and the emphasis of 'Enquiry and Skills'.

Section 2 describes the Levels of attainment, the measuring procedures by which students progress using the cycle can be measured.



Section 3 is the programme of study covering students with special needs, Key Stages 1-4 and Post 16 Education. This division not only lays out recommended content for RE but also demonstrates for each one, how the cycle of enquiry can be applied to each concept.

Section 4 explains in detail the hierarchy of concepts. It provides lists of concepts suitable for type A, B and C. Although generally accepted, this is an area, according to the author's attendance at network meetings, which teachers in the area of the research have often discussed in terms of which concepts are applicable for their designations and also whether important concepts have been ignored.

Section 5 appears to be unique to an agreed syllabus. As pointed out previously, this section provides directions to teachers of how to construct units of work on various religions. It is an early attempt by the team that produced *Living Difference*, to enter the world of the religious education practitioner. It states through the five different stages of the cycle, Enquire, Contextualise, Evaluate, Communicate and Apply, how the different concepts may be utilised. The idea behind this initiative was to help the teacher of RE to plan their work in both the medium and short term. Shortly after the publication of the agreed syllabus a 'Living Difference Handbook' (The Living Difference Handbook, 2006) was produced giving detailed schemes of work, its purpose being to give examples to teachers in the classroom. Section 6 identifies and explores, the links between religious education and other parts of the curriculum. It particularly focuses on the 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural' (SMSC) aspects of the curriculum. Both the 1988 and 1996 Education Acts more than imply the link between SMSC and the spiritual aspect of religious education. Moreover the Ofsted

Handbook (Ofsted, Sept 2014, pp. 131-4) states that when inspecting for SMSC “ there is a balanced approach to religious education”. Links to other aspects of the curriculum are also mentioned, from citizenship to inclusion.

The final section 7, looks to demonstrate the connection between the agreed syllabus and National Curriculum(NC). Since religious education is apart from the NC, it is seen as important that it still concurs with the main policies of the NC to demonstrate relevance. As such, it displays examples of where the agreed syllabus compliments the NC, from meeting students with special needs, emphasis on literacy and numeracy, behaviour management and catering for students who speak English as a second language.

Overall the structure is logical, comprehensive and sets out what it aims to do; clearly demonstrate progression from theory to application. Possibly it is too long. The examples of planning could have been left for the Handbook and the hierarchy of concepts is constantly repeated, as is the cycle of learning. However, if this was in the interests of clarity, it is an understandable fault. However, the more contentious of issues, it is suggested, is in the exposition of the purpose and theory of the syllabus.

#### C) Purpose, theory and the methodology of ‘Living Difference’

As previously mentioned, the general purpose of Living Difference is to ‘support students to develop their own coherent patterns of values and principles, and to support their spiritual, moral social and cultural development’ (Living Difference 2004, 2011 p7/ Revised 2011,p12)

However, this is only part of the purpose. Secondly, the syllabus fulfils the legal obligation of the local authority to the 1988/1996 Education Acts, which was the delegated responsibility from central government. There is also the purpose of the document as a planning tool for

teachers and, finally it is a proponent of a constructivist methodology that could be applicable in schools.

Within the context of the ongoing dispute in academic circles, of the meaning of religious education for students today, 'Living Difference' was Erricker's answer in practical terms. From his basic premise, that all knowledge originates in the experience of the child, Living Difference is supposed to show, that if teaching in the classroom starts from this premise, then a student will develop an excellent understanding of the concepts of a variety of religions and furthermore, their own beliefs and values will be matters of informed decisions. Consequently, although Erricker's academic arguments may be considered weaker than Wright's, in practice, a pedagogy based on constructivism would be seen to work effectively.

As such, one of the purposes that is proposed is that

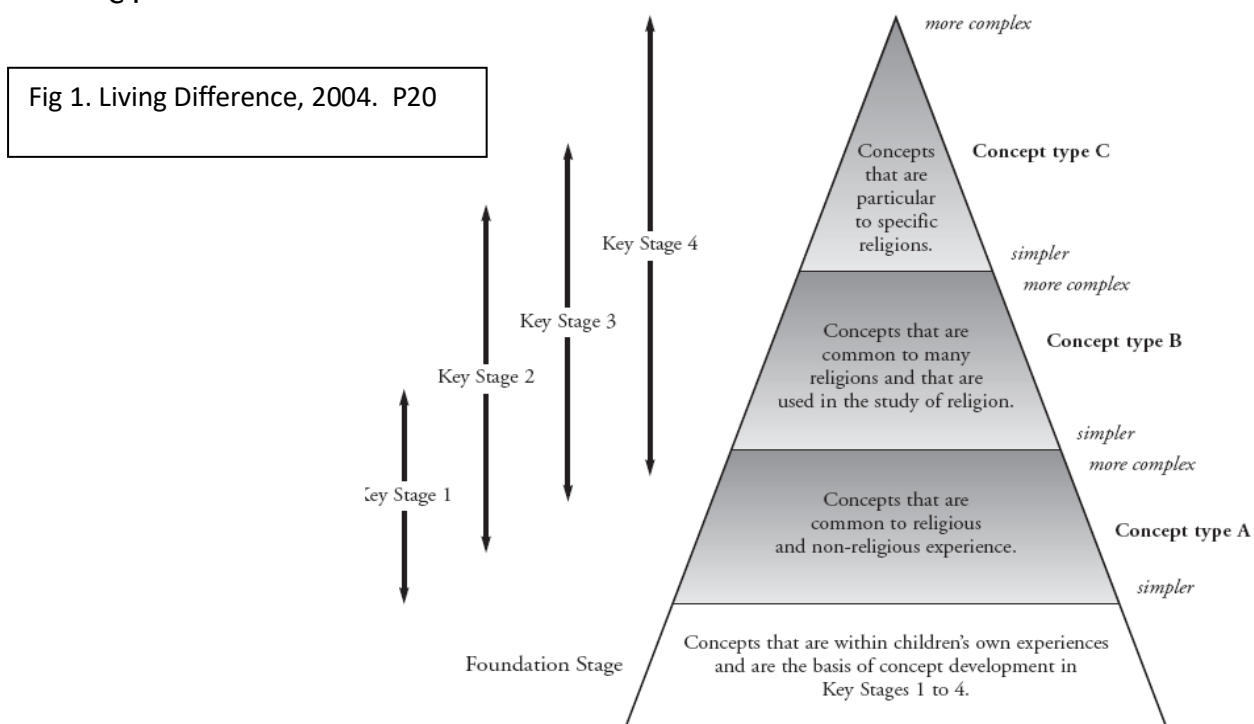
"Living Difference identifies that respecting difference requires us to engage with difference confidently. We need to identify how and why we have different beliefs, attitudes and practices from other people (Living Difference, 2004, p9).

To fully engage students in a process that would fulfil this purpose, Erricker created a methodology, a cycle of learning, that could be applied to planning of lessons and practice in the classroom. The basic premise was to investigate concepts, as opposed to large bodies of information.

Concepts to Erricker, and as expressed in Living Difference, are categories related to human experience. For example, one may study worship and describe all its different facets: this could be seen as information. Worship as a concept involves investigating all the different human experiences and ideas behind worship. It would encourage an investigation not only

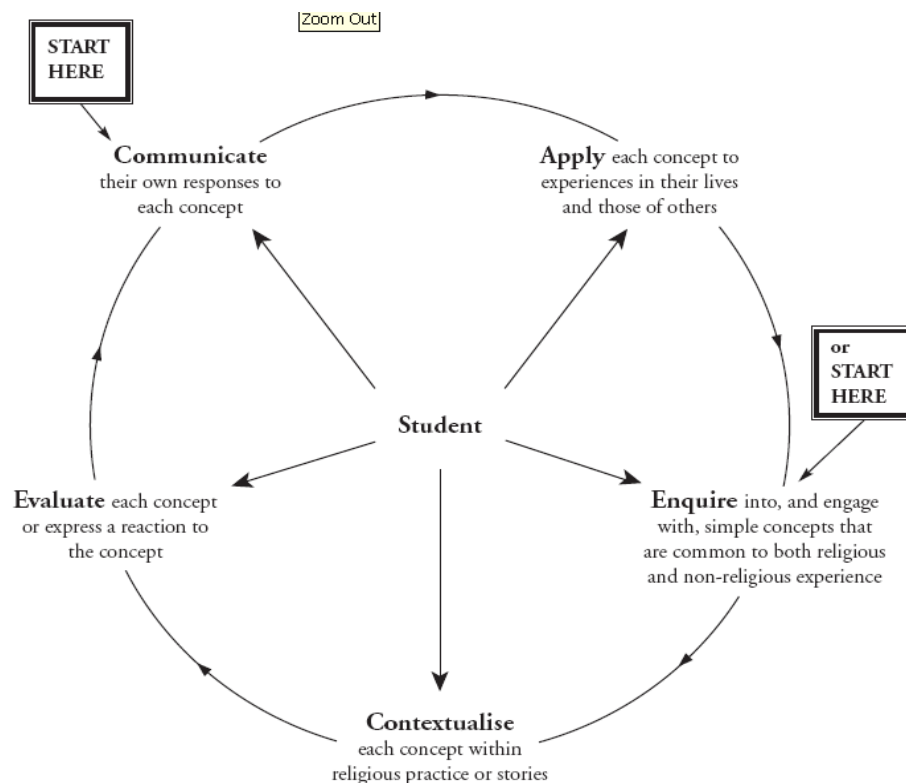
into the different forms of worship in different religions, but also enquire into why these forms of worship happen, why they are important and what is their relevance, in the context of the world that is external to the religion. Concepts, therefore, in the document are “frameworks or categories for interpreting human experience. They are tools for making sense of the world of human experience. The sense we make of the world depends upon our concepts” (Living Difference, 2004, p.11)

From a theoretical standpoint, it is clear to see at this juncture the influence of constructivism. The concepts are those aspects of our knowledge which have arisen from experience. The principle behind a concept led syllabus is for the teacher to be a facilitator of experiences from which the student may deepen their understanding of the concept. Concepts as a basis of study had been used before but with Living Difference they were put into a hierarchical structure (diagram.1 see below Living Difference, 2004, p.20). Less complicated concepts that were not necessarily related to religion, such as celebration or birth were listed as ‘Concept type A’. The most complicated concepts, which were also specifically linked to a religion such as Tawheed, in Islam, were categorised as ‘Concept type C’.



It was up to the individual teacher which concept to facilitate using the five skills demonstrated in the cycle of learning. (Diagram 2 Living Difference 2004,).

Fig 2. Living Difference, 2004. P18



The methodology is dependent on the study of concepts through the application and development of certain skills. The importance of concepts, as opposed to a body of knowledge, was not something new. Visions and Insight had worked on the idea. The idea of working on skills was also not original. However, combining the two and underpinning them with a pedagogical theory was. As demonstrated by the structure and the diagrams, each section is methodically linked together showing how the hierarchy of concepts is linked to the programme of study and the breadth of study. Erricker does not view this as a linear

method of learning, rather than as a 'spiral' (Erricker,2010). Concepts may be studied at different levels of complexity and revisited at a later date to understand the complexity of the issues studied.

#### D) Attainment targets in Living Difference

One of the most contentious issues, it appears, of teaching religious education has been the question of how it is to be assessed. Recommendations from Ofsted(2010) which in turn reflect Grimmit's theory(2000), sought a method of assessment through measuring by two attainment targets,

- 1) Learning about religion
- 2) Learning from religion.

The former emphasised the moral and spiritual aspects of the subject, whereby a student may develop their own personal qualities, referring to such ideas as truth, forgiveness or community. The second referred to learning about the body of knowledge regarding the religions, such as beliefs and practices. This was problematic for teachers on a day to day level. When asked to input data regarding a student's progress, they could only input one level, just as all their colleagues in all the other national curriculum subjects would. Which attainment level would they decide upon? Moreover, this was a difficult situation with parents, because many did not understand the difference between the two targets.

Like the Birmingham Syllabus, Living Difference combined the two making only one attainment target. However, this was not a case of merely combining the two recommended attainment targets. The targets focused on skills based progression; the skills that were the basis of the cycle. As such the attainment targets became an integral part of the cycle of learning, not merely an 'add-on'.

To enable the teacher to identify the progress of the student towards these attainment targets, specific level descriptors were created. For example, Level 3 (Living Difference, 2004, p.25) focuses on the skills of identify and describing a concept that is studied. These skills are complimented by the student being able to contextualise beliefs and practices as well as evaluating the concept. This enables the teacher to relate the planning of the lessons to the attainment target and provide an assessment of the progress of the student. It may well be that the level descriptors are probably, the most outstanding feature of the syllabus. Other syllabi had attainment targets such as Birmingham, but they did not have level descriptors. Other local authorities also had level descriptors, such Buckinghamshire and Cornwall, but these were lifted straight from the “National Framework for Religious education”. Hampshire was unique in its interpretation of the level descriptors, pertaining to the attainment targets and integral to a cycle of learning. Whether teachers thought this made for good pedagogical practice, was a different matter. However, this now seems to be a moot point since government directives have dispensed with levels of attainment.

## **8: Research And Reviews Of Living Difference**

**1)** Katherine Wedell (2009) The Living Difference Evaluation Project Report: How far does the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus ‘Living Difference’ facilitate effective teaching and successful learning in RE? An exploratory study. ([Http://hias.hants.gov.uk/re/coure](http://hias.hants.gov.uk/re/coure))

Through extensive study there appear to be only five reviews or commentaries, apart from Errickers own book explaining the approach demonstrated by Living Difference. The most importance in terms of this research and its depth, was the research project by Katherine Wedell (2009) and her subsequent article in (Weddell, 2010)

Wedell's research is commendable for several reasons. Firstly, it raised the profile of 'Living Difference' and is the only project that attempts to analyze the effect of the document. It attempted to assess the syllabus from the perspective of teachers from KS1, 2 and 3, thus covering all areas it was pertinent to., Finally, it is methodical in identifying a range of areas that were seen to be important by participants in the research. Specifically, these were; Planning; Progression; Assessment; Attainment; Training.

For the purpose of this research there are three main areas which I will analyse: the aims of the research; the methodology; the conclusions.

Firstly, at various points, Wedell gives us two stated aims.

The primary aim was “..To find out about the impact of Living Difference on teaching and learning in RE. Specifically, it looked at planning, measuring progression, assessing attainment, and the impact of Living Difference on attainment in Religious education.”  
(Wedell, 209, p.2)

Yet, on p3 referring to her methodology she states that the aim was;

“To ask the teachers what it was about Living Difference that in their opinions was more effective than their previous practice: what impact had Living Difference had on their practice and what effect was this having on students' attainment in RE? Was attainment higher?” (Wedell, 209, p.3)

These two aims, although they appear related, also seem incongruous. The first seems to suggest an objective analysis of the material, but the second is asking about teachers subjective opinions. Furthermore, the second aim presupposes that Living Difference “was more effective than previous practice”. By making this underlying assumption, it restricts



criticisms by the participants; it does not allow for the possibility that it was not more effective than previous practice.

The significant problem with this research, is its approach to its methodology. In the report, there is no review of literature on the subject. Wedell mentions a quantitative study that took place in December 2006/7, undertaken by the HIAS unit in Hampshire responsible for RE. Its aim was to “Find out what it was about Living Difference that teachers felt had caused the improvements in students’ attainment. The aim was also to see what might need developing or changing in the syllabus and its implementation.” (Wedell, 2009, p.2)

The main issue with this quantitative survey was the level of response. 128 primary schools responded but only 28 secondary schools. Considering that there are 91 secondary schools in Hampshire, Southampton and Portsmouth, all of which are compelled to follow, ‘Living Difference’ by law, this equates to approximately 31% of the total. As such, how reliable are the results? Can the conclusions from this first survey be considered to be indicative of a general response to the agreed syllabus?

Distinctively, there appears to be no academic review in the process of the research. She does not discuss the concepts of ‘learning’ and ‘impact’. Both these ideas mean different things to different people. The language that is used is neither defined nor scrutinised. This is epitomised by the sampling in the project.

“A random sample of twenty teachers was chosen. These were all teachers who were using Living Difference and had reported that they were finding the new agreed syllabus effective in relation to their previous practice” (Wedell, 2009, p.3)

This sampling method seems to undermine the first aim of the research. For the research to have practical meaning, on a general level, all types of teachers, especially those who find it difficult or not effective, need to be included. Furthermore, and Wedell suggests this herself, conclusions from such a report would be loose generalisations at best. “A sample size of twenty can’t show statistically significant variations, but can indicate emerging themes.” (Wedell, 2009, p.3) The issue here is that only seven secondary teachers were interviewed. These were teachers who were using Living Difference, said it had been successful and had training in its use. As such, the selection appears contradictory to the statement that the choice of participants was ‘random’. It may be possible to question also the motivations of the teachers who volunteered to take part in the research, but this only points to a deeper inconsistency; there is no explanation of how the participants were chosen/selected. This would be necessary to provide a context of the conclusions that Wedell goes on to make.

Another issue that arises from the assumptions made in the aims of the project, are assumptions made in the questions that are asked of the teachers; specifically question 4:

“What is it about Living Difference that you think has raised students attainment in RE?”  
(Wedell, 2009 p.4)

Considering that the fundamental question is “What is the impact of Living Difference?” such a question could well be seen to be leading and not impartial. Although Wedell points out that the teachers were chosen because they said that Living Difference had made an impact, this still seems contrary to the original aims of the research. I am not suggesting that this is deliberate, but rather more consideration should have gone into the wording of the aims of the project and the relation to its target audience.

Wedell's conclusions give some general advice on the need for further explanation on contextualisation. "Teachers need support to plan 'contextualise'. They need to be able to plan 'contextualise' in terms of higher order thinking skills." (Wedell, 2009, p.33)

The report also claims that " Learning is purposeful, enabling teachers and students to see attainment and progression" (Wedell, 2009, p.33)

Although these generalisations may be elicited from the contents of the Agreed Syllabus itself, it seems difficult to give credence to these statements when only 31% of Secondary Schools were represented in the sample. Furthermore, only seven secondary school teachers of the sample were interviewed.

In conclusion to Wedell's research, although some of the conclusions appear valid and would be interesting for further research, it may have limited relevance to the practitioners of religious education. Too many areas require further definition, such as the nature of skills and concepts and sweeping generalisations are made with little evidence to support them. The document lacks academic validation, with no reference to a pedagogical viewpoint or debate. It is positivist in its nature, appearing to appease the HIAS team who sponsored its inception, as demonstrated by an avoidance of substantial critique of the agreed syllabus. Finally, there is no evidence of triangulation, ensuring validity of the findings. Wedell states that she interviewed participants "sitting with teachers alongside their planning documentation and examples of students' work, asking them to talk through it to show how they used the syllabus" (Wedell, 2009, p.3). Yet, there is no other reference to this data, or assessment to see if it supported what was being said by the interviewee. Overall, this project could have been a tremendous opportunity to have a rigorous and enlightening assessment of what a wide range of practitioners thought about 'Living Difference'. Some

of its conclusions are important and could give direction for future RE documents.

Unfortunately, this is undermined by a lack of rigour regarding the method in which the evidence was collected and a lack of theoretical underpinning.

A year later (2010), this project was rewritten and presented as an article in the British Journal of Religious education (BJRE, Vol 32, No 7, 2010). Much of the written report was represented with some important additions and explanations. Some of the conclusions are explained further, such as the difficulties with the practice of 'Contextualise' and an emphasis explaining that Living Difference was 'grounded in the learning process' ( Wedell, 2010, p.161). Importantly, the article referred to more pedagogical issues, suggesting that while it provides support to teachers at the pedagogical level of objectives (Wedell, 2010, p.160), "LD does not give guidance at the pedagogical level of method" (Wedell,2010 p.160). Wedell suggests that particular pedagogical methods such as Cooling's 'Concept crackers' (Cooling, 2000) or Jacksons' Interpretative approach (Jackson, 1997) may provide strategies to enable teachers improve the application of the 'Conceptualise' part of the cycle. However, the issue of sampling is not contextualised. With only seven secondary teachers being interviewed and the aim of the report being to evaluate Living Difference with applications to a wide scale, I suggest, the conclusions, although relevant, are not substantiated. This is evidenced by the article, where the impact on GCSE is not mentioned, but section 15 of the report focuses on the topic. Furthermore, much of the commentary fuses all key stages together. The conclusions are generalised and there are significant differences between religious education in a primary and secondary schools. The project would have more relevance to secondary religious education teachers, if KS3 findings had been compartmentalised.

However, Wedell's work remains an important milestone in the development of the Living Difference Agreed Syllabus. It does highlight the progress that some teachers have made and illuminates the issues some teachers have with 'Contextualise'. It is a foundation from which other projects can originate, not least because of the qualitative methodology which Wedell adopted, an issue which will be discussed later.

**2: Geoff Teece** (2006): Living Difference: the Agreed Syllabus for Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton: British Journal of Education (28)2, pp. 217-219

Geoff Teece produced the only review of the syllabus in the BJRE two years after the first draft had been printed. Author of other articles on Religious education (Is it learning about and from religions, religion or religious education? And is it any wonder some teachers don't get it? 2010) and also an analysis of John Hicks (2010) interpretation of RE, he is a proven academic.

Teece starts by stating that it is unusual to review an agreed syllabus, but this document is unique and therefore warrants such a report. Essentially he is reviewing it because "it puts learning to the fore" (Teece, 2006, p.217).

Methodologically, he assesses different aspects of the Agreed Syllabus, firstly praising it for stating the purpose of religious education as opposed to simply regurgitating from government documents what may be seen as 'aims' of religious education. His primary support for the document lays in its foundation of the study of concepts rather than content.

He suggests that the authors have a clear idea of the identity of religious education because of the inclusion of this clause.

“Living Difference introduces pupils and students to a particular approach to religious education which focuses them on engaging with and enquiring into concepts..... They are tools for making sense of the world. The sense we make of the world is dependent upon our concepts. Within religious traditions people use distinctive concepts to express their experience and their understanding of the world.” (Teece, 2006, p.217)

Teece next praises the idea of having one attainment target, instead of two. He feels this is a key element of the syllabus and one of its most important points.

“It is the unpacking of this attainment target that gives the syllabus its coherence” (Teece 2006, p.217)

Although he applauds the focus on concepts in the syllabus and the hierarchical pyramid that is used, he suggests that the syllabus implies that concepts in the higher part of the pyramid are more complex and sophisticated than in the other two categories.

“The diagrams in the syllabus also suggest that Key Stage 1 children enquire only amongst type A and type B concepts. I'm not sure about this. For example, I have seen early years children enjoy using the word ahimsa.” (Teece, 2006, p.218)

Like Wedell, he raises the issue of looking at religion from a number of different philosophical perspectives. Guidance, he comments, is given on constructing units of work in the six principal religions. With regard to the method of enquiry to these religions, can the perspectives of Cooling, Jackson and others be part of the tools in the RE ‘kit bag’ or are they incompatible?

Teece covers the issue of compatibility with The QCA National Framework (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2004) and suggests that although Erricker (2005) states that Living

Difference is compatible with the National Framework, the levels of attainment and performance descriptors make it discordant with the former.

Despite his admiration of the syllabus, Teece emphasises the similarity to a document of the Westhill Project, "How do I Teach RE?" (Read et al, 1992). Not only does he find that the purpose statements resemble each other but also the idea of having three categories of concepts.

Overall, Teece admires the agreed syllabus greatly. He gives credit to its detail and its basis on sound pedagogical principles. He comments that the syllabus takes a vision of religious education and creates a comprehensive document around that vision.

"To my knowledge this is the first time that this has been achieved in a syllabus and it achieves it very well" (Teece, 2006, p. 219).

Teece is generous in his compliments and seems to see little to criticize regarding the syllabus. However, he does raise the issues of using other methodologies and the use of concepts. Later on (Teece, 2010, p.100). In an article concerning religious education in general, that displays far greater depth, he states that using concepts in the way that Living Difference suggests is a helpful tool. However, if the concept is not fully understood within the context of the religion, then teachers could be accused of "descriptive reductionism". That is, by studying a practice such as puja, only as an example of ritual, then the student, is not studying the reality of what puja fully means to a Hindu. The meaning of the term and its context, have been reduced to relate to a theme; this may lead to an inaccurate representation of the concept itself.

The article itself offers little other criticism. Teece supports a single attainment target and sees it as a radical departure from the current practice. At the time, and also in the QCA Framework, two attainment targets are given. He does not explain fully why the single attainment target is better. He also does not feature issues of religious literacy for the students, or the lack of an anthropological influence on the document. Does Teece not recognise the difficulties a constructivist method of teaching may present to students who hold relative absolutist views e.g. that although I have not experienced 'god', the concept of god is a fact.? Finally, although he mentions that the document is pedagogically influenced, he does not review how it is, or analyze the quality of the explanation. It appears that the article seems less of a review and more akin to a tribute. It would be interesting to know more about his response and also what Andrew Wright would have perceived, if he had written the review.

### **3: Clive Erricker and Rebecca Costambeys (2005). "Bike Riding for Beginners" in "World Religions in Education." Shap Working Party**

Written for the Shap working party on a religious education's journal, this is an interesting and less academic piece of writing. Written in two part, it presents two conciliatory viewpoints of Living Difference. Erricker's is a personal narrative of the history of Living Difference, also explaining some of the theoretical aspects of its construction. Costambeys' contribution is a personal representation of the possible positive effects it can have in a classroom environment. This article provides a positivist context for the syllabus, which is 'non-academic' friendly.

Erricker provides his reason for writing the agreed syllabus in the manner that he did because..



“ Nowhere, within the statutory/non-statutory guidance, could I discern the principles, on which good practice was based because there were no discernible pedagogical principles on which it rested” (Erricker and Costambeys, 2005, p.1)

Erricker, subsequently, provides the metaphor of ‘bike riding’ to learning about religion through the conceptual enquiry approach suggested by Living Difference. He describes the agreed syllabus as ‘cycling up a mountain’ (Erricker and Costambeys, 2005 p.1). He emphasises the importance of the single attainment target and the importance of interpretation in the cycle of learning. Possibly, implying a move away from his radical constructivist viewpoint(2005, p.3), he suggests that the methods used in contextualisation are not set in stone, suggesting the work of Bob Jackson and Andrew Wright. Alternatively, it may be seen as a compromise between his philosophical beliefs rooted in constructivism and influenced by the work of Jerome Bruner, and the practicality of providing a statutory document for a body of educators, possessing varying pedagogical perspectives.

Overall, he hopes that the methodology, rather than emphasising its statutory position would “create a culture of innovative development in Hampshire Religious education” (Erricker and Costambeys 2005 p.3).

This short article provides a different tone and approach from Erricker. It is more appealing and suggests a more open attitude. Erricker is attempting to encourage teachers to engage with pedagogical methodologies, not merely his own. Since it was published a year after Living Difference was produced, it seems that he realised the document either needed to be more user friendly or explained in less complex terms. He appears to have fallen back on his more immediate aims of developing teachers’ interest in pedagogy and inspiring them to plan good religious education.

Costambeys' input to the article is a simple description of her opinion of the effectiveness of Living Difference. She asks how the 'Bike riding is going in Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton' (Erricker and Costambeys, 2005, p.3). This biographical effort is enjoyable to read and paints a picture of a passionate advanced skill teacher who has fully committed to the development of the syllabus. From an initial reaction in meetings to the development of network groups to aid standardisation of planning, she recounts her experience of helping to develop and implement the agreed syllabus. However, since she describes the experience only from her own recollections, she cannot really present this written work as representative of teachers in the three education authorities. Also, unfortunately, upon reflecting upon its success, she takes no time to critically analyze the document. It would have been interesting to know what had gone wrong as well as the positive experiences of the students and teachers. In one sense, it reads like an advert, rather than a critical piece of writing.

Overall this is an explanation of the origins of Living Difference, taken from a biographical perspective. Taken as such, this is an informative composition, which provides a basic knowledge of the process of making a syllabus, the theory behind the method and personal recollections of its implementation. A good introduction for a study, but far from encompassing.

#### **4: Other articles.**

As previously mentioned, little has been written regarding Living difference, apart from Erricker's exegesis of his own work. Despite this, it is referenced in other works as a example of a good agreed syllabus and comparing it to the work of Wright (Aldridge, 2012 pp.200-202). Hinds(2005) wrote a positive review in the Times Educational Supplement. It recounts

the background to what an agreed syllabus is, the reforming nature of Living Difference and interview of one head teacher of Park Community school in Hampshire regarding its effect. A more rigorous analysis was written for the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus Conference (2009). This made a comparison of the different structures that agreed syllabi used and the principles behind them. Living Difference is seen to be not the only one to be based on pedagogical principles, but it is unique in also incorporating conceptual enquiry. This is useful as a structural comparison, but lacks depth of analysis regarding pedagogical foundations of syllabi and the impact of the documents on students' learning.

As useful as these articles are, there are a number of issues which have not been addressed which would provide greater clarity of the impact of Living Difference and the collective response by teachers of its pedagogical posture. For example, what is the situation if teachers' religious or philosophical beliefs are contrary to those proposed in the agreed syllabus? Did all schools accept the agreed syllabus and how did they implement it?

None of the articles make a comparison between a school, basing its pedagogy of religious education on Living Difference, and then delivering religious education based upon a different standpoint. It is the lack of inquiry into these questions that was the origin of frustration and the beginning of this research.

## **5: Living Difference Revised**

In 2010, Living Difference, as statutorily required was reviewed. Once again, all three Education Authorities collaborated to undertake the task. Ostensibly little changed. The methodology remained the same as did the pedagogical theory underpinning the document. There were some structural changes, such as the National Guidance was moved from the

end of the document (2004 version) to section one of the revised version. Other minor changes were made, updating directives in accordance with government initiatives, such as personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS) and Every Child Matters. A more detailed explanation of Enquire was included (Living Difference Revised, 2011, p.27) and it was also appreciated that the cycle, in secondary schools, may take between three and five lessons. A new section was added called “Fields of Enquiry” which combined the idea of essential knowledge from key Stage 1/2 and the key concepts from Key Stage 3. These were superficial changes, which were not meant to impact on the spirit of the document.

The introduction (Living Difference Revised, 2011, p.18) reflects upon the passage of time since the first publication and attempts to assess Living Difference’ impact., It mentions different projects which were formed to evaluate and develop the syllabus; a quantitative survey; regional development/ county steering groups; an independent qualitative survey. It follows on to say “All of these mechanisms have resulted in findings that show that Living Difference has had a positive impact on pupils/students achievement and attainment” (Living Difference Revised, 2011, p.19)

This statement is not fully verified. It is not clear that in every school where the agreed syllabus has been implemented, that it has indeed, had a positive impact, there remain far too many variables, such as the specialism of the teachers, the cultural/economic background of the school, for such an assertion to be made.

However, there are small hints to the direction of the syllabus in the future, specifically the methodology for enquire. It states

“Forming classrooms into communities of enquiry offers a safe framework for children and young people to explore both common and contestable areas of expression. The teacher is the guide for the journey”. (Living Difference Revised, 2011, p.23).

This language is similar to that used in the process ‘Philosophy for Children’ (P4C), which encourages pupils to investigate concepts through a developing democratic practice of open dialogue and discussion. Through discussions at recent network meetings and the courses which are being supplied by the Hampshire Independent Advisory Service, this appears a direction that the next agreed syllabus may follow.

The main impression of Living Difference Revised is that it is a second edition of the syllabus. The visual outlook of the document is more up to date and the structural changes make little impact to the methodology itself. It is a ‘holding document to the 2004 edition , waiting for the influence of Hannam, Erricker’s successor as the LEA religious education advisor.

## **9: Conclusion**

The objective of this review was to provide a context for the research regarding teachers’ opinion on the Living Difference agreed syllabus. The review also revealed the legal and pedagogic background of both religious education and specifically the agreed syllabus as composed by Erricker. Moreover, it was also the intention to demonstrate the complexity of defining the concept of religious education, both in practical and philosophical terms, an issue which all new teachers of the subject have to come to terms with. As such, debates between secular views, modernist and postmodernists of the subject were examined. The structure of the Living Difference agreed syllabus was analyzed as were the various

academic commentaries on the document. Referring to the introduction, however, the overall question rests with the teachers of religious education who have to implement SACRE's syllabus. The arena of the classroom teacher is one of pragmatism, not just pedagogical theory. In the light of this assertion, and to extend its authenticity, the next stage of an agreed syllabus should take into account the experiences of a variety of teachers. It is at this point that the practical research of this thesis has its place.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **1) Introduction**

This methodology will explain the context of the research into the experiences of teachers implementing the Living Difference Agreed Syllabus in the Portsmouth and surrounding area. It will also describe the context of the research. It will attempt to justify the reasons for using a qualitative methodology, purposeful sampling, and the form of grounded theory analysis that will be used. It will also discuss the views of Norman Denzin (1989) on interviewing technique, which, although has not been distinctly adhered to, has influenced the research mindset with regard to the approach to the fieldwork. This methodology will also contain explanations of the tools that were created and discuss the ethical implications that had to be taken into account.

#### **2) Educational context:**

Between 2004 and 2009 was a rigorous attempt to introduce a methodology of teaching religious education in and around a city in the south of England in line with Living Difference and improve the experience of students and teachers engaged in its practice. There is no quantitative data available that reflects how successful or otherwise this endeavour has been. However, through anecdotal evidence from the Portsmouth Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE), teacher consortium meetings and staff Inset days, the effectiveness of 'Living Difference' has been called into question. Developing an understanding of the personal experience of teachers may suggest guidance as to how this situation may be improved, in terms of pedagogical practice and philosophical approach.

### 3) Research gap

Most Agreed Syllabi do not seem to be subject to great academic scrutiny, possibly because they follow similar guidelines and are content orientated. Living Difference, as demonstrated by the literature review, has been mentioned in some literature but, apart from Wedell, there has been no in depth study as to its effectiveness, but more purposefully, the perspectives of a range of teachers. Therefore, to provide recent data and a basis for an informed report with regard to the next revision of the agreed syllabus, a new qualitative investigation would add an academic basis for the agreed syllabus conference.

Another possibility for this study in a city in the south of England is the changing demographics of the area. The demographics of the city in question, according to the 2011 census ([ons.gov.uk/census/2011census](https://ons.gov.uk/census/2011census)), in terms of ethnicity, show over 80% of the population are described as being 'white British'. The largest ethnic minority group is described as 'asian or black'. This may have a direct impact on the way RE is approached, since the new cultural influences must be taken into account, as laid down by the agreed syllabus. However, after further research, there is a scarcity of information regarding the idea of changing a syllabus due to demographics within this urban area. I did not pose a question in the interview schedule not wishing to be leading and 'Living Difference' does not make a statement regarding variances of religious education due race or cultural difference. The interest would be to see if any of the participants voluntarily comment on this issue without being lead.



#### 4) Research Aims

a) To investigate teacher's experience of Living Difference within a city in the south of England and surrounding area, so as to discover responses teachers had to the syllabus. To discover any perceived strengths or challenges that teachers have regarding Living Difference.

b) To investigate teachers' understanding of Living Difference in relation to pedagogy.

These aims are limited to a specific area for both pragmatic and methodological reasons. Firstly there is a limit to the number of respondents that the author can interview and the area that can be travelled to. Secondly, the initial instigation of the project originated from teachers in the South East Hants area. Any findings of these aims will be limited to the geographical area of the project and validity is limited and will not necessarily be generalised.

#### 5) Philosophical Positioning and Approach.

Punch's description of qualitative research provides a good basis for its preference..

"By comparison with quantitative research, qualitative research is multidimensional and pluralistic with respect to paradigms" (Punch, 2005, p.134)

Almost exactly the same description could be said of research into Religions. It would seem that the method and the subject matter naturally complement each other, therefore this next section will look at reasons why a qualitative methodology was chosen for this research. It will analyse why it is relevant to the area of Religious Education and specifically the Living Difference agreed syllabus. It will also look at the influence of Norman Denzin on

qualitative research technique. Finally, it will outline the my understanding of the concept of authenticity.

According to various authors, there are different forms of qualitative research. Merriam states that “ Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p5). She refers to Tesch’s (Tesch, 1990) compilation of different types of qualitative research ranging from ‘Critical ethnography’ to ecological psychology. Subsequently Merriam explains issues with generic qualitative research, ethnographic studies and grounded theory. This is to simply demonstrate the breadth and depth of qualitative study. What they all have in common is that “ Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world ” (Merriam, 1998, p.6). Cohen and Manion support this in their explanation of naturalistic approaches to research (which utilises qualitative methodologies

“As an alternative to positivist approaches, naturalistic, qualitative, interpretative approaches... possess particular distinguishing features... People actively construct their social world” Cohen, Manion, Morrison 2009. pp.20-21 )

As such, an appreciation of the researchers’ role is critical in the validation of such a study. Apart from the importance of reflexivity, the situatedness of the analyst adds to the context of the project. Yet the situatedness of the respondent is clearly vital. The key therefore, according to Merriam is “understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants perspectives, not the researchers” (Merriam, 1998. P.6)

Such a comment echoes Norman Denzin's (1989) perspective on the place of the interviewer. The ethos therefore, which lay behind qualitative methodology, it is suggested, is in direct sympathy with a study into religious education. The openness that a qualitative study allows, underpins the fluidity of the methodological process that interviews regarding religious education require.

There are an increasing number of research projects that have been undertaken from different philosophical Perspectives. From the Chichester project (1987), The Westhill Project (2000), The Stapleford project (Cooling 2000), The Warwick Religious education Project (2000, 2006) and Religious Education: Research Through A Community Of Practice (Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady 2009), Francis was able to compose a detailed compilation of different examples of research in religious education, which included ethnographical research, construction of validation tools and classroom research (Francis, et al., 1997). Jackson worked with Ipgrave and O'Grady (2009) assessing the links between action research and an ethnographic interpretative approach to Religious Education. Furthermore, Millar and McKenna describe the qualitative study of European teenagers' perspectives on religion and religious education ( Millar and McKenna, BJRE, 2011) . The latter used mixed methodology regarding data collection, specifically the Redco qualitative questionnaire and semi structured interviews. Additionally, The Forum of Religious and Spiritual Education at Kings College, as reported by Goodman (2018) investigated the impact of a scheme of work based upon a 'Critical Realist' approach. What these projects, it may be suggested, have in common, is an underlying approach to the subject that they are investigating, in that their methodologies are not positivist at their core. This, it may be suggested, is due to what is considered to be RE.

Obviously there are different definitions of RE, depending on the cultural, economic and sociological background of the people concerned. Marx (1976) referred to religion as the 'opium of the people', a sign of the oppressed and the sentiment of the heartless world. However, how religion is perceived has radically changed since the nineteenth century, as demonstrated in the literature review. Ofsted in its report, 'Making sense of religion' (Ofsted 2007) stated...

"The task of those responsible for RE is to help young people to make sense of religion in the modern world and issues of identity and diversity" (Ofsted, 2007, p.1)

Additionally the aims of Living Difference are 'to support students to develop their own coherent patterns of values and principles, and to support their spiritual, moral social and cultural development' (Living Difference 2004, p. 7 Living Difference Revised 2011, p.12)

Both definitions base the concept of religion rooted in the experience of people with regard to issues regarding values; concepts which are value laden and dependant on the situation of the individual. Originating from such opposite contexts, the former being a government organisation, heavily influenced by political views and the latter, created from a radical constructivist standpoint, both have commonality which is found throughout an understanding of religious education. Namely, that knowledge about any religion is based upon the experience and interpretation of the individual. It cannot be seen as acceptance of proven information or consistency of results. Erricker went further to say,

"it is meaning rather than truth or knowledge that underpins the education of the whole child" (Erricker et al., 1997, p.9)

Furthermore, it may be suggested that the core of religion, if not life itself, is based upon belief of ideas, concepts and stories which cannot be proven. These areas are a search for meaning for individual situatedness. Within western society, a large element of what is generally considered as 'personal knowledge' is based upon trust; we trust what is told to us by what we consider to be reliable sources of authority. We do not have the ability to verify all information that is communicated to us, consequently we 'trust' a large amount of the social fabric that forms our personal reality. Likewise, much of the substance of religion cannot be verified in terms of dogma and supernatural claims, yet adherents claim such ideas as absolute. A prime example of this is the concept of the resurrection in Christianity. In view of this core belief of the religion, linking the concepts of atonement and incarnation of God, (with the exception of the view of existentialists), the religion would not exist without trust. If trust and faith are the nature of religious education, then the most apt form of research for an investigation into personal perspectives of teachers and their personal value laden beliefs, regarding Living Difference, would be a qualitative methodology.

It is also particularly relevant to Living Difference, which invites both students and teachers to develop their meaning of concepts in relation to their own experience. As such, the themes of a study could not relate to quantifiable analysis, since each person's experience is inherently different, as is their interpretation of any given situation. Again, it is the subjective perspective of the student that is relevant in investigating religious ideas, within a variety of contexts, that leads to meaning. Due to the complex nature of the fieldwork landscape within the religious environment, there are, exponentially, a huge number of intangible variables. A positive approach, it may be suggested, would have difficulty validating quantitative conclusions, given such variables. Qualitative methodology allows for

openness and a perspective appreciating any hypothesis may be 'apriori' inaccurate. For the qualitative researcher, there does not have to be any hypothesis to be proved; the project may be valued as an end in itself.

As Patton says

"Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself..."

(Patton, 1985. P.1)

The place of the researcher; "researchers should be on their guard to distance themselves from their normal every day beliefs and then suspend judgement on social issues for the duration of their research" (Denscombe, p.669)

An alternative to this point of view is recognition that the researcher, as the origin of the investigation, is an integral part of both the process and the situation of the research. The beliefs, conscious or subconscious, influence the perspective of the researcher, regardless of intent. It may be suggested that it is not possible to be perfectly empirically objective, despite the best efforts of the research. As a consequence, it seems more effective for the researcher to be as aware of their own situatedness with respect to the investigation, to optimise the validity of the project. As Merriam suggests, "Because the primal instrument in qualitative research is human, all observations and analysis are filtered through that human beings' world view, values and perspectives!" (Merriam, 1998, p.22)

Underlying this project's methodology is the notion that when interviewing a subject, the interviewer is entering into the life story of the person who is participating in the research.

In a sense, the researcher is looking into the biography of the respondent. This makes such

research complex, but at least an awareness of this issue adds validity to the researcher's efforts. However, it also affects the perspective when undertaking the interview. When Norman Denzin analysed biographical method (Denzin, 1989), he rejected the previous paradigm of lives being recorded as rational constructions often presented in a chronological order. He observed that such a method fails to give attention to the difficulties in describing real lives with real objectives meanings. He proposed that people's lives were based on reactions to 'epiphanies', turning points that affect their understanding of their experiences. This has been critiqued as such a concept in itself is a generalisation, not sufficiently appreciating the complexity of the human condition.

Denzin also made another point relevant to this research. He rejects an objective hermeneutical approach suggesting that its weakness lay in terms of reliability and that the research itself is directed by the questions asked, rather than letting the narrative give its own message. It appears that Denzin's proposal advocates that the idea that we construct our own realities and objective realities is not peculiar to the individual. As such, the researcher becomes part of that reality when entering the respondents interview/story, as Denzin wrote "When a writer writes a biography, he or she writes him or herself into the life of the subject written about" (Denzin, 1989, p.52)

Finally, this research also takes into consideration the concept of authenticity. My understanding of this concept originates from the works of Bruce MacFarlane (2009), Patricia Cranton and Ellen Carusetta (2004). The former focused on the ethics of academic enquiry laying the foundation for what he saw as a 'virtue-based approach'. He suggested that 'good' research lay in the character of the researcher. He says

“Any discussion about research ethics is located in the complex and ambiguous context in which it takes place. This is a context populated by individuals and groups with differing goals, ambitions and ideological perspectives. ‘Real’ research is about the stuff of human life”. (Macfarlane, 2009, p3)

As such ‘Authenticity’ in this context is meant to be an appreciation of the whole situation of the researcher, the process of the research and all aspects affecting the project. It is based upon the reality of the complexity of everyday life. That is to say that no research is entirely objective and flawless. Simply by the fact that humans are flawed creatures, all our efforts, despite diligence, dedication to detail, and a conscious effort towards accuracy mean that inaccuracies will be made and meanings misinterpreted. The certainty of extraneous variables means that not all situations can be accounted for. As such, authenticity of research demonstrates an appreciation of the reality of the complexity of human existence. Macfarlane proceeds to suggest that apart from the virtues of courage, respectfulness, resoluteness, sincerity and humility which are needed to be a ‘good researcher’, there is also the need for self awareness, self critique and reflection. A good example of his ethos is shown regarding a comment on resoluteness. “It implies a determination to unveil the truth, however confirming or disconfirming to one’s view of the world this may be”(Macfarlane, 2009, p.90). The concept of authenticity here is summarised by the importance of integrity and honesty regarding the fallibility of human endeavours, but still attempting to undertake research.

Cranton and Carusetta, I suggest, have a commonality of purpose with Macfarlane in their research into authenticity in teaching (2004). Their research involved interviewing twenty two educators over a period of three years investigating what the meaning of authenticity



and how it can be manifested in practice. I found that on a personal level the principles behind their work mirrored my own worldview. They believed that when we work towards becoming authentic we communicate with students and others in a genuine way. Like Erricker (2000,2010) they believed that we make meaning out of the world through our experiences). As such they define authenticity as “Authenticity is a multifaceted concept that includes at least four parts: being genuine, showing consistency between values and actions, relating to others in such a way as to encourage their authenticity, and living a critical life” (Cranton and Carusetta, 2004, p.5) These human qualities are at the heart of authenticity and are consistent with MacFarlane’s idea of a virtues based approach to research. One of the impacts on the behaviour of a researcher which is raised from Cranton and Carusetta’s research is that meaningful communication “rests on the premise that those involved are speaking genuinely and honestly rather than with an intent to manipulate or deceive” (Cranton and Carusetta, 2004, p.7).

The other major concern was the importance of self awareness through reflection. They state that ‘ a sense of self is integral to authenticity is obvious’( 2004, p.21). Moreover, participants in their research “were clear that self-awareness plays a key role in their teaching and their relationships with students” (Cranton and Carusetta, 2004, p21).

These views have influenced my personal approach to this research and my own teaching. In the interviews, methodology and the analysis, the importance of authenticity has been in the background of all work. Genuineness, honesty, humility and critical self reflection have been goals of this research as much as the formal research aims. Both before and after interviews, informal discussions occurred regarding a wide range of teaching and non-teaching topics. This was to emphasise the human and informal element of what we were

doing. The impact of this was to allow respondents to be at ease with myself and themselves, producing a relaxed atmosphere. Regarding the thesis itself, there is also an acceptance of mistakes that can be made, not due to a wish to mislead, but as Merriam observes “The investigator as human instrument is limited by being human- that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere. Human instruments are as fallible as any other research instrument”(Merriam,1998. p21)

Fundamentally, authenticity in this case is virtues led, with a wish to communicate genuinely and be self critical. It also accepts the fallibility of human instrument

This section has pointed out just a few of the criteria explaining why a study of Living Difference is best suited by a qualitative methodology. Due to limitations, this is not the place for a more extensive discussion, however a final point is insinuated by Merriam, when discussing interpretative research “education is considered to be process and school is a lived experience” (Merriam, 1998, p.4)

The context of this project is the lived experience of teachers educating students in a constantly changing environment. The key point here, is that it is a ‘lived experience’, with all the complexities that ‘life’ entails. In one sense there is no terminal point at which this project ends, since the process of teaching continues. However, it is hoped that it will provide a snapshot which will reveal a variety of perspectives on the value of ‘Living Difference’.

#### **b) My Personal Context**

According to Merriam (1998) “the key philosophical assumption is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting within their social worlds” (Marriam,1998, p.6)

This is a working assumption of this project and the methodology by which it hopes to achieve its aims. As such there are consequences, one with regard to the context of the researcher. Colley refers to the interaction between values, theoretical understandings and the need for sociological reflexivity (Colley, 2010). As such, the philosophical, and in this case, the theological position of the project's researcher needs to be accounted for. At the initial stages of this research, I was in a management position of religious education in a secondary school, initially as a Head of Department, consequently as a Head of Faculty. I was also the secondary representative on the Portsmouth SACRE, part of the working party on the first 'Living Difference' agreed syllabus, and organised training days for teachers on Living Difference methodology, Portsmouth religious education network meetings, and the South East Hants GCSE conference for students. In addition I supported religious education staff in other secondary schools through observations and evaluations. Alongside this experience, I am also a Christian, in the 'high church', Anglican tradition. Radical constructivism theory would appear to run contrary to such a theological viewpoint because Christianity, at its root, is a system of beliefs based on an unproven existence of an infinite being. This being is not something, according to constructivism that can be directly experienced. If you cannot experience something, a constructivist would say that any knowledge of it, at best, is limited. A compromise viewpoint may be that an individual's immediate knowledge may derive from an immediate experience which then is used to form constructs. However, not all knowledge that exists requires immediate experience for an individual to accept its validity. Students trust the validity of a teacher's statement that Australia exists. They have not experienced the continent for themselves. Even photographs, television recordings are all secondary sources of information which in themselves may be invalid. In the same way, a student from a theist religious tradition may

accept the validity of concepts which, in themselves, have no empirical validity, yet for them is accepted as a form of 'knowledge' which influences their conceptual world view. A general term for such concepts, it may be suggested, would be 'relative absolutes'. The concepts themselves are seen to be absolutes by the adherents of religious/philosophical groups. The concept itself is accepted as knowledge of something that is 'absolutely true'. Outside the sphere of the religious worldview, the concept may not be significant, however, relative to the origin of the concept, it is still deemed absolute. Simply appreciating this and taking it into consideration allows the constructivist to accept that the knowledge and, therefore the reality, of some things, although not based directly upon immediate experience, is influenced by 'Relative Absolutes'. As such, a person can agree with the basic premise of constructivism, but also adhere to a set of religious beliefs as well.

However, my professional, personal and theological perspectives also had multiple consequences regarding major aspects of the research. The main impact was on preparation for the interviews and the analysis of the interviews, particularly coding. Therefore the methodology for this research was initially meant to be a 'grounded theory research project' but the analysis developed into a hybrid form.

The aspect of my research which had the most impact was that in undertaking the research, I was both an 'insider' and an outsider. These are useful terms however, they are limited as Chavez (2008) points, such a dichotomy may be a false one. The researcher's position and attitude may shift during the research which impacts their emotional/sociological position. Green (2014) provides a succinct and thoughtful review of this issue, emphasising that what is important is positionality since it relates to research methodology. However, despite

acknowledging the debate, 'insider' and 'outsider' are useful points of reference. A simple definition of 'insider research' being

"research that is conducted within a social group, organization or culture of which the researcher is also a member" (Greene, 2014. P.1)

Within these terms, categorisation of my position is difficult to place. As pointed out earlier, as a teacher of religious and being in a position of advising my colleagues, I had grown to know many of the religious education community in my local area. In the local geographical area I had grown to know many practitioners, some were working colleagues, a few I had mentored, some others were acquaintances that I had met at local network meetings, others were colleagues from an exam board and many were complete strangers to me. As such my personal and professional position was different to each person in the sample I used as respondents. Another concern I had, was that by the time of the research, I had known Clive Erricker for some eight years. Although not personally close, I had regular contact with him in his role as County Advisor for Religious Education and often spoke to him over matters of RE. Moreover, I had several conversations with him over his pedagogical philosophy and had a meeting regarding this research to satisfy him that I would be as impartial as possible, despite my philosophical issues with radical constructivism. Not one of my respondents brought up this situation as an issue, although with those I worked with closely, it may well have been an unsaid assumption of his influence. To counter this, I emphasised in informal conversations that lay down the foundations of the interviews, that this was a piece of independent research with no agenda and open to new findings.

As pointed out by Bell (2005), Chavez(2008) and Busher and James (2012) there are several advantages to being an insider. There is the advantage of already being known to the participants and have inside perspectives that would not necessarily be known to the 'outside' researcher. Interaction between the researcher and respondents may be more natural, and the interviewer is less likely to stereotype and pass judgement on the participants. Moreover, it may be also the case that insiders can read the non-verbal clues which are part of the common understanding between fellow professionals. Fundamentally as Charvez points out insiders are able,

"To understand the cognitive, emotional, and/or psychological precepts of participants as well as possess a more profound knowledge of the historical and practical happenings of the field" (Charvez, 2008, P.481)

As such a personal rapport may be easier to develop with participants as a means of demonstrating respect for their professional position and their personal beliefs. This is important because, as Charmaz points out, "We attempt to learn, but cannot know what occurs in people's heads" (Charmaz, 2007, p.19). A strong rapport with respondents based on integrity and openness, makes the researcher better placed when conducting the interview. Furthermore, detailed knowledge of the social grouping may mean that the researcher knows how to approach individuals more positively. Access to both participants and institutions may prove to be easier as well.

However, there are also drawbacks to being an insider. Busher and James (2012) point out several key issues. The way that participants shape the information provided to the researcher depends on their perspective of the researcher. An example may be that the researcher may be in a position of authority or may have a 'friendship' with the respondent.

Moreover, participants are likely to perceive a practitioner carrying out research as having particular agendas or interests (Ball, 1987). Keeping participants' anonymity may be difficult within their immediate environment and greater care and assurances are necessary. Greene (2014) also points out the issue of subjectivity. It may be a case that the researcher is too close to the project. As I will discuss later, this was a factor that I had to consider seriously. One solution was to have a 'supervisor' who was an 'outsider' to the situation, able to advise when difficulties arise.

Closely related to the issue of 'being too close' is the problem of bias. Greene discusses this extensively and Busher and James(2012) highlight this as an issue regarding the validity of the analysis of the data. However, I echo Greene and Charmaz in embracing the researchers' personal experience as an aid to the analysis of data. Citing Aguilier (1982), Greene reminds us that 'insiders' experience may be a source of 'insight as well as mistakes. Mrcuck and Mey support this state that observing that, " intimate knowledge will hardly be given to strangers, so familiarity will provide other insights than in the case of a researcher unfamiliar with a person or issue"(Mruck and Mey, 2007,p.523)

The issue of bias may also be an issue regarding the idea of objectivity. Originating from a positivist view of research is the notion that validity is assured mainly in 'objectivity'; subjectivity/bias is to be avoided at all costs. It may be interpreted from Charmaz' point of view (2007) that, "Just as the methods we choose influence what we see, what we bring to the study also influences what we can see. Qualitative research of all sorts relies on those who conduct it."She continues, " Neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world" (Charmaz, 2007, P.15).

As such, and alluding back to a constructivist view of teaching and subsequently, research, the notion is that 'pure objectivity' may be impossible to achieve. It may be that, in line with this train of thought, as Chavez suggests, the insider/outsider dichotomy may be an errant concept. In support of this Corbin states, "today we all know that objectivity in qualitative research is a myth" (Corbin, 2008, p.32).

In the case of this research the dichotomy of insider/outsider is difficult to determine; it was a case of both. I would suggest that to four of the participants, I would have been considered as an 'insider', in terms of knowledge of them as fellow teachers of religious education and association with them in educational forums. For the remainder, I was given access due to my teaching position and support from SACRE. However, referring to Mruck and Meys' point, I would suggest that there was commonality of experience that we shared. Teaching religious education in a growing secular society brings its own difficulties as does the pressure from a changing exam system. The strains and emotional pressures of teaching in a secondary school were common to both myself and the participants. Theoretically, I was therefore both insider and an outsider. However, I did not feel that this was an issue. Charmaz comment that the dichotomy may be a fallacy was indicative of my experience.

An impact of this was, in agreement with Hellawell, I adopted a position of focusing on the aims of the research and adapted to the situations that I encountered. "Instead of worrying over whether one is too much of an insider or outsider, researchers should strive to be both." (Hellawell, 2006, p.487)

Such a position was a difficult one, in that, as a matter of self-reflection, one questions one's own assumptions and opinions. It recognises Charmaz point that, " Knowledge is not neutral, nor are we separate from its production or the world" (Charmaz, 2007, p185). As



such, although there was a clear attempt to be as objective as possible, there is equally the acceptance that a purity of objectivity is unobtainable. Consequently, from the perspective of the small scale researcher, I would suggest, that there is a limit to what we can do about this. Simply being aware of this issue, it seems, is an acceptable position to hold.

## 6) Data Collection

The structure of this research was in line with the following process:

- A) Targeting of potential participants
- B) Development of Semi-structured interviews
- C) Pilot interview and observations
- D) Interviews of the participants
- E) Data analysis

The data collected for this research was through semi-structured interviews, written planning and exemplar material and my own field notes. Interviewees were purposefully sampled. This section will explain why these were chosen and the aims of each source.

To help clarify the work of data collection it may be suggested that it is important to remember that “ data are nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment”. (Merriam, 1998, p.69)

In this sense, the collection of any data for any research, is essentially subjective. To paraphrase Keith Punch , reality in this context, is a ‘text subject to multiple interpretations, multiple readings, multiple uses’ (Punch, 2005). However, there was a determined attempt

to be as objective as possible, in the decision making process of which data would be relevant to the project. However, it is an accepted axiom, in this case that,

“Research styles are not neutral, but embody complicit model of what the social world is or should be like, and of what counts as knowledge and how to get it” (Punch, 2005, p.135)

As such, this research’s basis, both in terms of epistemological and hermeneutical origins, lay in a postmodern constructive understanding of knowledge. However, this is also couched in an appreciation of a critical realist perspective.

The reason that a method using primarily interviews was chosen was due to the main aim of the project; to find out what teachers who have worked with ‘Living Difference’ actually think about the syllabus. The aims of this investigation did not only concern their evaluation of Living Difference in terms of practical application, but also as a theoretical document.

The research also wanted to explore, in the context of the participants working and everyday lives, if it had any impact, particularly since it was compulsory. With such a complex set of questions and in depth responses required, a survey or questionnaire seemed to be very limited. Moreover, both the latter options would be more open to bias than the interview option. By selecting interviews, it was thought, that although the situation would still be influenced by the researcher, the interviewee would have greater flexibility and independence in their response. A list of questions for the interviewee to examine were given prior to the interview (Appendix 1), but it was up to the individual if they wished to answer them. This was made clear on the form and reiterated before the interview.

Denscombe (2003) provides other advantages of an interview when undertaking a qualitative research project. He suggests that not only does it provide a more in-depth insight into the topic, but it also allows the researcher to set an agenda, there is the value of being able to discuss issues with key players in the field of study, giving access to privileged specific information. Punch adds "It is a very good way of assessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality" (Punch, 2005, p.168).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison support this view stating that it enables participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2009).

As stated earlier, the main aim of this project was to investigate of the experiences of teachers, who had taught the agreed syllabus viewed Living Difference. There is an underlying principle, aligning with the nature of Religious education that, understanding Living Difference is not purely about 'knowledge' of the syllabus, but a more holistic understanding, which includes a sense of its place in the spiritual development of the students being taught. The 'interview', as a multi sensory tool, again, is the most appropriate method in this situation. This view is also demonstrated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison, they state, " the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2009, P.349).

Religion, it may be suggested is also embedded in the human condition, thus interviews appropriately reflect the complexity of the topic being explored.

As, a specific type of interview, it was decided that a semi-structured approach would provide both the direction and the openness for respondents to engage with the topic in their own manner. Since the main aim was to investigate teachers experiences of the agreed

syllabus Kvaales' comment regarding the qualitative interviewer is apt; the interviewer "encourages the subject to describe as precisely as possible what they experience and feel and act" (Kvale, 2007, p.11). Alternatively, a structured interview could make the respondents feel that the questions were 'leading', and a completely open interview may leave the less experienced interviewees, with no support in their conversation.

Furthermore, as Rabionet says "A completely unstructured interview runs the risk of not being focused on the topic required" (Rabionet, 2011, p.563). However, it was also acknowledged in the planning of the interviews, that there were several disadvantages to semi structural interviews. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison point out, it can lead to little flexibility and "the standardised wording of questions may constraint and limit naturalness of questions and answers" (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2009, P.353). However, the advantages of increasing the comparability of responses, the reduction of interviewer effects and bias and the ease of the analysis of data, outweighed these considerations.

Another reason for the selection of the semi structured interview was that I was able to narrow down some areas or topics that I wanted to ask to the other teachers. Although being influenced by grounded theory regarding data analysis, the study had a specific aim regarding Living Difference. Through my experience of teaching religious education, prior study (an M.Ed specialising in Spiritual, Moral and Social Education), membership of local network groups, discussions with fellow practitioners, I had devised a set of questions that would be a basis for the interviews and would focus on the task at hand. In the interview, participants were free discuss other issues and they would be taken into account, however, there was a linear process of questions to be followed, if they so wished. This form of

interview, allowed me to keep a narrow focus on the aim considering the limitation of time and resources that were available to the project.

Despite the advantages, the issue of bias and limitation was still of concern, consequently it was decided to allow participants to have greater freedom in answering the questions. They were informed pre-interview that the questions were a guide for the interview and not mandatory. This was also undertaken to make them feel more at ease, I was trying to be sensitive to their fears and insecurities regarding an issue that may impact at county level. As a result, some participants did not answer all the questions or alternatively concentrated on some at the expense of others. This would have a cost regarding some areas of comparability, but it meant there was less interview bias and control.

Echoing earlier comments regarding the importance of positionality and the insider/outsider situation, it was still considered that the semi-structured interview was the most appropriate method of collecting data for this limited research project.

As a relative newcomer to this type of research, prior to initiating the interviews, advice was sought regarding how to show respect and develop a rapport with the interviewees. In terms of literature, Kvale (2007), Charmaz(2006) and Corbin and Anselm(2008) provided a thoughtful and detailed basis when considering how to approach both the ethical and practical elements. Advice was also sought from colleagues and my supervisor with regards to interviewing in general.

The starting point of the interview is the interviewer, and my positionality as such has already been discussed. However, to re-emphasise the However, equally important is the place of the interviewee. As Charmaz says “ the interview is contextual and negotiated”

(Charmaz, 2006, p.27). The interview, therefore, is a two way process. The respondent will essentially provide the data which forms the response to the aims of the project. The interviewee is present because of their own free will and willingness to participate, such co-operation needs to be appreciated by corresponding openness and sincerity. It is this openness and being grateful for their co-operation that offsets some of the power imbalance that some interviewees may feel, as Corbin says "Agreement is part of the power differential"(Corbin and Anselm, 2008, p.29).

In this way, and from my experience, an interview is organic and fluid. No two interviews that I did were the same. Some participants required more prompts than others, some paused frequently, one interviewee hardly stopped for breath. During the course of the interview therefore it is important to be sensitive to both verbal and non-verbal responses. Moreover, there was the additional need for the participants to be given time, not to feel rushed and by constant affirmation, realised that their contributions were valued. All of these are just some of the measures required for the interviewee to feel comfortable and accepted.

Charmaz, providing an overview of the process suggests that the interviewer is there to listen, to observe with sensitivity and to encourage the person to respond. Therefore, in setting up the interview process, it was the relationships with the participants that was the most important. Essential to this process was the idea that " the more researchers and participants belong to similar cultures, the more interviewers pre-suppose concepts and values as shared" (Mruch and Mey, 2010, P.523). Consequently, rather than purely email potential participants, I made contact with them either by phone or in person. I emphasised the collegiate nature of the investigation and the importance of their experiences of Living

Difference regardless of the length of service as teachers. In qualifying the aims of the project, I explained fully my place as a head of a department but more importantly the passion that I had for the subject. Moreover, I presented myself as a colleague who shared in the teaching of religious education within the context of the Hampshire locally agreed syllabus. Additionally, there was the confirmation of discretion and anonymity afforded to all who offered their support for the project. As such, the pre-interview conversations established a rapport that enabled those who wished to participate to feel those shared interests that Mruch and Mey refer to.

A specific criterion for the participants to be interviewed was planned, thus designating this as purposeful sampling. Some stratified sampling did occur, but this was due to the nature of the type of volunteers as opposed to a deliberate policy. The aims of the project dictated this format since, 'Living Difference' only applied to teachers of religious education and those who had taught the methodology.

Teachers were required who had experience of 'Living Difference' or worked in the geographical area where it was compulsory. The sample was limited by area to that of South East Hampshire for several reasons. This was mainly due to the fact that the city being investigated, which is independent from Hampshire local authority, provided a localised but varied sample. It contained a wide variety of teachers from recently retired to newly qualified, teachers who had qualified outside of the area, to teachers who had spent their working lives in South East Hampshire. This local sampling area was expanded because of the limit of secondary schools. There were only seven secondary schools, one of which was a Roman Catholic Voluntary aided school and not subject to the specifications of the 1988 Education Act regarding agreed syllabi. The number of respondents was limited to twelve. It

was deemed that through in-depth interviews of practising teachers, the data would be of a sufficiently high quality to provide at least a satisfactory analysis regarding the aims of the project. As Merriam says, “In this type of research, the crucial factor is not the number of respondents but the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p.83)

More pragmatically, there was the consideration of the limited number of teachers employed in the schools, the geographical limits to which the researcher could travel, limited financial budgets and a question of time limitations due to University deadlines.

Respondents were recruited on a voluntary basis, and approached through local network meetings, membership of SACRE and links to the RE advisor for Hampshire.

The pilot interview was undertaken with an experienced non-specialist teacher of religious education who fully fitted the criteria of respondents. As per all participants, he was given the questionnaire prior to the interview and full disclosure was given into the nature of the research. The background and context of the respondent was known to the interviewer due to working in the same environment for over ten years. The interview took approximately forty minutes and no written material was provided. I realised that this may undermine triangulation of the evidence, as a consequence every effort was made to encourage others respondents to provide documents that would support their interviews. Apart from the issue of written evidence, results of this process were that, the interviewer became more aware of question bias and interviewer effect, particularly in relation to colleagues who were well known, and the breadth of themes that subsequently arose during the analysis of the transcript.



### Creating the question sheet: (Appendix 1 and 2)

Before the initial pilot interview, a question sheet used for the interviews went through several rough versions. The guiding principle behind these was, as Charmaz proposes that “Questions must explore the interviewers topic and fit the participants experience” (Charmaz, 2007, p.29). Furthermore. Merriam states “The questions you ask depend on the focus of your study”(Merriam, 1998 p.76). I see these two statements as complimentary, providing a thoughtful basis when considering the questions.

The questions themselves originated from the focus of gaining knowledge of teachers’ perspectives as per the aims of the research. They were also based upon my experience as a teacher of religious education, and membership of local focus groups. I discussed the questions with experienced colleagues, my supervisor and the RE Advisor for Hampshire, Dr. Pat Hannam. As suggested by Merriam (1998) and Charmaz (2008) they started by open/informal questions to allow the interviewee to feel comfortable and relaxed for example

“ 1: From your own personal point of view what do you see as the purpose of Religious Education?”

and

“2: Tell me about the time when you first came across ‘Living Difference?’”

The remainder of the questions were more specific in alignment with the aims of the research, deliberately focused on Living Difference, allowing for both the deductive and inductive analysis that was to follow. An example of this were the questions regarding pedagogy:

What is your understanding of pedagogy in relation to 'Living difference'?

'Living Difference' is said to be based upon a 'constructivist pedagogy. What do you understand by this and what are your views on constructivism in the classroom?

To what extent does 'Living Difference' encourage reflection upon pedagogical argument?

These were included because of Errickers' claim (2012), that the agreed syllabus was placed in a pedagogical framework, as explained in the literature review.

The next part of the questions related to the agreed syllabus impact upon classroom practice and assessment, upon my understanding that these were basic features of teaching practice. For example:

"Please describe what you believe to be examples of good practice in Living Difference."

"Can you tell me about any of the challenges you have faced in applying 'Living Difference to your teaching practice?"

"Can you tell me about your experience of 'Living Difference' with regard to progress and assessment?"

These questions demonstrate that there was a deliberate effort not to be leading.

Participants were free to not only answer the question in the way that they wished but also to disagree with the question itself.

The final two questions required a personal reflection from the participants but were also meant to finish the interview on a positive note. These questions led to a formal ending of the interview, graciously acknowledging their importance to the research.

“If any, what impact has ‘Living difference’ had on your effectiveness as a teacher?”

“Is there anything you wish to add regarding your experiences with Living Difference?”

Further discussion of these questions is raised in the findings section of this thesis.

Before the initial pilot interview, the question sheet used for the interviews went through several rough versions. It was changed again following the pilot interview. Although, flaws in its construction appeared in later interviews, it was felt that due to the need for consistency, no further changes should be made. The fundamental difference between the versions was the first question. Originally, a question was placed asking the interviewee what they thought was the purpose of Religious Education. This was removed since it was considered that an answer would be made apparent during the course of the interview. In the pilot interview, this assumption regarding respondents possessing their own view of the aim of religious education required revision. In a debrief, the participant suggested that he would have liked to be asked that question at the beginning, since it provided a better starting point. As a consequence, for the sake of clarity and also to enable the interviewees to ‘ease’ their way into the session, the idea of what they saw as the purpose of religious education was considered to be a good question. In total, there were fourteen questions in the final question sheet (Appendix 2) probing into the experience of the teacher when first encountering the document, their knowledge of the structure of the document, experience of implementing the syllabus (including process and assessment), their personal evaluation, and experiences from their personal life influencing their teaching. The intent of the interviewer, was that questions were not meant to be leading, so, as mentioned,

respondents were free to answer all or none of the questions. However, it was felt that the interview required some rigour to give credence for its intended audience and also support authenticity and validity issues. Furthermore, it was the purpose of the research to attempt to access an in-depth response to the topic, therefore some direction was deemed appropriate.

## 6) Data Analysis

If data analysis is a process of making sense out of data, then this research suggests that it begins with a principle rather than a strategy: it should not be “ I am using grounded theory” but rather “ why should I use any theory?”. The decision regarding analysis of the data therefore depends on what is the right question. In the case of this research, the methodology of analysis arose from the research aims and the type of data collection itself. As Merriam says, “The researcher is responsive to the content; he or she can adapt techniques to the circumstances; the total context can be considered” (Merriam, 1998, p.7)

Punch states that “The essential idea of grounded theory is that the theory will be developed inductively from data” ( Punch, 2005, p.153). As a teacher, I have sympathy for this approach, purely because I believe that imposition of views on anyone is an erroneous exercise. As such I wanted to include some element of induction into the methodology. However, I felt that this had to be curtailed because of the limited focus of the aims, limited time/ financial constraints and additional professional responsibilities. Moreover as mentioned earlier when creating the questionnaire, there were particular themes that I wished to investigate. However, there were distinct elements of good practice that could be applied to the methodology that could be borrowed from ‘grounded theory’. In fact when

Corbin said “I believe that method evolves to handle the methodological problems that we as researchers find out in the field (Corbin and Anselm, 2008, p.9), mixing the style of data analysis was application of such a principle. Also taken into consideration was that there is a limitation in what we can see from the data as Derrida said “There is no clear window into the inner life of a person for any window is always filtered through the glaze of language, signs and the process of signification (Derrida, 1972, p.247). As such the conclusions of the data, although methodologically undertaken, are still a product of ourselves; a view that echoes Charmaz’ views on objectivity.

These principles meant that although I wanted to analyse specific answers to the questions in the interview there was also the flexibility to allow the data to speak for itself. When reading transcripts what is being said is only part of the data. There are those aspects of the data which are observables but there are also unobservables: aspects of the data which are discreet. An inductive process allowed me to take account of this feature. Punch stated that grounded theory was the search for regularities and that in this search ‘induction was central’ (Punch, p.196). This implies that irregularities are not prioritised, it is suggested that sometimes irregularities give us the most pointed directions to new ways of understanding.

Specifically there were six stages to the analytical process but begins with Coleman’s comment “Analysis of the data is ongoing from the start of the interview process as the interviewers reflect on what they are hearing” (Coleman, 2012, p.262).

After the interviews themselves, the first contact with the data was listening to the recording of the interviews themselves. I did this on the night of the interviews to check that

the recording worked and there were no technical difficulties so it was ready to be sent to be transcribed. I also wanted to keep the interviews fresh and write some notes for background information and initial reflections.

1. The first reading of the transcripts. I read these straight through and compared them to the recording checking for accuracy. There were a few occasions when the transcriber could not understand what was being said and left words out. This meant repeatedly listening to the recording and understanding what was being said in context. Already analysis, in a general way, was being undertaken. I was considering an overview of each person, their views on religious education and attitudes towards Living Difference.

2. Remembering Merriam comment “ Coding is nothing more than assigning some short-hand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data” (Merriam, 1998, p.164). Transcripts were read again and ‘open coding’ began ( Anselm and Corbin, 2008, p.198) . Initially I used a table as aid to remind myself which participants had answered which questions and in what depth. My judgement on these categories was dependent on the time and depth of the answers that they had given and related to the text of the Living Difference syllabus. I felt that engaging with such a large amount of data you could easily become overwhelmed by the sheer quantity. The table helped create a focus before I could start ‘coding’ At this point I was looking to match up answers that had been given by the participants to the questions they had been given. I started to categorise these under ‘ codes’ relating to the questions such as Q1, Q2 This provided more depth to the analysis undertaken in the previous reading. The aim at this point is to become immersed in the data.

| Table 1   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Comment   | Code  | Theme   |
| <p>“My experience dates back to the working party that was going to review the existing vision and insight and Clive Erika put forward the model and I can remember him sitting there looking at this type of enquiry he was drawing and I remember saying ‘where is the pupil in all this?’, and he paused and said ‘right in the middle of the cycle’, so my involvement dates back to then.”</p> | <p>Q2 Basic knowledge of LD</p> <p>Q3: Working knowledge of pedagogical background</p> <p>Q5: Did they describe strengths and weakness of LD?</p> | <p>Level of knowledge of Living Difference</p> <p>Teachers’ understanding of the pedagogy behind Living Difference</p> <p>Living Difference in practice</p> |

3. The next phase continued aligning the respondents’ answers that matched the questions. At this point I also looked for other key words and ideas that arose from the text; in this way I ‘coded’ the transcripts. Thus, as I re-read the transcript, I aligned ideas, and comments from the respondents to each of the questions. The interviews did not always follow a linear pattern and often references to the questions did not match the order of the questions. I also started to use constant comparison analysis in anticipation of similarities

and differences. This was also the point where the inductive aspect of the methodology overtook the deductive element when analysing just from the questions.

4. Analysis of the data led to collapsing of the codes, sometimes referred to as 'selective coding', into more general categories (themes). This was undertaken by looking for similarities/commonalities in answers. For example the codes of 'training' and 'resources' were subsumed into the theme of 'Teachers' ideas of the weakness of the methodology'.
5. By colour coding scripts, the themes were then highlighted and collated. By using the different colours representing themes I was able to find more general commonalities and highlight aspects that stood out on their own.
6. I continued this process until the limitation of my research dictated as mentioned previously. However my main concern was that I had reached a point where I could provide some evidenced based answers to the aims of the research

As mentioned earlier, a table was created just for the purpose of providing a visual idea of participants answers (Appendix 3) Although not qualitative in nature, it was not used as a quantitative measure but it was aid in deductive analysis of the responses to the questions. The table does not fit into an inductive method of analysis but it was of use in clarifying, in a general sense what was being said. This analysis also helped form the coding areas which I could relate to when re-examining the transcripts. To provide further refinement to the process of analysis, constant comparative technique was used in developing further themes and codes. By continuous cross referencing of data within the interviews, it allowed for



emphasis of codes or relegation of data importance, allowing the data to provide its own prioritisation of themes. As described by Merriam, this requires both deductive and inductive modes of thinking. This also required reading and rereading texts. This took into account Boeije's (2002) view that the constant comparative method should have a purposeful approach, in order to systematize the analysis process and to increase the traceability and its verification.

To summarise, Interviews (Example Appendix 4) were analyzed systematically for commonalities in relation to topics from the questionnaire. Key terms and themes were identified and highlighted, being open to new concepts not mentioned in the questionnaire. Documents, such as powerpoints (Example appendix 5) were offered by some of the participants. These were analyzed in conjunction with the questionnaire sheet. These documents were analysed in the same manner as the interviews, but also explored if opinions offered in the transcripts were supported by the written records. All transcripts were further analyzed, in relation to emerging themes, generalisations and possible hypotheses. This also allowed for the discard of data that were not substantiated. This reductionism continued until only major themes were left and saturation point was achieved.

The final point regarding data analysis in this research is also provided by Merriam. She observes that analysis, "is still a highly idiosyncratic, intuitive and lonely process, the success of which depends on the investigator's sensitivity and analytical powers" (Merriam, 1998 p83)

While grounded theory, and also constant comparative analysis, may provide substantive results from the data, the human element of the work must not be dismissed. This is also

true of data analysis; in terms of validity and reflexivity, the analysis must at least take into account the situatedness of both the author and the interviewee, being aware of the interconnectedness of the two. This does not invalidate analysis of data, but rather authenticates it in terms of the reality in which it originates. This echoes Charmaz view “Just as the method we choose influence what we see, what we bring to the study also influences what we see. Qualitative research of all sorts relies on those who conduct it” (Charmaz, 2006, p.15). Participants should also be seen as conductors. In very real terms they organise their own responses, deciding what to reveal and remain left unsaid.

#### 1) Ethical Considerations

The research fulfilled the requirements of Southampton University Ethics Procedures and the Data Protection Act. Permission was given by ERGO (Appendix 6) and interviews subsequently were organised and undertaken.

The teachers were assured that they would remain anonymous within the research and that they were free to withdraw at any time (Participant Information Form Appendix 7). In one case this did happen at the start of the interview, as the interviewee did not like the idea of being recorded. The research process and tools were shared with all participants.

Interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and a mini-book was used as a backup.

Recordings were transcribed by Mrs Janet French and were offered to all interviewees to provide the opportunity to redact the evidence that they had given. Only one participant requested the transcript and they assessed it to be fair and accurate. The data was securely stored in the researcher’s study with a guarantee that it will be destroyed upon completion of the project in 2018.

The interviews took place in surroundings that were comfortable for the teachers and in a neutral environment of the interviewees choosing. No other people were present and privacy was assured.

Underpinning this process was an investigation into theory of ethics in social research. It is generally considered that ethical virtues are required of academic researchers and the work of Bruce Macfarlane influenced the ethical context of this enquiry. He asserts that at the core of ethical research should be courage, respectfulness, resoluteness and sincerity since as he says,

“At heart, research is concerned with the pursuit of truth” (Macfarlane, 2009, p.91).

The concept of what is truth may be arguable, however consideration of participants and need for an open and honest knowledge of the consequences of their input is, ethically, incontestable. Therefore, this project had the concept of integrity at the heart of its ethical paradigm. Macfarlane elucidates this idea. “If academics are to research with integrity then that integrity must be a feature of the whole research process”(Macfarlane,2009,p.XIII). As such concern for the needs of the participants, particularly anonymity, was a central feature of the project.

The issue of deception and participants not knowing the process or potential outcome was not an issue in this research. The information sheet given to each potential interviewee was clear and fully explained the aims and purpose of the research. As such, the process was transparent and there was no danger posed to any participant.

## 10: Conclusion

This methodology has laid out the considerations and processes involved with the project. It has highlighted the theoretical aspect of developing a method, peculiar to studying religious

education and with respect to an investigation into the Living Difference Agreed Syllabus. In stating the research aims, it has demonstrated how those aims may be achieved and investigated issues arising from the collection and handling of data. It has reflected upon the influence of Merriam(1998) on developing research methodology, Charmaz(2007, 2008) , Corbin and Anselm(2008) advice regarding the practicalities of data collection, Denzins' view on the place of the interviewer/biographer and also the work of Bruce Macfarlane in relation to Ethics.

As with any research, nothing is perfect and lessons have been learnt in this process . In particular, there was the reluctance of participants to provide physical records supporting their views, and difficulty in organising times for interviews that were convenient for everyone. However appreciating the impact of this reflects the practicalities of the study.

## **Findings From The Research**

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the results of the interviews of participants in this project, in relation to the investigation parameters of the study. The purpose of this study has been to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching Living Difference. During the interviews the participants described and discussed attitudes towards religious education and Living Difference as an agreed syllabus.

The research findings that this chapter reports are based on an inductive/inductive analysis of face-to-face semi structured interviews, a variety of documents given in support of these interviews, and the researchers observations of these interviews. Both audio recordings and transcripts were interrogated in this analysis.

### **The Participants.**

Twelve teachers of religious education chose to participate in this project, six male and six female. Eight of them were current Head of Departments, one newly qualified teacher, one first year teacher and one main scale teacher. All of the participants have taught religious education at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 at Secondary level.

### **Themes**

Several themes arose after constant comparison analysis, however it was decided to focus on the following themes in response to the aims of the investigation. This was due to some themes closely echoing or being closely aligned to a more dominant theme such as 'Mechanics of Living Difference' being incorporated to 'good practice'. Alternatively some

themes were not supported by the vast majority of participants and with regard to the practical limitations of this thesis such time and word count. It was felt such themes could be left for later exploration. One example of this related to comments on the relationship between citizenship and religious education on a general level. Three participants made comments regarding this theme but i felt there wasn't sufficient evidence for it to be placed in this analysis.

- 1) Level of knowledge of Living Difference
- 2) Teachers' understanding of the pedagogy behind Living Difference
- 3) Living Difference in practice: The quality of the teacher as central to the process
  - a) Teachers ideas of the methodology and how it inspires good practice
  - b) Teachers ideas of the weaknesses of the methodology
- 4) Living Difference and Assessment
- 5) The Absence Of Spirituality

Further investigation and a secondary analysis of these themes led to the discovery of more general and discreet themes.

These were:

- 1) How teachers see the relationship between theory and practice
- 2) Instrumental aims of education
- 3) Teachers' focus on outcomes rather than pedagogy

## **Precursor**

When presenting the results of research, the context and style of the interviews also need to be included due to the impact on any given conclusions. Most of the interviews took approximately 35 to 40 minutes to complete, however three were considerably longer, those taking the opportunity to go into far more depth with their answers. Overall, there were a number of issues that interviewees thought were challenging, when implementing the agreed syllabus. There was not one theme that all respondents brought up, however there were themes that the vast majority deemed to be significant.

### **1) Awareness of Living Difference as an agreed syllabus**

This area is concerned with the individual's awareness of Living Difference as the agreed syllabus. This meant that they knew of its existence, the statutory nature of the document and the implications for planning and teaching. One of the interviewees, although in charge of the department, claimed to possess scant knowledge of the document and no knowledge of its statutory role. Her predecessor had told her "Here it is, now forget about it (Living Difference)."

Three interviewees possessed a basic knowledge. They knew of its existence, it had a methodology and it was a legal requirement. Although all three had undergone training, one suggested that their lack of knowledge was due to it being complicated. An example of this limited view was demonstrated by P11

“I know the structure within looking at different concepts, it ranges across all the key stages: KS1 almost simplistic almost knowledge gaining, just recalling facts and then moving up to higher order thinking skills, a bit like Blooms hierarchical pyramid almost...”

Four interviewees had a good working knowledge of Living Difference. They were aware of its existence, could describe the methodology clearly and its link to a pedagogical basis. They were able to discuss the terminology of the cycle of enquiry and give examples. Furthermore they described the statutory role and recommendations regarding religions to be taught and time allocations for the yearly curriculum.

The final four displayed a developed knowledge and could discuss all of the above as well as provide insights into the construction of the document. An example of this was P7 who explained in detail all aspects of this question. For example, referring to the statutory status of Living Difference he said

“My understanding is Living Difference is Hampshire’s agreed syllabus and each county can elect a syllabus of their own. LD isn’t just unique to Hampshire: there are other smaller LEA’s- Westminster, Camden and a couple of other places that have opted to use LD”

It is noticeable that with this interview and no others, there was reference to Living Difference being used outside the local authority.

## **2) Pedagogy of Living difference.**

This theme is concerned with the knowledge of and understanding of the pedagogical basis of the agreed syllabus. Most knew that the document had this basis, but only some



could discuss this, referring accurately to the ideas proposed by the Living difference. A representative example of this was P8 who suggested that pedagogy

“in relation to LD, it’s about how the students learn, the way they learn and how they construct that knowledge, how they get that knowledge together based on previous ideas and values”

Upon deeper questioning, this last interviewee did not display an understanding of the epistemological basis of constructivism and its implications for Living Difference.

Also, most of the participants confused following the cycle and pedagogy. Accurately relating the methodological cycle to pedagogical theory, was a theme that they experienced difficulty with. The interviewees could be separated into four groups.

- a) Only three of the participants could actually discuss this area of the agreed syllabus with any confidence. The three interviewees displayed understanding of pedagogy and were able to relate it to the Living Difference syllabus. They also understood and commented on the concept of constructivism in relation to other pedagogical theories, such as Andrew Wright. Comparing constructivism to Critical realism P4 made the comment

“As a teacher, it’s (*constructivism*) relatively safe compared to, perhaps, some of the other pedagogies that might exist. In the wrong hands and in the wrong way, things could be not so appropriate in the classroom. If you take critical realism and some of the ideas of Andrew Wright, if they weren’t applied properly, you could end up with sending the kids out arguing that religion is a meaningless, pointless entity and has been made up.”

- b) Two were able to discuss the pedagogical theory behind Living Difference and were able to describe the concept of constructivism. However, there was limited understanding of the theory and upon questioning little depth of knowledge. It was as if they revised for the interview.
- c) Three understood the concept of pedagogy, but due to a lack of knowledge of constructivism or the background to the agreed syllabus, were unable to relate this to Living Difference. Only one of these originates from outside the Hampshire area. P1 stated “ I haven’t really thought about it on a wider scale, I think because it is what I have been brought up in my teaching” but also went on to say, regarding Living difference, “the idea of taking these huge ideas and linking it to the students, I think is a very important thing”. If the idea of constructivism was explained to these participants, they related it to different aspects of their experience.
- d) Finally, four of the teachers possessed no knowledge of pedagogy in relation to Living Difference. Two said that they did not know what this meant. When questioned about constructivism one stated “I have no idea what that means.” Often there was confusion between explaining the method in the cycle and pedagogy itself. P9 suggested, when asked about her understanding of pedagogy in relation to Living Difference “It’s a circle of learning. You start with your concept as your starting point then work your way around”. These participants often misrepresented terms. Two participants tried to give a limited explanation of constructivist pedagogy. For example

“ I think it is about being more reflective, trying to put things into context, giving pupils examples of how things happen rather than just telling them, it is trying to set it within context for deeper understanding” (P11)

### **3) Living Difference In Practice:**

a) Teachers positive observations of the Living Difference methodology.

b) Teachers observations of the challenges of the Living Difference methodology

Responses to this line of questioning were the strongest, in terms of the participants feeling confident about what they were talking about. This was demonstrated by the length of their conversations, familiarity with key terms and concepts and being able to describe examples. However, responses were varied in their depth and the issues raised.

A) Participants positive observations of the Living Difference methodology

The vast majority of the teachers saw the application of the cycle as a helpful aid to their teaching. Eleven of the interviewees felt able to comment due their experience in teaching; ten of those consistently displayed a positive reaction to the agreed syllabus. A new teacher stated.....“For me, if you follow the cycle you can’t get it wrong”(P8)

Several consistent ideas arose regarding the benefits of the Living Difference during this section of the interviews. All said that it was better than previous agreed syllabi because it was concept based, rather than content orientated. Furthermore, teachers were able to choose the concepts that they taught. They also pointed out that students were at the heart of the process, P3 stated that....

“My understanding is that the whole thinking behind LD, the whole idea of conceptual enquiry is teaching the pupils to be more independent learners, to actually think about ideas that we study, topics, units from different perspectives so they reflect on their own beliefs, their own ideas and have their own perspective on a belief or a teaching and then become aware through the conception enquiry cycle of other perspectives and how they can use what they have learnt in different ways”

In support of the concept supporting independent learning, (P4) said it “helps them create meaning for themselves”. Furthermore, a non-specialist Head of Department supported this saying, (RE) “is more personal to them” (P11)

The great majority commented positively on the availability of planning materials as well as schemes of work (SOW). All but one school based their SOW on the documents provided by the County Adviser for RE. It was thought that these were easy to follow and accessible to non-specialists. P2 stated that

“ it is a model that is an attractive model that brings both clarity to my planning, teaching and also my role here as co-ordinator of RE as the only RE specialist: You can make it work for non-specialists”

Further comments on the value of the provided SOW emerged “My initial experience was a positive one: it helped you create lessons that served a purpose” P4.

Another constant theme through the investigation was the necessity of students being part of the process.

“ I think children actually buy into it, if you don’t just sell it to them, but if you understand it, if you know what you are doing and trust the method” (P7)

This comment was indicative of the majority of the feedback. Greater interaction from the students was encouraged and it allowed more accessibility for the students. A consequence of this was that it was felt that it developed higher order thinking and questioning. In line with this idea, a participant showed a SOW for a unit called the Island, this text was used to support her view that.....

“It’s original. It’s interesting. The kids love it. I like it. It’s a good way in *(to RE)*” (P9)

With regard to Living Difference in the classroom, several participants provided evidence of work from the classroom to support their comments on the agreed syllabus. P4 gave, as an example of what he thought was good practice, a PowerPoint called “Moral Evil and Natural Evil” (See appendix 4) All interviewees, with the exception of two, discussed examples of classroom practice which they classed as ‘good’ due to the inspiration of the Living Difference methodological cycle. They referred to aspects of the cycle, such as the enquiry stage as a method to interrogate opinions and bias statements. Another example described how a lesson helped ‘gifted and talented’ students attain higher than predicted levels of attainment.

B) Participants’ observations of the challenges of the Living Difference methodology.

“Good RE and good teaching in general is so much more than the sum of its parts, it is not just pedagogy, it is so much more”. (P11)

The following evidence entirely originates from a personal perspective of the respondents. All the challenges referred to by the interviewees affect their personal and professional response to how they teach. As such, the results suggest a need for the construction of Living Difference to be more aware of teachers as complex professionals, with a wide range

of concerns and limited resources, who have to find solutions to these problems on a daily basis, in a convoluted environment.

By the far the most common area of challenge was the issue of time. This is separated into two distinct areas; time for planning and curriculum time given to the subject.

The time needed for both long and medium term planning was directly mentioned by five of the subjects and inferred by a further two. Comments ranged from the need of time to create resources, converting previous schemes of work, planning the concepts which were to be presented, to the extent of extra time given for short term day to day planning. Five summarised this saying.. “It’s very difficult sitting down and trying to plan the whole year’s worth of concepts”

Participant six talked of the time needed “ getting to grips with all of this” whilst participant nine raised the issue of both:

“My biggest problem was a question of time,.....on a personal level my time has been extremely limited and drained by the fact there was one specialist in a department that requires at least two and a half full time people. From that point of view the time aspect of going back and revising things and checking they are working has been pretty much impossible”.

The issue of curriculum time was a constant factor in all but three of the schools of the interviewees’ schools. Either by direct comment, inference or by the context of the interviewee, the amount of time provided affected the planning and performance of the subject. Some interviewees had to teach a full GCSE course on one lesson a week at Key Stage 4, others could not offer a GCSE at all, P12 further stated.... “ The fact RE is being cut

further from next year.....The way it would leave it then, would completely drop yr 9 and (*leave only*) twenty minutes a week to years 10 and 11.”

P4 discussed pressures external to the department “The main issues have come from outside” as a reason for being unable to finish a cycle. Others directly commented on the lack of curriculum time given to the subject. Participant 11 said.

“I think maybe the way that we would choose to teach it is almost choosing areas that you would like to teach, because time is so limited. So it isn’t being covered to the extent that we should be doing it and something has got to give”.

In conclusion, the issue of time is by far the most wide ranging challenge to the teaching of Living Difference, according to the evidence provided. The interviewees’ claim that religious education itself it was not taken seriously by government and senior management in schools, underpins many of the responses to other questions.

Another consistent comment that arose from the more experienced teachers was that although some thought Living Difference possessed a pedagogically sound methodology, it was still the quality of the teacher that was at the heart of good teaching. At this point, the results tend to suggest show that the participants think that the quality of the teacher is more important than Living Difference itself. P2 said “the strength of it lies in the strength of the teachers. In itself it is quite an empty model”

Although this was an atypical viewpoint, on regular occasions teachers mentioned the importance of the experience and quality of the teacher as instrumental in using the cycle well. It was considered possible to follow the cycle mechanistically and achieve progress,

but this did not necessarily lead to inspiring lessons. As P5 said “ I don’t think it’s LD that produces good RE, it’s the way people use LD that produces it”.

Furthermore, P10 said “ purely based on a mechanistic approach, yes, you tick all the boxes, but you don’t bring in the spirit of interest which is important to engage children”

Furthermore P12 said “ Good RE and good teaching in general is so much more than the sum of its parts, it is not just pedagogy, it is so much more”.

Four teachers discussed the idea of Living Difference being too prescriptive. They wanted the flexibility to adapt the cycle and ‘dip in and out’ or thought that an enforced Agreed Syllabus was against their personal principles. P 9 said “ I think it’s ok as a guide and we follow it up to a certain degree but I don’t think everything should be too prescriptive” and later “ I can’t- and don’t- do prescriptive so, therefore, we have what we are trying to teach the kids, and the outcomes that we want.”

P10 further stated...

“ I do not think it’s methodology is something that should be imposed upon all teachers of the subject and I do not think that it is necessarily healthy for all children to have this sort of methodology imposed upon them.”

This supports the idea that following a philosophical ideal regarding the pedagogical element to them was alien to a minority interviewees. This was further supported by their ideas regarding what constitutes good religious education and their lack of theoretical knowledge regarding a constructivist pedagogy. Although few directly commented on this issue, all the teachers found that they were openly adapting the Agreed Syllabus in some form. Only one interviewee discussed following it ‘ad verbatim’ (P4). As such, one result of



this research is that the vast majority of teachers interviewed do not follow the Agreed syllabus as directed. This idea is evidenced in the practice of other teachers where, for a variety of reasons, the methodology was not completed fully; emphasis would be given to one or two parts of the cycle over others. Agreement with the principles of Living Difference was stated but appeared not to be implemented in planning or in the classroom. P7 supported this assertion. "I am quite a fan of Living Difference but I'm not someone who uses it as a prison to restrain the way I think".

Another issue that the HODS raised was the practice of planning itself. This was commented on in different ways. Within the Living Difference Handbook (2004) and other support materials, a time frame for the execution of a cycle, it was felt, was at least inferred. P4 described how at a previous school he was made to complete the cycle in one lesson. Consequently, most felt the time frame given by the support materials for each lesson was unrealistic and had to be adapted. It was simply not possible nor good teaching to attempt to go through the cycle in one lesson. Others felt that there was too much emphasis on enquire and not enough upon contextualise. Three participants mentioned the difficulty of choosing the concepts when planning since they were all interlinked. They felt that they often overran and that students wanted to know about other concepts but there was not the time to cover those areas.

Closely linked with this theme, was the notion that not all teachers understood Living Difference in the same way and as a consequence there was little consistency from school to school in the South East Hants Area. P7 stated with conviction

"The main difficulty I have with 'LD' is when you go to meetings where there are other heads of RE who have different views of how it should be done- I am not

saying theirs is wrong and mine is right- but there are different ways in which it is done.”

It was also mentioned that this could also be an issue internally. “We had five different understandings of how Living Difference should work which led to some lively debate” P2.

Furthermore, upon further discussion of individual planning, it was commented

“Whilst its’ (*LD*) is quite a clear document, there are still possibilities for errors to be made and for people to think that maybe the communicate stage on this cycle could be interpreted to be an enquire”(P2)

The evidence at this point seems to highlight a conflict between the idea of teachers wishing not to be “imprisoned” by a prescriptive model and the managerial objective of tighter consistency regarding school, medium term and personal planning.

A minority of teachers commented on antipathy from students towards RE as a whole as a challenge to teaching according to Living Difference. Reflecting upon students’ attitudes, P11 stated,

“ I think they have quite negative views on RE. I think their point of view is we are teaching them to believe in something, to become Christians or to become Jews and I don’t think they understand that it’s not trying to teach you to become a religion, it’s about learning understanding and tolerance.”

The need for Living Difference to fit in with the requirements of the new GCSE was also on the minds of the teachers. Three respondents discussed the disparity between the concept based approach of Living Difference and the need for greater depth of knowledge of factual

information. Two discussed in depth their worries for a need for students to be more religiously literate. They felt students could not understand the concepts properly without a basis of information regarding the religions studied: Living Difference according to them did not provide for this. Another commented on the success of his department in implementing Living Difference but commented,

“What I don’t like is this idea that it’s open up to that criticism that sometimes LD can be too much learning from and not enough learning about, that is the difficulty, to get that balance right” (Participant 7)

The respondent here, appears to be referring to a methodology used in areas of the country where ‘Learning About’ refers to the factual information of RE and ‘Learning From’ refers to the abstract and spiritual aspects of RE. Another respondent clearly criticised the implementation of the methodology saying.....

“ We had whole lessons where actually very little was done, religious content wise” (P1)

This interviewee went on to comment that by following the Living Difference cycle students developed good analytical skills and were able to identify and explain concepts but their basic knowledge of religious beliefs and practices was severely lacking.

The common factors amongst these respondents was that all three were experienced Heads of Department, had undergone training courses and appeared fluent in their understanding of Living Difference. The results, therefore show that to these teachers it was a major immediate concern and one that would continue into the future.

#### 4) Operating And Using Assessment: “Flying Without Wings”

The original Living Difference and its immediate sequel had one attainment target “Interpreting Religion in relation to human experience” as opposed to most other agreed syllabi which have two: “Learning About Religion” and “Learning From Religion”. It also has eight levels, each with a description of what is required for each stage of the cycle. To reinforce this, it also has performance indicators describing ‘acquire skills’ for each level.

The vast majority of interviewees, at first, were critical of the provisions for assessment and progress in Living Difference. Initially a small number made some positive comments. An NQT (newly qualified teacher) stated “It’s very effective if used correctly”(P6), a head of department said “It did indeed help us with progress and assessment, because there was little prior to it”(P3) However, as interviews also revealed, a wide variety of criticism. Furthermore, there was anxiety looking to the future of assessment and demonstrating progress since the government was to stop the use of levels in schools. Some teachers were concerned about how they were to measure progress and what Living Difference could do to help them. As P1 said:-

“the issue will be assessment without levels... it will be like flying without wings”

Questions regarding assessment and progress were answered from a wide range of viewpoints. A majority commented on how they had to adapt the assessment system, often using GCSE questions which were then adapted. Another significant minority discussed how complex the system was and the confusion on where to do the assessment in the cycle. A minority described examples of assessments that had been used. One respondent said “ I found the whole process very false”,(P10) appearing to raise the issue of whether religious

education should be assessed at all. Overall, there was no specific majority opinion on the topic. However, there was a consensus that it was better than what had gone before, although it could be confusing and it needed to be adapted.

From a range of the respondents there were positive comments. One felt it had given them a baseline and a foundation where to start,(P8), which was supported by (P4) “ From a teacher’s point of view it’s quite straightforward”.

A minority of respondents positively discussed the fact that there was only one attainment target. P2 felt that it was useful for non specialists, because it was very simple and was a best fit approach. P8 thought that the method of assessment encouraged students to be more reflective and that there was a good emphasis on evaluation as such. Overall, the positive comments on how Living Difference helped with assessment and progress were fewer in number in relation to range, number and depth. Interviewees made their statements and provided little qualification. As an example , P6 said

“Your assessments are the ‘apply’. It’s where using that opportunity to apply that knowledge on a long term basis which is all I can really say. In terms of more progress than assessment of my students, even subconsciously, without knowing it, I’m following levels of attainment”.

Contrary to this was the feedback criticising the assessment element of the agreed syllabus.

Firstly, a small minority did not comment on it all because they consciously did not use it or had outright rejected it. One interviewee, who had used it, was quite explicit in his condemnation

“ I find the whole concept totally false. How can you measure what spiritual progress has been made?” “I thought the object of Living Difference was to go much deeper than that, and if that is the case, I don’t see how you can measure that effectively” (P10)

The majority of the respondents claimed that they had to adapt the assessment criteria. Often they used a GCSE model. This could either be related to the level criteria and or fed back to the student directly as a GCSE grade, a significant minority had been practising this policy for some time. One of these had used LD initially but changed later. In all of these schools, GCSE was a priority. As P3 said ....

“What we do now is, most of assessment and measuring is based on GCSE style questions”.

Another significant minority commented on how complex and confusing the assessment system could be. Through a variety of comments it was thought that translating the level descriptors to pupil speak could be difficult for the students to understand. For some it was confusing as to which part of the cycle to assess and when? Was it the case that all sections should be assessed, or as one respondent thought, it should always be at the ‘apply’. P 5 commented on this at length.

“ I think the levels from LD are too confusing for the pupils to understand.” And

“ I really don’t know what the answer is but I definitely don’t think that it’s a case of describe, explain, evaluate for each level”.

This train of thought was supported by another respondent:-

“It seems unwieldy and unmanageable because it could be that you are assessing the applied but you are assessing the contextualise” P 2.

A summary of this aspect comes from the latter interviewee, “If I could identify one major flaw it would be the levels and how they are translated and how they are assessed.”

In the context of the Living Difference handbook, there are many examples of assessment provided with the exemplar schemes of work. However, even with specialists, there was concern over interpretation and application. With NQTs this was particularly the case. With such incongruity, most if not all had resulted in creating their own assessments, based on evaluative questions or a GCSE model. Since there was generally wide support for the methodology, it enabled the students to ‘take off in flight’ in their learning, but with no assessments they had no ‘wings’ to support or guide them.

### **5) Spirituality Not Essential To Practice?**

Despite this not being a specific topic in the questions, the concept of spirituality was mentioned by a significant minority of interviewees but which covered the spectrum of experience, Heads of department, newly qualified teachers and one who was retired.

Overall there was a lack of concern for spirituality and many did not refer to it at all, regarding the teaching of religious education more generally and Living Difference specifically. There were three types of response. Firstly, those who referred to spirituality when discussing the purpose of RE such as P 8 said “I feel it is important to give young people the opportunity to develop their moral, spiritual, cultural knowledge.”

Others incorporated it within the teaching strategies they employed with the school, sometimes specifically relating to the Living Difference cycle. P 4 declared “However, personally, they can understand their own spirituality, however they choose to see that”

Another, when describing good practice mentioned it amongst other ideas “following the cycle, trying to bring in all sorts of things I feel important to religious education, bring in some spirituality, appreciate different cultures” (P 2)

However, one of the respondents was particularly animated, linking spirituality with the basic purpose of religious education. He saw spirituality as the key component in the teaching of religious education and that this was severely lacking not only in Living Difference but also the teaching of religious education in general.

“ The purpose of RE is to try to help young people to develop ideas, understanding and to understand in particular... but how having a spiritual side to them can influence their lives they lead and the decisions they make”(P10)

He said later “... for a lot of them, they did not see themselves as spiritual beings”.

One of the challenges identified was that there was an antipathy amongst students, who felt that religion was not relevant to their lives(P10). This participant was particularly passionate concerning spirituality and raises the issue of the importance of the topic. It does not seem accurate to come to the conclusion that one area is more important than others, because it is not mentioned overtly by many interviewees. It may be the case that the subject is airing a topic that the others wish to avoid.

This aspect is significant, since it is in the mission statement of Living Difference that investigating our spirituality is one of the four core aims of the agreed syllabus. If, when asked about their experiences of teaching Living Difference, the majority of respondents went into little depth, at the very least, it may be deduced that they do not see it as essential to their practice.



### **Further Analysis of Themes**

#### 1) How teachers see the relationship between theory and practice

After analysing the data on respondents understanding of the pedagogical background of Living Difference, a secondary investigation looked at how they saw the relationship between theory and practice. With the exception of two, all saw the idea of practice led theory as important. Words and phrases such as 'reflexivity', 'metacognition', 'development of higher order thinking', were common. Other areas discussed in five of the interviews were 'concept led education'. P3 stated "I believe in concept led education. Knowledge is relative and depends on who chooses the curriculum. Concepts focus on developing the learners understanding of the idea".

However, only three discussed how the theory informed their practice and were positive in their appreciation. In the context of whether a constructivist methodology could help classroom practice P4 commented "I think Clive Erika really hit the nail on the head when he thought that LD would be the way forward". P7 also affirmed that as a pedagogy "Living Difference can be used as a basis for teaching and learning in RE". Another went as far to say "In a way, Living Difference is a pedagogy of its own". As such it may be viewed that minority of the participants appreciated in-depth a distinct link between the pedagogy of Living Difference and classroom practice.

However, the majority of respondents discussed these issues separately and did not make an overt link between the two. Two openly dismissed the connection. P11 stated "Good teaching is not just good pedagogy" and P6 thought that pedagogical knowledge was a low priority. In this context he stated that "the important thing is the quality of the resources". One suggested that teachers didn't have to think about pedagogy with Living

Difference because “ teachers can just follow the cycle, not really think about the theory behind it”(P3).

The most obvious element that came out of the analysis was the perceived ‘separateness’ of the two concepts by the interviewees. All participants attempted to discuss the questions on pedagogy, although some were limited and eagerly described issues of classroom practice. Only the three who discussed pedagogy in depth related the practice back to theory. The level of the pedagogical influence varied amongst the respondents and there appeared to be no pattern such as it being dependent on age, experience or position in the school.

## 2) Instrumental aims of education

On a more general level, outside the parameters of Living Difference, without fail all of the teachers referred to the intrinsic aims of religious education as being the priority as opposed to any instrumental objective for education. However underlying this approach was a tension between having to comply with external standards based upon a more instrumental philosophy. For a significant minority they felt institutional education was for students to get exams, meet attainment targets and attain standards set by external bodies.

In this analysis, key terms such as ‘moral learning’, ‘holistic’, ‘reflection’ and ‘tolerance’ were common. This was indicative of the idea that education should be for the development of the person as a whole. P11 stated that religious education “ contributed towards the spiritual cultural and moral development” of the child and also that it was “absolutely critical to student development in a holistic sort of way”. The idea of education of the whole child, especially personal development, was mentioned by all

participants. Within this context P3 stated “ We are responsible for helping them to improve their understanding of themselves”

Another emphasis was the development of personal skills to enable the student to develop but not exclusively for the betterment of exam results. These included ideas of providing opportunities for discussion, time to think, and “giving them a voice”(P4).

P7 supported this view stating “ We have to provide them with the opportunities to develop perspectives by which they are thinking more flexibly” and P10 commented that education gave them an opportunity to “discuss issues that they will encounter throughout their lives.”

A significant minority commented directly that this view was being undermined by the expectations that were imposed upon them. P3 directly commented on an observation where the lesson was criticised because there “was no written evidence of progress” even though it was felt intelligent and investigative discussion had taken place. This attitude may be summed up a comment by P2 “ We should be producing adults that are more than units for consumption”. No teacher commented on whether the two approaches could be complimentary.

### 3) Teachers’ focus on outcomes rather than pedagogy

Another more generalised finding than just related to Living Difference was that for the significant majority the educational outcome for the student was more important than just following a pedagogical theory or methodology. The analysis found two aspects to this issue. The first was the idea of an outcome in relation to the wider skills to be developed. Students should be able to describe basic features of a religion, they should develop understanding, metacognition and “be tolerant of each other and tolerant of other cultures” (P4). Developing these skills was deemed more of a priority than

“religiously following the methodology” (P2). One respondent justified this position by stating “Children are unique and every class is unique because of the combination of personalities and abilities and group dynamic that you get within a classroom” (P8). The greater majority of the respondents stated that they used the methodological cycle but adapted it to meet the learning outcomes that they thought were appropriate. This was not only true of the intrinsic aims of the subject but also external exam targets/outcomes.

The pressure to achieve measurable targets was also a pressure on the teachers. P7 explained that the necessity to comply with GCSE assessment objectives meant that all assessments from year 7 were now based on GCSE style questions, four other teachers confirmed this approach to measuring progress. The need to have a measurement of progress as an outcome of lesson was highlighted by the majority of participants focusing on levels being lesson objectives as well as assessment criteria. P10, when considering outcomes stated “I’m following levels of attainment”. Some saw such a view as a criteria as a standard of success. Three of the twelve overtly praised their students for attaining targets for example P12 stated “Higher level candidates were able to achieve level 7. That was good progress”. Another P3 mentioned that “we have an obligation to fulfil exam criteria”

However, this position was not left without criticism. Three of the more experienced participants were averse to acceptance of examination criteria or teaching standards as outcomes in themselves. P6 commented that with religious education it did not seem possible to measure it effectively due to the nature of the subject. Supporting this view and in contrast to an earlier comment. “There’s more to RE than getting 7 out of 8 on a

question” (P3). This conflict seemed to be summed up by P1 when discussing GCSE criteria stating that “ I don’t see how Living Difference will be able to support the GCSE”.

This analysis seems to confirm that there is a tension between the perceived different outcomes required of the participants. Furthermore, no one considered a method of bridging the gap between the two.

### **Supporting documents from the Interviews**

The participants in this research project were given the option to support their interviews with written material. All but two chose to provide this evidence. Documents provided ranged from schemes of work that they used or created, photocopies of marked books, to detailed powerpoints.

The vast majority of the schemes of work (SOW) were taken from the Living Difference Handbook, often with only the name of the school inserted at the top. As such these followed the methodological cycle of teaching starting from Communicate, Apply, Enquire, Contextualise and finishing with Evaluate. The SOW for the topic of ‘Ghandi’(Participant 11) included learning outcomes, the stage in which the cycle of learning took place, resources required and imaginative tasks for those outcomes to be achieved. In some cases the SOW also gave examples of differentiation. Other presented SOWs included ‘The Island’ ( P9), a topic which investigates the development of religious belief through an experiential strategy; Who is Jesus?(P10); An investigation into the background and basic beliefs regarding Jesus and The Holocaust( P5); An investigation into Jewish perspectives of the Holocaust. The majority of interviewees discussed lessons taken from these schemes of work when discussing good practice. Typical strategies utilised visual resources, debate and an over reliance on powerpoint presentation. Only one section focused on informing

students of religious material, that of contextualise; the others developing skills pertaining to the information. This documentary evidence correlates with the criticism by most of the interviewees that there was not enough 'religious knowledge'. P1 said:-

"Yeh, it's all kind of piece meal. I know you look at it as a kind of thematic thing, Teach RE do Joseph thematic thing, here's a concept of religious ideas about it but never actually going in depth about what that religion actually is"

However, in terms of teaching with regarding planning, those that supplied SoWs were very positive. P9 stated:-

" In terms of exemplar schemes of learning that LD came up with, we use The Island, which is excellent. Obviously, we always add things to it but there isn't a great need to change anything but its following it. I think it's a fantastic idea."

The other noticeable observation is that these schemes of work included assessments and mark schemes. As such they were comprehensive documents that provided the mechanics for following the cycle. However, there was a lack of religious information to go with the scheme of work (SoW). It was assumed that the teacher would have access to religious sources and had the subject knowledge to implement them. According to the data, this led to head of departments having to train non-specialists.

One interviewee provided a SoW that did not follow this format, but followed the principles behind Living Difference. The SoW ( P12) was enquiry based and possessed similar learning outcomes and strategies that other SoW suggested. Similar resources were used but student participation was more interactive and reflective. The photocopies of the students books which accompanied the SoW, suggested that the students had engaged fully with the

concepts studied, but also they could give thorough analysis of religious material. This specific example seems to contradict previous assertions that students did not acquire enough religious knowledge. In this case, the Living Difference methodology was adapted, the specific terms were ignored but the desired outcomes were achieved.

Overall the SoW supported the assertion that the majority of interviewees were positive about Living Difference. The SoWs provide a strong framework to plan teaching on a medium term provision. Directions are given as to where to find resources and exemplar tasks are provided. It can be seen to be mechanistic and it supports the assertion by some of the interviewees that it may be seen to be prescriptive. However, regarding non-specialists, this framework offers a clear structure to a subject they may not have an in depth knowledge of.

Four of the interviewees, gave PowerPoint presentations as part of their evidence. The topics ranged from a “Dukkha Cycle’, ‘Natural Evil and Moral Evil’, ‘Sawm and why Muslims do it”, to a philosophical approach regarding thinking skills. The ‘Power points’ for lessons followed a common framework of starter, learning objectives, tasks and evaluations. All were concept driven, requiring students to assess what they knew regarding a concept and then investigating religious ideas associated with the idea. Like the SOWs, tasks were imaginative and student centred. For example one teacher asked students to utilise newspaper articles in groups and another used a form of ‘Question Time. Another factor that they all had in common, together with the SoW, was that they started from the experience of the student and ended on a reflection by the students on what they had learnt, completely in accordance with the constructivist methodology behind Living Difference. Another similarity was that none of the presentations used any of the

terminology present in the Agreed Syllabus or the SOW. Furthermore, none were characteristic of lessons suggested in the SOW. The teachers had added more religious information and explanations of the concepts being investigated. It appears that the 'Communicate, Apply and Enquire' areas are combined into one section, or Apply and Enquire are ignored completely. The lesson then proceeds to Contextualise and then evaluate, with a repeated 'Communicate' as a form of plenary. Combined with the evidence from the interviews, that all of the teachers adapt their own practice, this manipulation of the methodology seems to be commonplace. It raises the question of how positive the respondents really were to Living Difference in practice, as opposed to what they said in the interviews.

This view appears to be the view of P 3, who provided the PowerPoint on thinking skills. The respondent had stated that intrinsically the school followed the Living Difference Agreed Syllabus but had adapted it to a whole school approach: "Thinking Schools". The powerpoint presentation explains this philosophy and then gives examples of how this may be applied in classroom approaches e.g. Circle Map, Bubble Map etc. These strategies are intended to encourage and develop thinking skills such as metacognition and acting with empathy. In the interview, it was said that the respondent supported Living Difference at first, but then had to adapt it. This is evidence of a major transition away from not only the Agreed Syllabus but also the philosophy behind it. It also raises the issue of how far religious education departments are being pressured by whole school policies, to ignore Living Difference.

The written evidence provided was a useful tool, providing further light on the themes that were unearthed in the interviews. It both supported assertions made in the interviews, but



also questioned some statements when put into practice. The use of specific religious knowledge in lessons and teachers' concern to its apparent lack of emphasis in the Living Difference cycle has been emphasised. Teachers support for a concept led agreed syllabus has consistently been evidenced both in SOWs and other material. A lack of 'Living Difference' pedagogical influence was demonstrated in the practical aspects of evidence provided, although it was present in the SOW. (Although these were provided in the Living Difference handbook). Finally, the written evidence was most useful where respondents gave more than one example, such as a SOW and assessment, to give further validation to their responses in the interview.

### **Summary of Results**

Overall, the results of the evidence provided from both the interviews and documents create a disparate picture of the experience of teachers towards Living Difference.

- A) The experience of teachers, of the Living Difference Agreed Syllabus, varies greatly both positively and negatively depending on the school they are in, and the approach of the Head of Department.
- B) The great majority of the teachers displayed a clear knowledge of the legal basis of Living Difference and its status as the County Agreed Syllabus.
- C) Overall, the great majority of interviewees were positive regarding Living Difference, observing that students were at the heart of the process and that it actively promoted higher order thinking skills. However, written work demonstrates frequent adaptation of the Agreed Syllabus, ignoring the methodological cycle of Living Difference.

- D) In general, most teachers' state they are supportive of the notion of Living Difference, particularly a concept led agreed syllabus. This is particularly true of more recently qualified teachers and teachers who have been part of the process of creating Living Difference. However, written responses displayed incongruity with these statements.
- E) The pedagogical aspect of Living Difference, regarding the theory and practice of teaching RE is rarely taken into account. Even amongst those who are pedagogically literate, it is rarely, consciously, applied to 'everyday' teaching.
- F) Less experienced teachers find choosing concepts and implementing them within planning 'confusing' but experience and support from other teachers rectifies this.
- G) The great majority felt that there was not enough emphasis on knowledge of religious beliefs and practices in the cycle. This was a great concern when the new GCSE demanded a greater recall of 'Religious Knowledge'.
- H) The idea of having just one attainment target was seen as an improvement on past agreed syllabi and gave greater clarity when reporting. However, the levels of attainment were seen, by the majority of interviewees, as confusing and difficult to implement in assessments.
- I) Even with specialists, there is concern over interpretation and application of assessment materials based on Living Difference and the levels of attainment. The great majority of respondents discussed creating assessments which were evaluation questions based on a GCSE model.
- J) The spiritual development of students is part of the purpose of RE as The Agreed Syllabus states:

“The purpose of religious education (RE) in Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton is to support students in developing their own coherent patterns of values and principles, and to support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development” (Living Difference 2004 p7, p13, Living Difference Revised 2011, p13)

However, according to the interviews, spirituality appears to be widely ignored in the teaching of religious education. The majority of respondents do not mention it as part of the purpose of religious education and a small majority discuss it in any depth. The vast majority refer to religious education as promoting multi-culturalism and tolerance of others’ beliefs and practices.

#### **Results pertaining to a wider view**

- 1) The great majority of teachers perceived a direct relationship between educational theory and classroom practice. However, few discussed how the theory impacted upon classroom practice. The majority of participants discussed theory and practice separately. A significant minority spoke at length concerning the correlation between the two. Some suggested that if staff were to follow Living Difference ‘mechanistically, a knowledge of theory was unnecessary.
- 2) All teachers saw the intrinsic aims of religious education as taking the highest priority. However there is a tension between this view and fulfilling the instrumental aims perceived to be required of them in a ‘relativist society’ (P9). Only one discussed the idea of fulfilling exam criteria as an obligation. Education was perceived to be for the development of the ‘whole child’, that is education for education’s sake.
- 3) Educational outcomes, such as the development of personal skills, attitudes towards relationships and personal development were seen to be more important than

following a pedagogical theory. The latter was deemed to be a tool to achieve an outcome (P2) which could be altered and amended depending on educational setting. Strict adherence to pedagogical principle was not seen to be instrumental in achieving developmental outcomes for the student.

The idea of outcomes was also identified in terms of external measures of progress.

Where this was the case they were part of the assessment system often from year 7.

A small minority suggested that in this case the attainment of levels and exam grades was subservient to pedagogical theory.

### **Discussion On Findings: Research From The Chalkface**

“Were’ not creating academics. Were’ trying to teach children to become better human beings and fit into society” HOD RE (P8)

#### **1: Introduction**

In this section I will be revisiting and discussing the aims of this research and subsequent questions that have arisen, due to analysis of the findings and in the light of reviewed literature. Since this research was, initially a response to the “Living Difference Evaluation Project Report (Wedell, 2009), the section will start with a discussion on the differences between Wedell and this project, primarily focusing on the aims, sampling and importance of the philosophy behind semi-structured interviews that were used to carry out the research. Subsequently the issue of pedagogy and functionality with regard to comments made by the participants will be analysed. This issue may then be compared to the issues of the strengths and challenges that Living Difference has presented to the interviewees and the respective views of Erricker (1997,2004,2005,2010,2013) and Hannam (2017). Such a discussion will highlight the issues of pure constructivism and the stance of academics and the functional role of teachers in the classroom.

Although a grounded research methodology may generate common themes, analysis may also bring up an individual perspective that is relevant to the research as a whole. One such comment, by P12 said of the Living Difference methodology. “I felt on many occasions, I failed miserably, because I hadn’t been able to do it to my own satisfaction”. After assessing the context of such a statement and clarifying its meaning with the participant, this is a statement that is difficult to ignore. The findings of this project suggested an overwhelming

notion that, in general, the agreed syllabus was a good scheme of work in aiding teachers of religious education to plan their work, a view that Wedell also points out (Wedell 2009).

However, there was also widespread criticism of the document among the respondents. .

One statement cries out that, for at least one teacher, on a practical basis, Living Difference did not so much support, as undermine this person's efforts. It would be inaccurate to say that this was a typical response by participants to the document. However, key themes were evident in the findings, such as the confusion over planning concepts, the misunderstanding of its pedagogical basis, its prescriptive nature and its apparent lack of connectivity towards GCSE. Living Difference support documents appear to fail to take into account the demands of the reality of teaching RE everyday, in school.

It is somewhat ironic that a document based upon a constructivist paradigm, that our experience is the basis of our knowledge, does not take into account the experience of the teacher having to implement it. For both Erricker(2004) and Hannam(2016), creators of Living Difference, past and present, the interpretation of religious experience is the aim of the agreed syllabus. Interestingly, both sought the aid of teachers in their development of Living Difference through both working parties and the creation of local teacher networks (acknowledgements in all versions of Living Difference 2004, 2011 and Living Difference III 2016). Participants 2 and 7 stated being part of this process. However, these meetings were led by the advisors, directing the input and suggesting tasks. These activities, as well as the findings of this research, demonstrate that Living Difference very much puts the child at the centre of the educational process. Despite this, I suggest that, at the very least, the findings of this project point us to considering the place of the teacher in this methodology. The majority of religious pedagogical approaches presently used in school as demonstrated by

Erricker, Jackson and Wright are in essence, child centred. However, the wide interpretation of Living Difference as demonstrated in the findings show that the personal beliefs and individual experiences of the teacher affect their understanding of learning and of Living Difference itself.

In the context of this approach, it should be stated that the aim of this research was not to prove the success or otherwise of Living Difference, but rather to study the experiences of a targeted group of teachers of Religious Education at Key Stage Three and Four. In this context, this research understands 'experiences' as the participants' encounters, thoughts and evaluations of facilitating the 'Living Difference' agreed syllabus. There are many approaches to the teaching of religion, however, what is important at this moment in time, in the context of the curriculum in England and Wales is that it is taught at all. I suggest that any document with the intention of being an example of best practice must be subject to both academic and practical scrutiny. For the sake of all practitioners, such a document must prove itself to be serious in terms of its philosophical basis and its ability to be transferred successfully into the classroom.

## **2: Wedell, Differences and Denzin**

In the methodology it was suggested that an appreciation of Denzin's view on biographical research, provides a greater depth of teachers' responses in interviews. In respect of the aims of this project, such awareness, couched in some grounded theory methodology, gives more depth to the findings, rather than just accepting participants' answers as an objective reality. Simply put, Denzin observed that interviews were not purely objective question and answer sessions and that the interviewer should be aware of the complexity of the situation. Floyd also comments on this observation "any study of complex social situations ,

biography, history and contexts are inextricably linked and the interaction between researcher and informant is a crucial part of the research process” (Floyd, 2012, p.224)

Subsequently, when analysing the interviews, looking for axiomatic codes and then links between themes, an awareness of Denzins’ and Floyds’ observations lends itself to a more open process. I will discuss the differences between Wedell and this project and how such a perspective provides greater depth and clarity to the findings.

There are several differences between this project and the very limited prior research on Living Difference`. Primarily this research was undertaken by a practising teacher, working with other practising teachers to offer insights into Living Difference, pedagogy and experiences on an academic level. Often referred to as ‘action research’, (Baumfield, Hall and Wall, 2008) it is academic praxis, the process of people looking in a systematic way at what is going on in their practice. With reference to Wedell’s work, as discussed earlier, analysis of the interviews has uncovered further differences, specifically in the approach taken regarding the context of the interviews. Wedell states that she used semi-structured interviews (Wedell, 2009, p.3)

“As researcher I used the format of semi-structured interviews, sitting with teachers alongside their planning documentation and examples of students’ work, asking them to talk through it to show how they used the syllabus.” (Wedell, 2009, p.3)

However, there is no explanation as to why this method was used, the difficulties of this approach and how semi-structured interviews need to be interpreted.

Even in the subsequent article in The British Journal of Religious Education, as compared to this thesis, there is little justification of this methodology. The issue of sampling has already



been discussed in the methodology section and the variety of responses given by the secondary teachers, emphasises the point that there appeared to be is limited value in selecting seven key stage three practitioners who were chosen on the basis that they already held the view that Living Difference was effective. However, the findings of this doctoral research were undertaken being aware of Norman Denzin observations on interviews and research. To start with, I suggest that any qualitative interview is a form of biographical research; 'the interview' is a biographical tool. By this I mean that it is a glimpse into the personal lives of the interviewees. The 'semi-structured interview' may be limited in scope and time, compared to a more extensive response but, fundamentally, it is fulfilling the same purpose of asking a person to reveal their life experiences of a given situation. As such it is laden with difficulties, for example the authenticity of the participants' responses. As Denzin says "Every storyteller has two options when telling a story: to tell a story that accords with the facts of his life or to tell a story which departs from these facticities"(Denzin, 1989, p.76). Taking account of this premise, the research was aware of the character of the interviews. For example respondents sometimes contradicted themselves. One HOD(P1) stated that "My initial experience was a positive one. It helped you create lessons that served a purpose" but later on in the interview went on to say, "There isn't massively clear guidance on how to implement it". These statements appear to contradict themselves but could equally be true depending on what the participant was thinking at the time.

Furthermore, another interviewee initially stated that Living Difference was an excellent document that helped her improve her practice. Discussing other pedagogical approaches she then stated "For me, no I have never asked if this is better than the other ones". What

was apparent was that during the course of the interview the process was making her reflect upon the questions. This process of immediate response to the issues, which developed into personal reflection, occurred during the majority of the interviews. In one sense, the interviews took on a life of their own. Consequently, when assessing the responses in semi-structured interviews, the researcher must at least be aware this has happened and think upon the real meaning of what the interviewee has been trying to say.

Denzin also reminded researchers that “What we ask influences the outcome” (Denzin, 1989, p.52). According to Denzin, a classic hermeneutical approach to the analysis of the interviews is limited, treating them as rational, objective incidents. It seems obvious from personal observations that any interview is affected by numerous causations outside the experience. In no part does Wedell display an appreciation of these factors either in her report or her article. In preparation for my interviews I sought to become more familiar with the interviewees by personal discussion, I invited them to decide where and when the interview was to take place. Thinking about timing also helped make the situation easier, for example not meeting after school on a Friday when people were tired. The simplistic view of assuming what is said is meant is underlined by her use of leading questions. Wedell states “The aim was to ask the teachers what it was about Living Difference that in their opinions was more effective than their previous practice” (Wedell, 2009, p.3)

This epitomises, at the very least, a preconceived idea of what the conclusion may be. If one wishes to improve practice, there is little value in only assessing those who agree with it. It may well be that some practitioners felt that Living Difference was not more effective than their previous practice, as demonstrated by some of the respondents in this project.

Wedell says of her methodology “The research focused on teachers’ use of the syllabus. As researcher I used the format of semi-structured interviews, sitting with teachers alongside their planning documentation and examples of students’ work, asking them to talk through it to show how they used the syllabus.” (Wedell, 2009, p.3).

As a process for interviewing at the immediate point, this seems straightforward enough and was repeated in the interview practice of this research. However, she follows this by stating...“The aim at this point was not to interpret teachers’ comments but to lay out the findings clearly.” (Wedell, 2009, p.4)

However, to lend any sort of validity to qualitative interviews, I suggest interpretation both of what is said and the context, are necessary. Interviews can be distorted by time, the audience, the subconscious editing of events and by the informant themselves. This was demonstrated in my research, by some respondents who became more relaxed as the interview continued. As such they became more open. This may well have been due to the openness that I encouraged and demonstrated prior and during the interview, a symptom of attempting to be ‘authentic’. One newly qualified teacher initially gave general support to Living Difference but later on qualified this by observing, “Good RE is so much more than the sum of its parts”(P12). The context of the situation for her was that she knew the legal obligations towards Living Difference but also knew that due the attitude of the Head teacher towards religious education as a subject, that it was almost deemed irrelevant.

The advantage of taking this position with regard to the interviews is that it is a more holistic practice. It allows the researcher to take note of those comments which were said outside the parameters of the distinct objectives. Often comments made as asides or more general comments, give us a deeper view of the character of the interviewee and

consequently a better understanding of what they are saying. For example one head of department P1) said of his reason for teaching RE to students ,“I wanted to have the blinders removed and see a vast array of different beliefs”. This is an emotive statement, reflecting upon the perceived blindness of the pupils he teaches towards the immense variation of beliefs that exist. Appreciating the passion behind this view provides us with context to more clearly understand his responses to the main objectives of the research.

Other observations were also significant in the research. A minority had appeared to have looked at the questions and revised key words. Two (P5 and P8) were asked about ‘constructivism’ and gave an almost textbook answer. When asked to elucidate upon their response, the interviewees, either through lack of knowledge or inability to explain were unable to do so. In the same manner, a minority attempted to answer questions which they had not thought about, particularly in the wider area of pedagogy. Three of the informants went at a fast pace in the interview, not a negative observation, since their input was extremely valuable. However, they did not want to go into any further depth and, for them, discussion of the work of the students was limited. Finally there were times when questions had to be rephrased and concepts defined, an indicator that the majority hadn’t read through the questions before the interview. However, the interviewees were immediate with answers and often thoughtful, pausing in their responses. The respondents were sincere in that, within the context of their own narrative, this was what they had to say. As such their responses provide, as Hermione Lee says “the vivid sense of the person” (Lee, 2005,p.4).

Therefore this research is different in terms of sampling, context, research methodology and, fundamentally, the aims. This research sought to investigate the experiences of a

variety of views regarding Living Difference and its pedagogical standpoint, whilst appreciating the personal context of the respondent during the interview. Experiences are variable and unique at the same time; understanding this provides a more accurate basis when evaluating the findings. In essence, the research has let the interviewees narrate their own message not one imposed one on them.

### **3: Is informing the head teacher of the law enough?**

All the teachers displayed knowledge of the legal basis of Living Difference and its status as the County Agreed Syllabus. Most were able to expand upon this, suggesting that the methodology had to be followed in classroom practice. A further group also acknowledged that Living Difference supported the 1988 Education Act, in emphasising that Christianity was the main tradition in the United Kingdom, whilst also appreciating the importance of other religions. Although the interviewees knew this was the law only two strictly adhered to the agreed syllabus.

Some felt that the legal position of Living Difference made it too prescriptive. There was a consensus on the positive approach, using concepts as a basis, however, in practice, and a further outcome of the thesis was that most partially or fully ignored the methodology. The participants inferred that they had to follow the instructions of the head teacher. In one case, the respondent(P6)described being forced to follow a school lesson plan and somehow, incorporated the different parts of the cycle discreetly into his teaching. Another representative(P3) described how she started teaching with the methodology, found it hard to apply due to time limitations, and then adopted a completely different pedagogical syllabus - "Thinking Schools". This was due to the vision of her head teacher, which she

stated that she agreed with. Both participant 6 and participant 3 are examples of teachers knowing the legal status of Living Difference, but for various reasons not following it.

Head teachers are advised of the law by the co-ordinator of RE, so they are aware of the legal position of RE. Yet, there appear to be various reasons why head teachers do not adhere to the law. Many are covered and expanded upon by The All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education's report RE: The Truth Unmasked (March 2013). Primarily there is the impact of the 'English Baccalaureate, as previously discussed but, I suggest, more importantly, the issue is of no Ofsted monitoring of a schools obligation with regard to RE. As Robert Long states in his briefing paper to Parliament (July 2016) "Ofsted is unlikely to notice or comment on the fact, even where schools admit that legal requirements are infringed"

As a result of this ,schools are not held to account to the time allocation directed by the locally agreed syllabus. This is fact was commented on in the APPG report earlier stating "Ofsted should require inspectors to report on non-compliance with statutory requirements regarding RE" (APPG March, 2013, p.5).

As yet no department of the government has responded to this recommendation. This reinforces the view that RE is considered to be of less value than other subjects. As a consequence, teachers of RE find themselves in an iniquitous position, by law, they have to follow a locally agreed syllabus, which has a specific methodology but in practice they are being undermined by the removal of curriculum time and in some cases their employment. (APPG March 2013).

There is also the impact, more recently, of the 'Progress 8' accountability measurement for secondary schools, revised in October 2017 (DFE OCT 2017). This gives double weighting to English and Maths and enforces a curriculum including the 'Ebacc' as well as Science. This leaves just three spaces for all other subjects to compete with, including RE. As such there appears to be a contradiction in the Department for Education's stated belief that, "Good quality RE can develop children's knowledge of the values and traditions of Britain and other countries, and foster understanding among different faiths and cultures." Moreover that, "Religious education remains compulsory for all state-funded schools, including academies and free schools, at all key stages and we expect all schools to fulfil their statutory duties,"" ([BBC Website, September 2017](#))

The reality is that many secondary schools ignore or dilute RE at KS4, as demonstrated by a survey published by the Religious Education Council and the National Association of Teachers of RE (2017). It found that a quarter of the schools polled said they do not offer the subject to all students at GCSE level (aged 14 to 16). Such a situation has a direct outcome on religious education teachers, as demonstrated by this research. According to participants, lack of curriculum time was seen as one of the major challenges to good religious education, irrespective of the agreed syllabus, as was the frequency of non-specialist teachers being asked to teach the subject. In this case, is informing a head teacher of the law enough? Not if the law is deemed to be irrelevant anyway.

#### **4: "I Don't Know What It Means To Be A Constructivist"**

This section will discuss the apparent lack of pedagogical knowledge shown by the respondents, particularly the constructivist philosophy underpinning Living Difference. It will expand upon the findings of the research, comment upon Wedell's analysis of this issue and

place the results in the context of the work of Erricker (2000-2013 and Hannam , 2017). I will suggest that, in the main, the teachers in this research are more interested in the outcomes of their efforts either in relation to the personal development of the student or examination results, than putting an extensive effort into researching and reflecting upon specific pedagogical issues. Agreeing with Baumfield (2012), it is suggested that this is a misplaced prioritisation which may lead to a lack of authenticity in their practice and the teacher may be deprived of a progressive understanding of their work. To clarify, the definition of pedagogy for this research is “Pedagogy is the ‘art of knowing’. As a teacher how to conduct intentional and systematic intentional and systematic interventions in order to influence the development of the learner” (Baumfield, 2012, p.205).

From a personal point of view, having been an experienced teacher of religious education, a head of faculty, and active participant in the development of local religious education, it is suggested that this understanding of pedagogy is interpreted as a day to day encounter in RE, where every concept that is taught is examined and the RE teacher reflects upon the questions, ‘Why am I teaching this?’, and ‘Why am I teaching this concept in this way?’. Such a focus has led to a new form of ‘functional pedagogy’ which originates from the functions of the teacher in preparing a learning environment not from a particular hermeneutical perspective.

Reflection upon the findings of this research found that there were great variations and inconsistency when discussing pedagogy and Living Difference. The majority had not really researched the constructivist philosophy that underpins Living Difference as evidenced by the lack of detail regarding this epistemological point of view. This was not limited to any particular group; experienced and successful HoDs were unable to discuss constructivism



with accuracy or in depth. It appeared from their responses that they had read the document, used the methodology to varying degrees but for the most part, did not understand the ideology behind it. This indicates factors, such as not enough available training, not enough personal interest and an unwillingness to abandon their tried and tested methods. Most participants seem to agree that a starting point should be the child and the outcome should be a well rounded individual who has the ability to question and analyze rather than being a store of facts. This appears to concur with the views of Erricker (2010)

A succinct comment from participant 5 provides a context for a general comment. "I guess that the pedagogy within LD is pupil centred". Furthermore, the discussion included a reference to Plato's idea of knowledge and finished with "I don't remember what I did at college". Her level of understanding of pedagogy was far from unique. Two respondents discussed 'Blooms taxonomy' when discussing constructivism, another described going around the methodological cycle when asked about constructivism, others avoided the question completely as mentioned in the findings. Two quite openly stated that they had no idea about the meaning of constructivism. The majority could discuss the link between theory and practice but most did not directly refer to the idea of pedagogy itself. That is not to say that this group were ignorant of pedagogy. Many could intelligently discuss, in practical terms the relation between ideas and how these were put into practice. The discussion on Blooms Taxonomy(P7) was an ingenious reinterpretation of the way the cycle works and another(P2) opened up the question, that since we live in a relativist society could RE be taught in any other way? Such comparisons do not appear to have been mentioned in any Living Difference literature and is unique to the results of this research.

Despite these enlightening conversations there remained a lack of depth of knowledge regarding pedagogical theory. One possible cause of this is observed by Stern

“Within schools, the practical application of behaviourist theories can dominate teachers’ lives” (Stern, 2007, P.68)

Stern is suggesting here that the idea of positive and negative reinforcement is part of the cultural and historical educational institutions in the UK. From the classroom where material gain and merits/house points are seen as rewards, to ‘House Systems’ which dominate the ethos of a school, a behavioural approach to learning can be seen as a major influence on how we teach in lessons. This is in stark contrast to a constructivist learning approach as Holt also points out (Holt, 2015). Yet, apart from competing pedagogical and psychological points of view, there may be more intrinsic reasons why a group of ‘inner city’ teachers may be limited in their discussion of pedagogy. It may be that at an intrinsic level they simply disagree with constructivism, they may be looking for a bridge between the various approaches that is practical. Ironically, it may be that Erricker, unintentionally, suggested this himself, “You don’t decide between pursuing intrinsic academic goals or the extrinsic overall development of young people; you have to regard these as complimentary” (Erricker, 2010, p.97)

One experienced participant who was able to discuss in depth and with significant reflection the pedagogical basis of Living Difference suggested that... “Its’ rooted in constructivist pedagogy, but, I feel in ways, it is a pedagogy of its own’.(P4)

The above discussion of pedagogy is not developed in Wedell’s report (2009) and subsequent article (2010). She suggests that Living Difference provides pedagogical

guidance at two levels, the levels of overall aims, and objectives. A third level she says, that of method, is not provided for. It is noteworthy to state that none of the participants identified these elements in relation to pedagogy. She states that this level of planning is left open for the other approaches to be used for example 'Philosophy for Children'. Her conclusion was that the agreed syllabus can 'facilitate significantly more effective teaching of RE.... but may benefit from further development' (Wedell, 2010, p.159). There appears to be a significant criticism of these remarks. Firstly, Wedell does not appear to appreciate the thought and work that go into the development of the aims and objectives which as demonstrated by the respondents are often modified. Secondly, the cycle itself is pedagogically driven therefore adherents to the cycle would state that a method has been provided.

Supporting this latter point, Erricker himself states that this method of conceptual enquiry has its roots in a constructivist origin.

"At the same time, the methodology of Living Difference, as a model of conceptual enquiry, does lend itself to constructivist theory in the technical sense as well as the broader sense." (Erricker, 2010, p.78).

However, even if this were not the case, the main attainment target, Erricker says is

"for students to interpret religion in relation to their own and others' experiences." He consequently states "Immediately a hermeneutical circle is constructed" (Erricker, 2010, p.82).

In this sense, Erricker himself disproves Wedell assertion that a third level, a pedagogical method is not provided for. Seemingly contradicting himself, Erricker also states that the

methodology is not tied to one 'specific or etymological basis' (Erricker, 2010, p.82), suggesting that other approaches may be used in its implementation. Yet this seems questionable. The whole idea of studying religion through concepts and emphasising the individual's interpretation of experience is fundamentally a constructivist construct. It alienates Wright's critical realism, Smart's idea of the individual suspending their own point of view and Jackson's observation that our own ethnographic experiences are inaccurate because of our social influences.

Wedell goes on to suggest that other pedagogical approaches may be used with Living Difference, giving examples of Cooling, Fisher and Jackson. She highlights how studying concepts can help students engage with their learning. However she misses the opportunity to point out that a concept based curriculum does not always have to be constructivist in its basis, as Living Difference is. Furthermore, there could be greater discussion as to how these different approaches would be applied on a practical basis, the epistemological issues and provision of some reference to teachers' views relating to pedagogy and raising attainment. The findings from this research suggest that the majority of participants would welcome greater discussion regarding different approaches, P7 said

"I think it is very good, but I wouldn't want to say it was the only thing I ever thought about in planning lessons because I thought there was nothing better, if somebody showed me a way of doing it differently then I might use it if I thought it would work. If I thought it was limited in some way then I would look for something which would extend it on to where I want the children to go."

One significant finding from the research regarding Wedell is that, despite Erricker considering that her report is important regarding Living Difference (Erricker 2010) and

Aldridge stating that her research on the agreed syllabus suggests it “is proving a very effective way for teachers to relate pedagogical principles to the realities of the classroom practice” (Aldridge, 2012, p.201), none of the participants mentioned or displayed any recognition of her work. This does not denigrate Wedell’s work but rather reinforces the notion that the majority of the participants in this research would not or could not discuss the pedagogical basis of Living Difference at depth.

Why there was limited discussion of the theoretical basis of Living Difference may be a complex matter. It may be the case of limited professional development opportunities, depth of knowledge regarding pedagogical theory or being present in a school that runs along an alternate philosophy to their own beliefs. As far back as 1975 Lortie suggested that practice was the dominant role in shaping teacher development. Socialisation by the school had an impact on the practice of the teacher. It would seem from the discussions of the participants that this is still the case. P2 discussed the necessity of complying with managements aims for the school. This meant limited time for the GCSE course, increased assessments and decreased time at Key Stage 3. In turn this had an impact on the way that the subject was taught. Another teacher commented on this impact by stating that at Key stage 4, lessons were now content dominated due to the lack of time for the subject.

Another factor was the educational standpoint of the school. One respondent discussed the importance of “Thinking Schools” (P7) and that this was an important part of the learning journey. This could well be seen as a good example of what Warford (2011) describes as teacher learning being situated. Inspired by the work of Vygotsky, Warford places the teacher in the workplace as the prime location for their own learning and development. In the case of the participant, the methodology that she had immersed herself in due to the

philosophy of the school ran contrary to Living Difference. The participant discussed how she had to make the agreed syllabus fit the alternate methodology which the school desired to see in lesson observations.

Apart from the influence of the philosophy of the school, there may be other variables at play as well. The issue of terminology and language used in the document may well be an issue. The comment “ I don’t understand what you mean” (P5) was echoed by a majority of the interviewees. In line with being aware of sensitivities, some clarification was offered and in the majority of cases some discussion continued.

If we take it that understanding pedagogy is part of the professional life of a teacher, it may be suggested that we take account of the myriad of variations of personality types that are part of the profession. It would seem to be logical consequence that each one will have a different view of this issue and different priorities. For many of the participants, the priority was to discuss classroom practice and the importance of religious education for them.

As the interviews with the participants displayed, the majority of teachers felt the methodology of the agreed syllabus could be used to develop effective practice. However, this does not mean it improved their understanding of pedagogical theory, which was one of Errickers’ main objectives. (Erricker, 2010). Erricker, as discussed earlier, highlighted the importance of an understanding of pedagogy in teaching practice. He believed “You don’t decide between pursuing intrinsic academic goals or the extrinsic overall development of young people; you have to regard these as complimentary” (Erricker, 2010, p.97)

The conflict of intrinsic and instrumental aims of religious education and education in general arose out of a deeper analysis of the transcripts. By ‘intrinsic’ I refer to Dewey’s

comment “the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education... the object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth” (Dewey, 1916/1980, p. 107).

As opposed to an instrumental view of education which could be described as Intrinsic motivation refers to “extrinsic motivation pertains to a wide variety of behaviors where the goals of action extend beyond those inherent in the activity itself” (Guay, Vallerand, Blanchard, 2000, p.176)

Unlike Erricker, none sought to find a way for both to compliment these two aims. Like their views on the link between theory and practice, this may have been a product of their situation, conversely it may be a matter of philosophical principle. Alternatively, the interview was an opportunity for the participants to express their views in the comfort of confidentiality. It was also a chance to reflect a feeling that no attempt had been made for the two aims to work together. One participant saw the dichotomy between the two as equating to the aims in key stage 3 and the aims of the GCSE stating “ KS3 has become about learning about RE and KS4 is about the academic GCSE” (P6). As displayed in the findings only two participants discussed the end product of exams in a positive frame. The respondents stated that we have an obligation to the children to help them meet the exam criteria. This, at least infers an appreciation of the necessity of exams.

The other pressure that teachers felt were on Ofsted based observations. Ofsted use the language of instrumental/extrinsic aims such in their 2009 report they stated that “Serious weaknesses remain widespread in the way levels of attainment are used in planning or assessment” (Ofsted, 2007, 6-7). The emphasis is that a good school is demonstrated by its use of levels of attainment, a measure of progress which may be a sign of an extrinsic paradigm. Furthermore “Inspectors judged pupils’ knowledge and understanding of

Christianity as good or outstanding in only five of the schools” (Ofsted, 2013:9) in their reports. The idea of ‘knowledge and understanding’ alone as a criteria for good religious education runs contrary to the opinions of the all the respondents who also included providing opportunities for moral development, empathy and time for thinking.

Additionally Ofsted derive evidence of being a ‘good school’ provided from examination results (Ofsted ,2007). As such it would appear that teachers participating in this research are accountable to a behaviourist philosophy. It may be suggested that being steeped in fulfilling targets and standard based targets had an influence upon the practices of the participants. The majority of teachers discussed assessment in terms of levels or GCSE grades. In three cases they actively saw these measurements as a criteria for success.

However, what a transcript does not always reveal is the emotion which an interviewee conveys the words that they are saying. P4 was passionate regarding the intrinsic aims of religious education, particularly the opportunity to allow the students just to think. “ In RE sometimes they get the chance to just sit there and think. Actually think! Actually think about why life is important”. To this participant and the majority of the others the intrinsic aim of education was the priority, exams were a necessity for the school. This echoes Russells’ comment

“If children themselves were considered, education would not aim at making them belong to this party or that, but enabling them to choose intelligently between the parties; it would aim at making them able to think, not at making them think what their teachers think (Russell, 1992. pp401-2)

What there was little note of was a conciliatory view regarding the instrumental aims of schools. I suggest that it seems common sense, that within our cultural and economic



system some form of examination system is required. However, the present form of terminal examinations without formative assessment such as coursework, runs contrary to this cross section of teachers who participated in the project. If, as Erricker suggests, they could be made complimentary, teachers' motivation and satisfaction may be increased.

Erricker's understanding of pedagogy seems to have changed over a period of time, as demonstrated earlier. In his most recent work (Erricker and Chater, 2013), he appears to have reverted to his more radical views on education. However, his view on what pedagogy requires is more balanced

"Pedagogy in RE requires a coherent understanding of the human condition, society, the paradigm of knowledge implicit in the discipline and subject matter, and the ways in which learners, in their context, will apprehend the ideas on offer (Erricker and Chater, 2013, p.108)

However, He also observed that he felt that there was a paucity of implementation of pedagogy, as he understood it, within the classroom environment. Aldridge (Aldridge, D. 2012) observed that Erricker identified a 'systematic malfunction' (Erricker, 2010, pp.67-68) that had led to a fracture between theory and classroom practice. "The gap between theory and practice is not just extensive but at present incommensurable" (Erricker, 2010, p.67)

At one level Living Difference was supposed to heal this break, but according to the respondents in this research, in SE Hants, this is not the case. As demonstrated, there was a lack of in-depth discussion regarding pedagogy and several participants admitting they did not know the theoretical basis of the agreed syllabus. Aldridge(2012), commenting on Wedell, stated that independent research had proved that Living Difference was effective in

addressing the situation, yet, as demonstrated the conclusions of Wedells' research were not based on rigour and the research would not stand up to scrutiny with regard to its independence, being funded by Hampshire County Council for its advisory service. I would suggest that it is not a systematic malfunction that is the cause of this paucity of implementation but a more complex issue with a multiplicity of causes, originating in the practicalities of a Key Stage 3 teachers' everyday existence.

Firstly, it may simply be that the teacher disagrees with the whole concept of Living Difference. As one of my interviewees (P12) was told 'This is Living Difference. 'You have to know about it. Now forget about it.' Some teachers felt confident enough in their own practice and with a proven track record that they feel that the methodology is not relevant to them. However, it may also be that they disagree with Living Difference on an epistemological basis. A rejection of relativism was present in most of the respondents' views, for example P7 said

"You have to be able to trust in the collective experiences, collective knowledge that is what we mean by the knowledge which is already out there, you are never going to know everything there is to know just through experience because no human has enough time to do everything, so we have to trust there is knowledge out there that is knowledge gained from the experience of others."

This view was linked closely with the change in nature of GCSEs from a skills and concept based exam to an emphasis on the recall of 'knowledge'. Teachers preparing for this had to incorporate more content into their courses and ensure students undertook more summative assessments in order to prepare them for the exam. As discussed later this affected the views of the teachers towards pedagogy.

Teachers in this thesis had other reasons for thinking that an in depth pedagogical view is not required, although some did accept a knowledge based paradigm would be difficult to imagine. One teacher said

“We are a relativist society where education has to be relevant and I am not even sure what it would look like to have an education based on truth claims” ( P2).

Such a comment highlights the dichotomy between what may be seen to be the philosophical basis of society and what is now seen to be the core of education in schools. What teachers personally believe and how they teach can be quite polarised. Other teachers interviewed expressed a variety of views on the teaching basis of Religious education. A minority expressed the idea that the root of RE is spirituality, whilst others considered its *raison d’être* being in developing cultural acceptance and understanding. As such, a theoretical and epistemological view was not considered to be important. Living Difference was considered to be simply a method of how to teach the subject in lessons not an example of a philosophical point of view. For most of the teachers, it was the outcomes that were important, not the method or the pedagogical philosophy underpinning the practice. This conclusion was arrived at for various reasons, mainly originating from the participants reasons for teaching religious education, exam targets and students personal development. As quoted at the beginning of this chapter by a Head of Department, “We’re not creating academics. We’re trying to teach children to become better human beings and fit into society”( P9).

Fundamentally this was the most common belief amongst the majority of the teachers, demonstrated by direct comment or by inference. The majority of interviewees commented on how religious education was seen to be a method of educating students on living in a

multicultural society and developing a sympathetic appreciation of alternative beliefs systems which they will encounter in their lives. One participant said “I think the purpose of RE is to teach pupils how to be tolerant of each other and to be tolerant of people from other cultures” (P5)

Comparing the teaching of religious education one participant commented, “As long as they arrive at the destination at the right time then how they get there is up to their personal discretion” (P8).

What appears to be said here is that as long as the students either develop as person along the intrinsic aims of education or develops a body of knowledge that may fit a measurement of progress, the methodology does not matter. This may seem attractive because it could be argued that it provides freedom for the teacher to be creative and use their individual talents. The findings of the analysis revealed that a holistic aim of education was important to all respondents, some of whom felt Living Difference provided a basis for this endeavour. P11 stated “the whole theory of constructivist pedagogy is the idea that pupils are involved in how their learning is shaped”. As such the child is put at the centre of the process and the development of their meaning-making is at the core of progress.

Despite this staff still felt that ‘knowledge’ had been left out of the objectives and consequently they had to adapt the SoW.

Orme (2020), criticised pedagogical theories and named Living Difference as an example stating that its “abstract ideas about aims and process had eclipsed the curriculum” (Orme, 2020, p.183) He then proceeds to describe how he created in a ‘Free School’ a ‘knowledge-rich’ curriculum stating that “ Knowledge in RE is not a small detail or irrelevance, it is front and centre” (Orme, 2020, p.184). In his case it would appear that the theoretical ideas had

overtaken what he saw the outcome to be, a similar view that was taken by the great majority of the teachers. In a similar vain, he also noted that in the planning of the agreed syllabus “where the five enquiry skills are described in detail, the teachers’ agency is minimal”, an observation that was partially responsible for initiating this thesis.

Another reason for teachers’ pragmatism may be their own beliefs. Ironically, rather like Erricker’s self confessed rejection of ‘institutionalised religion, it seems his critique is based in adherence to a belief rather than empirical fact. Possibly this contradiction is one of the reasons that, at a subconscious level, teachers in an urban environment such as that in this thesis do not make an active attempt to study the pedagogical origins of Living Difference.

Another major pedagogical difference illuminated by the findings is the pedagogical and practical impact of the new style GCSEs introduced in 2015. Content led and focusing on the recall of a larger body of knowledge, these examinations are wholly different in terms of skills and philosophy that their predecessors. In many ways Living Difference was in sympathy with the previous examinations, a concept led scheme of work could be successfully used to teach the old GCSE. However, as commented by the interviewees this is now not the case. One respondent said “I don’t know whether LD in its’ current form will be able to support GCSE” (P1)

Even the most recent edition of Living Difference (Living Difference 3, December 2016) still adheres to the conceptual format and methodical cycle of the original. However, there appears to be less emphasis on a mechanical use of the approach, allowing teachers more flexibility in its application. Despite this more open approach, being rooted in a skills based, conceptual pedagogical view still leaves it at odds with new GCSE specifications.

This view, along with the pressure of conforming to exam criteria, led another respondent to say “When we are judged in the school on the progress and achievement in GCSE results your focus has to be within those areas” P11.

Such a pressure, it is suggested, means that even the most ardent admirers of the Living Difference methodology have to compromise in their approach to classroom practice, in light of annual appraisal targets set by management. It is, therefore, not a deliberate rejection of a pedagogical viewpoint, but a rejection nevertheless.

The evidence from this research shows that on the whole, reflection upon pedagogical theory is being widely ignored. This does not mean that the teachers that were interviewed disregard pedagogical theory or think it is unimportant; the views of the respondents were contrary to such an assertion. However, a study of pedagogy was deemed to have less of a priority than other factors in everyday practice. In agreeing with Erricker (2010), Baumfield (2012) and Stern (2006), it may be suggested that ignoring the pedagogic origins of teaching practice, and Living Difference is detrimental to the professionalism of teachers. Active reflection upon pedagogical issues leads to a clearer understanding of the relationship between teacher and pupil. It allows teachers to have confidence in their own place as learners, encouraging the development of new initiatives in response to the changing needs of the educational environment. In relation to the agreed syllabus, pedagogic reflection would inform the teacher of why they are following the methodology and why it can be successful.

As Julian Stern said

“By researching RE pedagogy, teachers can thereby come to understand the impact and value of their work. They may also come to feel part of the whole process: not merely ‘speaking textbooks’, but members of the community of learners, learning and developing together with colleagues and pupils” (Stern, 2006, p79)

However, as demonstrated by this research, the complexity of the language of pedagogical theory can be problematic. In the light of a functional approach to teaching praxis, pedagogical explanations need to be more accessible, or they are in danger of being ignored or irrelevant. Taking into account the variety of personnel teaching RE: non-specialists, one year PGCE teachers, Teach First, cover supervisors; the increased variety of RE practitioners, means that academics can no longer assume a degree level understanding of religious concepts and issues. Nevertheless, teachers are still interested in the question of “why am I doing this?” as demonstrated by their willingness to participate in this research. Despite this interest, due to time constraints and an increase in administrative tasks, there appears to be scarce application to the study of pedagogical theory. The vast majority of teachers interviewed in this thesis were able to comfortably discuss the concept of pedagogical theory, but were limited when referring to the theoretical background of Living Difference. Moreover, when discussing good practice, interviewees seemed more at ease in describing examples of classroom activities and why they chose them. This led them to evaluate their own practice and consider alternatives for the future.

Erricker said that the gap between the study of pedagogical theory and its practice was incommensurable (Erricker, 2010, p.67). Alternatively, it may be considered that the method of that study has evolved. What has arisen, I propose, is a new form of pedagogy. One not starting from a hermeneutical basis but, rather originating from educational

practice based upon experience. Experience in the classroom then leads to its own theoretical paradigm. Its functionality derives from assessing the needs of the learners and adapting approaches to learning and teaching strategies, enabling students to attain a meaningful grasp of both content and experience of the subject. The primary step in this learning cycle within the classroom, is the teacher working with the issues and challenges of engaging with children. The definition of knowledge in this case is derived from what the educational system requires of the teacher at the time, including the different social situations of the students that are being taught. It is suggested that this latter consideration is a priority for teachers in the classroom, a reality which often separates the academics from the practitioners. This functional pedagogy is based upon what works in the classroom and the time constraints. It is still child centred but also takes account of the place of the teacher. It allows for the diversity and personal qualities of the large bank of RE teachers. As such it also allows for teachers who adhere to different approaches to complement each other, no one theory being determined as superior to another.

### **5: It's good but.....**

One of the initial research questions focused on whether Living Difference helped teachers in their classroom practice. In answer to this I would firstly suggest that what makes a good tool to aid classroom practice differs from subject to subject and person to person. However, the results of this research displayed a consensus from the vast majority that, for a variety of reasons, Living difference was effective in helping teachers deliver Religious education to the majority of pupils. This next section investigates the conclusions of Erricker, Hannam and Aldridge with regard to why Living Difference is a positive



contribution to teachers practice and reflects upon the respondents ideas of how it both helped and hindered their work in their classrooms.

Erricker said in 2010

“ the purpose in introducing a methodology for conceptual enquiry in Hampshire in 2004 was to give the subject direction that had an enquire approach, emphasised progression, skills and the importance of students understanding, engaging with and using concepts” (Erricker, 2010, p.96)

Erricker foresaw the need to link a pedagogic viewpoint with practice and attempted to do so with Living Difference. Despite criticism of his theoretical position as discussed earlier, particularly his postmodern view of knowledge, I suggest that in practice he sought a compromise. With new GCSE specifications( e.g. WJEC Religious Studies 2009) relying more on recall of information rather than personal reflection on ethical issues, teachers had to accept a content led curriculum for KS4 schemes of work. To remain functionally relevant, Erricker had to be able to argue that his pedagogic theory could be applicable to GCSE students. In the Living Difference Handbook ( Hampshire , 2004) he gathered together exemplar schemes of work and in his commentary of the document ( Erricker, 2010) he proposed examples of lesson plans and medium term planning of how the methodology could be applied in practice. Furthermore, as RE advisor for Hampshire, he organised network meetings aimed at encouraging teachers to create their own resources based on the agreed syllabus. However, the question still remained, could this be applied in an everyday classroom situation?

Interviewees commented positively on the methodological aspects and often the outcomes of the resources that were supplied.

“It does encourage a massive amount of reflection” (P 4)

And another, concurring with the stated aim of Erricker...

“Students create meaning for themselves and create meaning in their own lives.”(P)

Furthermore, from a practical perspective and supporting the aims of the Living Difference Handbook

“But I think it helps you plan, helps you to understand what you want the children to achieve” (Interviewee 6).

The majority of respondents to this research concluded that it could be applied, but with substantial revisions in light of the functional praxis of teaching. The dominant feature of the support of this methodology was that it was concept based as opposed to content led. Despite significant support, this was qualified. Typically, as one interviewee stated.....

“I am quite a fan of Living Difference, but I’m not someone who uses it as a prison to restrain the way I teach” (Interviewee 7)

From a functional point of view both Hannam (2017) and Aldridge(2012) agree that Living Difference has its strengths. However, neither discusses the idea that the Agreed Syllabus and the subsequent Handbook are separate documents. It seems from the evidence of the respondents that in practice, it was the Handbook that was referred to in terms of teaching and the Agreed syllabus less so.

Overall, Hannam identifies four strengths of Erricker's approach, as proposed in *Living Difference*. Firstly she states that "It is the only approach to religious education that has systematically attempted to resolve the relationship between a conception of religion and religion in the educational context" (Hannam, 2017, p.91).

Secondly, in the construction of the document, she observes that educational consideration has been taken into account especially with regard to the methodology of teaching.

In the sense that Erricker has applied his work to a practical document, this assertion is accurate. However, this has been pointed out before and is not an original idea. (Teece, 2006. ). However, Hannam suggests, implicit in this work is the awareness to have an educative focus. As suggested earlier in the literature review, this is the most outstanding feature of this document. It is an agreed syllabus that is rooted in an intensively thought out position with regard to the philosophy of education.

The fourth strength Hannam refers to is that Erricker places the child at the heart of the educative process. Again this is not an original position; Harold Loukes (London, 1961) had begun this process over a decade ago. However, the uniqueness of Erricker's process is that he places the interpretation of narrative of the child at the core. Hannam alerts the reader to this but is concerned that this overemphasis may lead to difficulties with relativism. Her observations are salient and lay a foundation of seeing the positive contribution of the agreed syllabus. However, her work is dominated by her critique of Erricker's' constructivist paradigm both on a theoretical and practical level. Issues such as the place of constructivism and the utilisation of concepts are concerns which are relevant to the research aims of this thesis.

Apart from theoretical criticisms, Hannam also critiques Erricker's position in terms of classroom practice. She considers whether Erricker's version of Living Difference can "Bring about what he hopes" (Hannam, 2017, p.89). Reflections from the interviews in this research shine light on this issue, such as the positive analysis by the respondents demonstrating that Living Difference can be used effectively in the classroom. However, its use may not be as Erricker intended; teachers utilising the aspects that they perceive to be valuable and ignoring it as a whole approach. Hannam observes the origin of Erricker's difficulties is his constructivist approach to religion. According to Hannam, Erricker distinguishes religion being understood as a 'concern for knowledge, political ends and power as opposed to 'faith' which is 'located in the everyday and linked with spirituality. (Hannam, 2017, p.84). This is a direct rejection of formal or organised religion, which appears to ignore the reality of believers' everyday existence in applying their beliefs to their own lives.

Hannam's criticisms focus mainly on Erricker's post modernist interpretation of religion and the subsequent accusation of relativism. This is not a new allegation, Watson and Thompson (2007) discussed how they felt Erricker's philosophy lacked a notion of 'values'. Values should be taught and are not relativist in their origin. If this were the case then values were relative to each person and as such, for example psychopaths would be justified in their actions (my example). Hannam feels that Erricker's view of religion has limitations for the classroom, in that it does not allow for pluralism and that the constructivist approach constrains the practice of the teacher. She also indicates that not enough has been made in regard of the position of the teacher; however this is not expanded upon. This latter element is highlighted in this research. Why is it that the vast

majority of respondents, when looking at the evidence they gave, referred to elements from the handbook? Interviewees praised the practical element and the simplification of assessment targets. They were encouraged that the ideas of the agreed syllabus prompted higher order thinking and in depth discussion. A minority, actively preferred the idea of a conceptual approach, rather than looking at content.

Hannam has other criticisms of Erricker's theoretical position in relation to Living difference. As demonstrated she refers to his 'marked ambivalence to institutional religion and its attendant orthodoxies'. (Hannam, 2017, p.86). According to Hannam this position undermines his approach to studying religion in itself. It may be suggested that there is a negativity within Erricker's view of religion that undermines his position. It may appear that, the experience of religion is not objective, it is deeply personal. As such 'religion' per se, is different to each person. Erricker however, sees a difference between religion as an institution and religion as 'faith'. It may be argued that since the 'institution is made up of individuals interacting with religious perspectives, 'faith' and 'religion' are intrinsically interlinked. As such, I concur with Hannam that his position on religion is a flaw. It is certainly not mentioned at all in any of the interviews. If anything, there is an underlying understanding of religion as a set of beliefs and practices, which include the various religious institutions. It is elements of this understanding that are described when teachers discuss how they teach in the classroom. Hannam later reflects that Erricker's stance "does not cater for what it means to be religious and to actually live a religious life" (Hannam, 2017, p.91)

Hannam pursues this idea further saying that his view on religion does not cater for plurality of religion that exists in school. It seems that she does not explain, in this context, what she

means by plurality. There may be an assumption that she is referring to different religions viewpoints, but this is a simplistic interpretation. Teachers, when differentiating in class, must not only allow for the different views and backgrounds of their pupils but must also analyse their range of abilities and sensitivities. 'Plurality' in this context, should not only refer to the different religious beliefs held by the pupils but also the 'plurality' of levels of which they can access such religious beliefs. In both cases such situations may preclude a pupil from concurring with a constructive approach to religion studies. In many monotheistic homes, the existence of God is not questioned, just accepted, because the presupposition of an infinite being, logically, denies full understanding. Such an ontological position is fully rejected by Erricker, as seen by his opposition to Wright (Erricker, 2010 ). Wright suggested that his idea of 'critical realism' "is characterised by ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationality." (Wright,2012, pp.10-13).. As such Wright believes it is possible for students to engage in a study of religion as an external reality. This is contrary to Erricker who focuses on the narrative of the child. This latter aspect is mentioned by Hannam, but not related to the work of Wright.

According to the results of the research, teachers found Living Difference a useful methodological tool, a good planning document and much practice was based on the accompanying handbook. The study of concepts was positioned philosophically, by the respondents as external ideas to be studied. Concepts are referred to as ideas, but written materials demonstrate them as material to be studied. It appears that rather than focusing on the narrative of the child which Erricker wanted and Hannam suggested was his focus, the teachers being interviewed, dealt with the concepts as a body of external knowledge to

be investigated. Clearly, this is a compromise upon the theoretical basis of Living Difference and is indicative of the functionality that teachers feel that they must practice.

A final criticism that Hannam proposes needs to be raised at this point. She suggests that the process (*within Living Difference*) is far more instrumental than intended. (Hannam 2017 p91). Results from the interviews tend to support this point of view. By this I presume it to mean that the completion of the process becomes the focus of classroom practice rather than the investigation into religion. A result of this could be,

“However, if you use the mechanistic approach every single cycle the pupils will get bored”

Interviewee 5

In essence the research demonstrates that the process/methodology is considered a major feature of teaching practice. Some respondents commented that this was strength in consideration of the growing number of non-specialists teaching the subject. This may be seen to be indicative of a growing functionalism, some say de-professionalisation of teachers. Rather than being more creative and innovative, or even inviting the teacher to think on a more pedagogical level, the formal methodology allows teachers to be more systematic and narrow in the preparation of their lessons. Was this Erricker’s intention? By being so radical, did he not allow a greater flexibility? Could there not be a discussion of a revision of the cycle? Even though there have been two reviews (2011 and 2016), the basic idea of the cycle and how it is followed, including under Hannam’s guidance as RE advisor, has remained the same. Erricker’s post modernist interpretation of religious education, in his view, should reject the constraints of a modernist, institutionally based notion and allow individuals to develop their own narrative through their own experience. However, I agree with Hannam, in practice, completion of the process has become an end in itself, rather

than a tool to enhance learning and encourage flexibility. Probably, this is why teachers, in this research, claimed that it was too prescriptive and that they only utilised aspects of the handbook and ideas from the 'contextualise' and 'apply' in particular.

Linked with this notion, I suggest, is Hannam's statement that in the Living Difference conceptual method of enquiry, the role of the teacher is underdeveloped. Hannam does not expand upon this idea, yet there is nothing in the agreed syllabus or the handbook that reflects on the situatedness of teachers having to implement it.

Erricker concentrates almost entirely on the narrative of the learner and their interpretation of concepts "The aim is, therefore, for students to interpret religion in relation to their own and other's experiences" (Erricker, 2010, p.82).

Erricker created a pedagogical tool solely in relation to the experiential context of the learner. However, that context does not exist in 'itself entire'. Whether Erricker acknowledges this or not, our life experiences do not exist in an introverted reality. We are influenced by events and people outside our perception; the responses of our interviewees often relate to how they created an atmosphere or research information which the pupils were not aware of. As previously mentioned, when studying the context of the learner, it is essential to assess the context of the facilitator, not just as a professional but also on a biographical level. By appreciating the emotional, social and psychological situation of the teacher, the researcher can develop a greater understanding of what is going on in the classroom. First and foremost this required a period of reflection considering how the participants may feel in an interview situation. In practice this meant spending time getting to know more about the with regard to the professional life of the participants but also, discussing personal elements of their lives. This required openness regarding myself and a



willingness to exchange such information. The consent form (Appendix 8), to some extent may have allayed fears regarding anonymity. Discussions regarding school and classroom experience were had and an attempt to find 'common ground' was sought. This was sometimes membership of network groups or attendance at a seminar or conference. In terms of psychology, there was the deliberate attempt to put the participant at ease. An obvious strategy was for them to undertake the interview in their own environment where they could feel more ownership and control of the interview. Within the interview itself I was acutely aware of the importance of the language and tone that was used. Interjections were non judgemental and probes only used to elicit further expansion upon an answer. If an interviewee seemed to be confused or stumble when speaking, patience was the key asset required. After the interview, I made myself available for any follow-up that a participant required to ensure that they felt their participation was important. By using this approach of sensitivity and thoughtfulness for the respondents' wellbeing I tried to demonstrate an appreciation

Denzin suggested that when interpreting a biographical situation, and I suggest, interviewing teachers regarding their personal experiences is such a situation, this, in turn, provides an insight into the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships occurring in the educational environment. Simply following a methodological process, it appears, does not facilitate good religious education and neither, for that matter, an environment which would coherently fulfil Erricker's aim on a meaningful level. Hannam stated that the role of the teacher is underdeveloped. This research suggests that in comparison to the process, the role of the teacher as a human facilitator is minimalised This seems to be a central flaw in the presentation of the 'Living Difference' project and as yet, has not been addressed.'

Overall, Hannam is critical of Erricker's position and his philosophical influence on the Living Difference methodology. However, in the end she supports the idea that it is a worthy model on a theoretical level. She does not give practical examples where it has worked or develop ideas where it has been effective in the classroom. Despite this, many of the responses from the research support her general criticisms, particularly regarding the epistemological issue of knowledge. In discussing this topic participant 3 said "I do think that pupils do have knowledge outside their own experience, I do believe that we just, our job really is, to foster an understanding of that...."

It may be profitable for future research, to see if further links between Hannam's views and the views of active teachers may be established.

## **6: Issues of Assessment**

As demonstrated by both content and the experiences of teachers, teaching RE is a complex issue. Being academic, personal and spiritual in its nature, it provides both philosophical and pragmatic difficulties for the teacher. The teacher of RE also has to cope with the demands of whole school processes. In 2010, Ofsted produced a document reporting on the state of RE and targeted assessment as a weakness.

"In RE, good assessment practice is possible but is too often encumbered by poor curriculum support, planning or a low status for RE and is misunderstood" (Blaylock, 2012, p.239)

Blaylock's summary of the Ofsted's comments on assessment in their major report in 2010, is symptomatic of commentators continuing views on the issue. From Grimmitt, attempting to resolve the issue with the concept of criteria based on 'Learning from Religion and

‘Learning about Religion’ to Erricker’s single attainment target in Living Difference (2004-2011), there has been constant debate on the issue of assessment in RE. This has focussed both on the ‘why’ and ‘how’, more usually the ‘how’, due to government directives and the processes within individual schools. Teachers feel obliged to copy the style and structure of standardised assessment procedures. The research revealed some aspects of assessment as a constant theme by the interviewees, the conflict between institutional assessment structures, regard for the GCSE and the guidance from Living Difference being major components of the teachers’ reflection. Work by Lat Blaylock (2012 pp.235-239) and in particular, Liam Gearon (2013, pp.132-137) may explain why this is.

The Ofsted report ‘Transforming Religious Education’ was supportive of the Living Difference methodology to the point that it provided it as a form of best practice (Ofsted 2007 ) However, it also commented on the paucity of assessment procedures in schools. Inconsistency of the application of assessment was also a feature of interviewees’ responses. Firstly, some participants demonstrated multiple views on the reasons for and implementation of assessment. There was admiration for the agreed syllabus’s initiative to have just one attainment target, not two. This was seen as simplifying matters, staff not having to worry which result they had enter when complying with school processes. Moreover, at the time the corresponding levels of attainment were similar to the National Curriculum guidelines for other subjects. It was also felt that assessments based on the methodological cycle led to more higher order thinking, it “ encouraged pupils to be much more reflective” However, the evidence shows that teachers used a variety of assessment methods, which did not always comply with the aims of Living Difference, both on a practical and pedagogical level. Furthermore, whilst a minority found it quite

straightforward, another small group found it confusing. Others did not use the assessment system at all.

In his critique of assessment in religious education, Lat Blaylock displays a candid view of both the practical and philosophical elements of assessment. The reality of many RE teachers is that they will teach a large number of students, due to a sparse number of lessons on a limited timetable. Blaylock suggests that, “for a teacher who works with 450 pupils per week- not uncommon in RE- this requires that they make over 8000 assessments about pupils during key stage 3” ( Blaylock, 2012, p.236).

This is a crucial statistic for the classroom teacher, since it is the concrete context in which assessment has to take place. Any pedagogical approach that ignores this situation quickly becomes irrelevant, as I suggest the research of this project demonstrates. Teachers appreciated assessment material that was not only pedagogically relevant to the students, but were also relevant to the context of the functionality of the teacher. The Living Difference Agreed Syllabus, provides both an attainment target and levels of attainment by which progress may be measured, yet a significant number of teachers admitted to not adhering to it. The Living Difference Handbook provides some examples of assessment which fit the agreed syllabus, yet still there was a not a consistent adherence to their application. Now that levels of attainment have been discontinued, there is even greater uncertainty with regard to specific criteria for assessment.

Blaylock also provides a principle that concurs with the inferred principles of the teachers interviewed, specifically, “RE needs assessment that serves good learning, rather than being driven by the goals of comparability” (Blaylock, 2012, p.337)

Furthermore, he advocates a process based upon the principles of 'Assessment for Learning' a carefully focused lightweight use of a variety of strategies. This, I suggest, is more sympathetic to the responses of the interviewees. The teachers found that they were creating new end of unit assessments, which combined GCSE style analytical questions with a focus on a particular skill. Few discussed assessment as an ongoing strategy on a daily basis, but rather saw it in a formative context. The original levels of attainment, in both *Living Difference* (2004) and *Living Difference* (Revised 2011), may be seen to encourage this summative approach. This is at odds with Blaylock who believes in encouraging task setting which enables learners to engage with RE on an individual level.

Blaylock, rightly, focuses on the importance of assessment as a classroom tool, to improve the learning for students. Gearon in 2013 highlights the important issue of pedagogic philosophies using assessment to reinforce their own values as opposed to the individual needs of the students.

He states " pedagogies of religious education in assessment terms will be framed by what is prioritised as achievement and attainment in religious education" (Gearon, 2013, p.135).

Furthermore, He suggests "Each paradigmatic model selects from, or determines what is important to learn about and learn from religion" (Gearon, 2013, p.135). As such he concludes, " Each has a correspondingly less-than-coherent model of assessment. It is difficult to determine if any of the grander claims made by such pedagogies could even be reasonably or meaningfully assessed. And this is a core difficulty." (Gearon, 2013, .p137)

In essence, students' achievement is measured only in terms of the scheme of work which is based upon a particular epistemological point of view. In practice, students undertaking an

assessment relating to Living Difference would have different experience undertaking one from a 'Critical Realist' point of view. This raises the question of uniformity within religious education; is it acceptable that students in various parts of the country are assessed not only by different content but also by different criteria?

Such varied selection of criteria is also pointed out by Geoff Teece (2010, pp.93-103), who points out the confusion that RE teachers have in understanding what RE is and consequently the difficulties in assessing their subject. Both creators of agreed syllabi and creators of lessons find the need for reductionism in relation to the concepts and material presented in classroom. There is, in this process, a temptation to find commonalities and then for these commonalities to be imposed. I suggest, that the result is a form of RE created for the consumption of schools but possessing little resemblance to 'lived religion'. The question then arises 'what is the benefit of assessing a subject removed from its origin?

An analysis of these critiques may suggest that in the classroom the pedagogical philosophy behind a method of assessment doesn't matter, being utilitarian, the main concern is that, in terms of data, students are seen to be making progress. Such a view is not wholly accurate. Intrinsically, teachers have shown the belief that, like Blaylock, that assessment should be used for the needs of the individual pupil, not fundamentally originating in comparability measures. It is the progress of the child that matters, both in academic development and personal understanding.

A final observation: combining the two attainment targets into one may be seen as a temporary solution considering the inherent issues involved with the assessment of religious education. In everyday practice the teacher has to conform to the practices of the institution that they are working in. The assessment practices may well be organised and

students may feel, within the parameters of their studies, that they are making progress. Yet this situation does not necessarily equate to meaningful assessment. As one of the interviewees suggested 'how can you assess RE?'. With a subject that includes spiritual development, empathic skills and the ability to sympathise, how is it possible, it was observed, to measure these attributes? As such, is there a place for religious education as a non-assessable subject, in academic terms? The alternative is to separate the elements of religious education, the academic studies and the personal development, into two areas of study, Religious Studies and Religious Education. The first may be measured using orthodox means and the latter would be open to more abstract appraisal of personal qualities.

It would appear to be that the issue of assessment is not really the question. As demonstrated by just some of the authors, there are difficulties defining the nature and purpose of assessment in religious education, let alone devising methods of application. What is revealed and reinforced by this research is that, in the classroom, assessment is down to the application and philosophy of the teacher. Pedagogy can have some input and theoretical discussions can make us think about why it can be applied, but theory must be relevant to the functionality of the teacher. Living Difference attempted to bridge the gap and at its inception made life easier for many teachers, if they were supporters of, or were not concerned with the pedagogic foundations of the document. As time progressed, the pressures of new GCSE specifications began to have an impact and schools insisting that religious education be measured in terms commensurate with other subjects. Blaylock correctly asserts that assessment must have real meaning to the child, to help them make progress that the child perceives as development. That seems to be the basis of all measurements, not just religious education.

## 7: Summary

The aims of this research, in relation to adding to 'the body of knowledge' on religious education, were to seek a new perspective on the application of Living Difference as seen by teachers. By analysing their points of view on the issues involved with Living Difference, being aware of Denzin's biographical studies, it was hoped to discover localised perspectives to enhance our understanding of the relationship between practice in the classroom and the agreed syllabus itself. It was also hoped that small scale research may provide some insight into broader issues. In relation to the aims of this project, this discussion analysed some themes that came from the research. This process required prioritisation of the five distinct grouping of the questions that were asked of the interviewees: These were 'general views on RE'; Pedagogy; teachers view on the strengths and weaknesses of Living Difference ; Assessment; Personal reflection on ethical issues raised during teaching Living Difference. Some questions, such as the mechanical nature of the methodology were merged with general themes such as 'strengths and weaknesses' because of the similarity of purpose and answers from the interviewees. I prioritised the first four of these areas because of the dominance of the data from the research.

As such this section reviewed the research of Katherine Wedell, concluding that although there were significant flaws in the design of her work, it still provides significant indicators for further improvement in 'Living Difference'. In her recommendations she suggests that the application of Living Difference would be improved through further training of teachers. This may well be true; however, it appears that the teachers need to be inspired to undertake that training in the first place. This seems to lie at the heart of the matter. Erricker produced a scheme of work that was pedagogically based and could be used



methodically to teach religious education; however, according to the interviewees it could not guarantee good RE; that was down to the quality of the teacher. This idea highlights again, the place of the teacher in this process. Denzin's insight into the biographical nature of qualitative research demonstrates the need to consider the personal context of teachers when creating pedagogical materials, especially those which are legally enforceable. It is not possible to create a separate agreed syllabus for each individual however, further consideration is required considering the various religious, philosophical and functional perspectives of the teachers that have to apply the syllabus in practice. Greater flexibility with regard to how the content is taught needs to be apparent. If not, as this project has demonstrated, teachers will, at worst, totally ignore it.

Accountability was discussed, highlighting the pressures on both head teachers and teachers to relegate religious education to a minor topic in the curriculum. Further, because there is no accountability measure for religious education, apart from GCSE results, teachers are able to ignore the agreed syllabus. According to the responses, this leads to a great variation in the quality of both the provision and delivery of this subject. I suggest that such a position leads to an undermining of the aims of RE, both in the agreed syllabus and in the Ofsted reports, that all students should have access to high quality religious education. This leads us to a major observation of this project. Religious education can be viewed at a micro level; that is in the classroom and the day to day tasks in the school environment, and at a macro level; that of guidance of religious education, as seen at local authority and governmental level. It would appear that those in the latter group, do not appreciate the full consequences of curriculum decisions at the classroom level. To cut time for this subject and

reduce its status and at the same time demand high quality teaching is a contradictory notion.

Reflecting upon the views of the teachers regarding Living Difference and its strengths and weakness', this discussion analysed Hannam's critique of Erricker's philosophy and its application in the agreed syllabus. She highlighted the significance of the plurality of religions being underrated in the agreed syllabus and this flaw was heightened by Erricker's antipathy towards organised religion itself. Furthermore, Erricker's pedagogical view was criticised because it was open to the charge of relativism. Overall, this project supported these observations but suggested that Hannam's comment (Hannam, 2017, p.91) that the 'role of the teacher was underdeveloped was in itself an understatement and suggested a new functional pedagogical praxis needs to be considered to enable Living Difference to fulfil its potential.

Next, the discussion considered teachers' perceptions of assessment in Living Difference. Taking account of Gearon's observation that all assessments are products of the pedagogical bias of their authors, this highlights the difficulty RE teachers have in helping students to measure their progress. Living Difference attempted to solve the issue of having two attainment targets by introducing just one, yet the evidence suggests that this causes problems of its own. The analysis supported Lat Blaylocks' insistence that assessment must have real meaning to the child. As such appropriate methods of assessment are still an issue in RE. The research highlighted this problem and described the challenges that they face. However, no long term solution was arrived at in the context of present guidelines imposed on schools. I suggest, a new assessment model for RE would require a radical overhaul that would re-write the nature of religious education in the secondary sector.

### **Some observations**

Due to the word count maximum of the Ed.D, there is a limit to the topics that could be discussed which were raised by the research. However, at this point, it is worth mentioning some areas which are in themselves are valuable.

1) One of the first discoveries of the research concerned the nature of the interviews. When conducting the sessions, I informed the participants that they were free to determine the interview in the way they wished. They could answer all the questions or just some of them; answer them in order or otherwise. The interview was to be as relaxed as possible, to enable them to take ownership of their response. This approach, inspired by Denzin, led to a disparate set of results. However, it may be concluded, that this research was being true to the spirit of qualitative interviewing. This approach was reinforced by considering the characteristics of each person when assessing the data. It means that, for all significant purposes, this method allowed the interviewee to narrate their own message, not one imposed on them. Under these criteria, the interviews were as authentic as they could be.

2) As such one of the more immediate observations was that the interviews reflected both the character of the interviewee and the situation that they were involved in. Living difference for each teacher had to be functional. As a tool it had value if it worked, not because of any pedagogical philosophy that it was based upon. Furthermore, Living Difference had to be contemporaneous with the social and political reality that the teachers found themselves in. As such, to be effective, Living Difference has to take account of the 'place of the teacher'. As mentioned earlier, Living Difference is focused on the child's perspective upon learning. Hannam (Hannam, 2017, p.91) hinted at the idea that the role of the teacher is underdeveloped; neither in the agreed syllabus nor the handbook is the

social/political/ educational position of the teacher referred to. Pedagogically, and practically, learning is a co-operative exercise where the realities of all parties come together. Emphasising one over the other is illogical and ineffective this merely provides an illusionary situation. If a real appreciation of the context is to be discerned, as per Denzin's perspective, then an awareness of the challenges of all participants in the learning process is required. Quite demonstrably, I suggest that, the interviews in this research show Living Difference has little regard for the personal lives of the teachers. In the case of this research, the situations of the participants varied from new heads of department, new teachers, retired teachers, non specialists, experiences teachers with families, teachers with sick relatives and one who was pregnant. Are we seriously asking teachers to ignore the experience of their personal lives whilst educating students? Living Difference provided a methodology, that interviewees felt were prescriptive and focused upon the experience of the student. How then, is it possible, from a pedagogical perspective, for Living Difference to be fully relevant to the teachers who must put it into practice? Maybe this is the major reason why Living Difference is not taken as seriously as it could be by the teachers that were interviewed.

3) It has been suggested, by Wedell (Wedell, 2009), that a way forward would be to provide more training. However, for this to occur, teachers have to be interested in taking part in the training. The majority of interviewees had undergone some training in the Living Difference methodology, yet there still continued to be inconsistencies in its application and difficulties in understanding the pedagogy behind it. It seems obvious that teachers need to be interested in Living Difference, both as a pedagogical philosophy and as an educational tool, for training to be both relevant and successful. In general terms, if such training were

successful, there would be no grounds for Ofsted to state in both of their previous reports that the teaching of RE in schools, is inconsistent and often poor (Ofsted 2010 pp.14 -21; Ofsted, 2013, p.5). It is still the view of this researcher that a pedagogic understanding is a vital asset to an educator. Therefore, the question still remains, how can pedagogy be actively demonstrated to be relevant to teachers in the classroom? One possibility is that those responsible for training teachers of the future should have current experience as classroom practitioners. At the very least this would lessen the distance between lecturer and student, enabling them to demonstrate how their theories are effectively put into practice.

4) Several of the interviewees suggested that they liked a concept based scheme of work as opposed to a content led scheme of work. Rather than just learning information, as some suggested that a content led curriculum may do, concept led planning enabled, some suggested, more flexibility and allowed students to investigate ideas and provided the opportunity to develop more questioning skills. As demonstrated earlier, Living Difference is pedagogically based upon constructivism, but considering the various theoretical positions of the interviewees, it appears that a concept led scheme of work, does not have constructivist. Although some found concepts difficult to prioritise, teachers could still plan creative and imaginative lessons around religious ideas. Moreover, the teachers brought to the table good practice from a variety of theoretical positions, not limited to Erricker's' constructivist point of view. As such, it may be suggested, we are seeing teachers developing their own individual personalised pedagogy. These are often an amalgam of ideas combined with having to fit in with the stresses of everyday teaching. Such a

development is a positive contribution to the development of pedagogy, making a direct link to real practice in the classroom.

### **8: Finally.....**

This research investigated the various views and observation of teachers of religious education and concludes that, with certain reservations, Living Difference appears to have made a positive contribution to the support of religious education teachers in the an urban area in the south of England. This research should help those considering teaching religious education, to think about Living Difference, as both a pedagogical document and a method of enquiry. Furthermore, it is hoped that future authors of any religious education agreed syllabus, should take further consideration of what is practical within the everyday classroom teaching; particularly the pressures of teaching the new GCSE. Within this context, the variety of pedagogical ideas should each be valued. Teachers should be encouraged to work in a way that utilises their talents, not made to feel that an agreed syllabus is beyond them. In relation to this, training for Living Difference needs to justify itself as exceptionally relevant to all teachers of RE. A major deficiency from the majority of interviews was reference to spirituality. Such a significant absence could be the basis of future research, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

## **Conclusion: Recommendations, Implications and Future Research**

### **1: Introduction:**

As has been mentioned at the beginning of this journey, there was limited research on the Living Difference Agreed Syllabus. Alan Brine (Personal communication 6/5/2018) recently said of it “ There is urgent need for some honest evaluation of Living Difference. Too much evangelical fervour around the model”. This is, in part, what was felt at the start, however it was the uncritical nature of Wedell’s research (2009) running contrary to the anecdotal evidence gathered from local RE groups and SACRE, that made it seem that a more analytical approach was required. Academically, there was an ongoing conflict between Andrew Wright and Clive Erricker regarding the issue of spirituality within RE( Articles in BJRE from 2000-2003) which spilled over to the theoretical basis of the agreed syllabus. It was ironic that Erricker criticised confessional models of RE but his pedagogical viewpoint could be seen to be confessional itself, proposing a particular belief about the origin of knowledge. Criticisms regarding Living Difference by the participants were also being made about the methodology itself, such as it was too prescriptive and too concept based.

As mentioned in the methodology, I have been in a privileged position regarding the teaching, monitoring, provision of training on religious education and access to the development of Living Difference. Having taught religious education for twenty seven years, I was also the secondary representative on Portsmouth SACRE for eight years. Moreover I was also a head of a religious studies department and a head of faculty of social studies. This has provided a depth of knowledge and unique perspective into the development of the subject in the South East Hants area. As such, within this conclusion, the opportunity will be

taken to provide suggestions based upon this experience, and the findings from this research.

As a former member of the local SACRE, responsible for supporting teachers of religious education and assessing the state of religious education in the relevant city, the remit became problematic. How to help teachers with an agreed syllabus that they were not fully comfortable with and did not consistently understand? In adding to the body of knowledge of religious education, the research project has helped to investigate this issue, but also has provided a context for where some teachers find themselves. Furthermore, this exploration has looked at the pedagogical underpinning of the agreed syllabus, examining its relevance to everyday teaching practice. For so long, authorities have focussed on child centred religious education. Has the place of the teacher been forgotten in this process? Education, on a day to day scale, is an organic, vibrant and a fluid event. As such, an approach or research should attempt to appreciate this. Living Difference was created to give specialists and non specialists alike, a model based on a pedagogical philosophy, to help educators to provide a meaningful education. In starting this exploration, there was a question involving the discrepancy between what was being advocated by the religious education advisors and what was being discussed by teachers in local schools. Why were teachers taking such a 'cafeteria approach' (Curtner-Smith, Hastie & Kinchin 2008) to the agreed syllabus; taking the bits that they liked but ignoring the whole concept? This research may suggest that teachers are being pragmatic. Pressured by a number of responsibilities, from a lack of time, conformity to school assessment criteria and a results driven educational dynamic, which are just a few examples, classroom practitioners adapt to the environment that they are in.



Prior to this research project I was influenced by the work of Norman Denzin and his research methodology investigating biographies. The project was approached with a focus on being aware of the personal context of the participants, in order to achieve authenticity. Analysis of Wedell's research and articles regarding Living Difference, revealed a paucity of published material regarding Living Difference. This research intended to explore, in depth, what a range of practitioners thought about the agreed syllabus as to provide a more balanced view in the RE body of knowledge.

At the time of writing there has been no further in depth research on Living Difference or its related pedagogy, but there have been significant investigations regarding the general teaching of RE. From Ofsted, "RE: Realising the Potential" (Ofsted, October, 2013, RE: The Truth Unmasked, The supply of and support for Religious Education teachers (the All Party Parliamentary Group On Religious Education (2013), to the Committee of Religious Education preliminary report (2017) the place and value of religious education in the curriculum has been explored. Most of these reports have arrived at similar conclusions. The quality of teaching in secondary schools is rarely outstanding, teachers of RE feel under pressure, undervalued and lack confidence. There is a lack of specialist teachers of religious education, and consequently, non-specialists feel confused about what they are teaching. There is a call for schools to be more accountable for their delivery of the RE curriculum, being the only realistic method to force head teachers to implement their statutory obligations. This research has sympathy with some of these findings, but looked more closely at the impact of agreed syllabus, since it is one area that the teacher of religious education can have a real impact on.

## 2: Recommendations:

### A General Observation:

Probably the main observation that is inferred by an analysis of the interviews is the difference between those who wrote the 'Living Difference' document and those who have to implement it, in a diverse educational setting. It would seem, that with the best will in the world, someone who works outside the functional environment of working full time in a secondary school, would find it difficult to fully empathise with the harsh stresses that are placed on teachers of RE. Some full time teachers were incorporated into the process of creating the document, yet its final version was still written by religious education advisors.

One teacher in this thesis said "I think I learnt how to be a good teacher before I learnt what Living Difference was about ". It was a common attitude amongst the teachers interviewed that you do not have to follow Living Difference to be a good teacher. Good teachers will adapt the resources they have to best fit the students in their charge. Therefore, if the agreed syllabus is to be more relevant and effective to classrooms in the region, the authors of such a document need to be more aware of the personal situatedness of teachers. Both teachers who support the syllabus and those who have difficulty with its implementation, need to be encouraged to be part of the next review: certainly some of the participants of this research would be capable of doing so. Authors need to be more sensitive of the plurality of teachers' personal and religious viewpoints when advocating a particular pedagogy. As has been demonstrated in the research, if teachers feel it is not relevant to them, present circumstances allow them to ignore it.

## A) Recommendations For Teaching Religious Education Locally

The bulk of the recommendations of this research refer directly to the geographical area in which the investigation took place in, since Living Difference is only applicable to a limited number of educational authorities in the country, specifically, Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton, the Isle of Wight, Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster. Furthermore, rather than refer to recommendations for 'Living Difference' in this section, I have focused on the ideas to potentially improve RE in the local area. As has been seen in the research, the vast majority of teachers do not strictly adhere to the methodology of Living Difference. The initial geographical area for this research was in South East Hants, which has specific local issues, therefore pertinent recommendations need to be cognisant of the fact that many schools do not fully utilise the agreed syllabus. The recommendations of Wedell's report (2009) have also been taken into account. Finally, no recommendations have been made deliberately from the research regarding assessment as the criteria for this has been changed. At the time of the interviews, schools were required to measure the progress of students in relation to levels of attainment, as per National Curriculum guidelines (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency 2007). This is no longer the case and the Living Difference III has produced Age-Related-Expectations (AREs) to assist teachers with assessment, "recognising that schools are free to develop their own assessment programmes." (Living Difference 3, 2016, pp.79-83).

### I. The Issue Of Time:

As demonstrated in the findings, the most influential aspect that affected Religious Education was that of time, an issue that was not addressed in literature specific to Living Difference. This issue was in relation to both time for planning and time within the

curriculum. One Head of Faculty directly stated that her greatest challenges were limitation of curriculum time and extent of the use of non specialists (P11). The interviews demonstrated that the respondents were making outstanding efforts to teach Religious Education, despite the restriction imposed upon them. In RE: The truth unmasked (All Party Parliamentary Group On Religious Education, 2013) , there is an intrinsic demand that religious education be given the time that it deserves. It requires to be given the same amount of time as other subjects of the core curriculum, to do it justice. This time must not only include planning and curriculum time but also, I suggest, time for reflexivity.

Stern(2013) suggests that spending time discussing and thinking about Religious Education with other professionals can be at least as effective as attending courses. Time for network meetings, amongst the local schools, during school time needs to be made. At county level, meetings are organised, but these need to be localised. There are several advantages to this. Firstly, local teachers of Religious Education are most familiar with the issues involved with the geographical area, such as the plurality of various religious groups. Secondly, close proximity to each other will make it easier to organise such groups. Finally, regular contact with other teachers of religious education, will allow specialists and non-specialists to share their personal experiences of Living Difference, thereby enhancing a support network. These meetings must be informal and collaborative, as part of an on-going program of professional development. The meetings should not be seen to be directed by the advisor or any other outside body, since confidentiality would be crucial. With regard to Living Difference, it may lead to a greater corporate understanding of what the methodology is really asking, a criticism that several teachers raised within this thesis.

Returning to the issue of time allocated for religious education in schools, a second recommendation refers to SACRE. Considering the impact that government policy has had on the demands of Head teachers, as described earlier, local SACREs should be required to review how they are implementing their role as guardians of the subject in the local authority. Hampshire, Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight and Southampton, instigate and make provision for the review of Living Difference. However, what provision is made for enforcing the time allocation required (Living Difference 2004, 2011, 2016) in local schools? What point is there for making a substantive effort in creating a document and then being limited in ensuring schools are accountable? It begs the question is 'SACRE' responsible for the decline of Religious Education in local schools? I suggest, local SACREs need to critically evaluate what they want for Religious Education, in light of the educational realities that we face. After a review, what are they prepared to do to ensure high quality religious education is being taught in the schools within their area? At the moment, SACRE work with local area advisors, who, in turn, arrange training courses and visits to schools. However, the evidence from the interviewees suggests that this is not enough in terms of their efforts to teach using Living Difference.

## II. Openness to others forms of pedagogy and being 'too prescriptive'.

One of the key observations made by these teachers was that the Living Difference method was sound, but it was always dependent on the quality of the teacher. The application of the methodology in itself could not guarantee interest and engagement from pupils. The research demonstrates that the same is true of the pedagogical philosophy of Living Difference. Erricker (2000) believed in a radical 'constructivism' and then seemed to develop his view of a more 'practical constructivism'. Whatever the starting point, this idea

asks the participant to start from their own experiences. The Living Difference attainment target is that the students should 'interpret the experience'. From the point of view of this project, several questions are raised regarding this practice. Firstly, the concept of interpreting the experience surely should not be solely in the remit of the student alone? Should not the teacher, who initiates, plans, assesses this process, also be required to start from their own experience and form an interpretation? Fundamentally, Living Difference is a constructivist document, and as such it should ask the teacher to personally engage with it. What is their own experience of the topic? How do they feel? What are their reactions and conclusions? Without this active participation by the teacher, it cannot succeed fully, since the teacher is asking the pupils to do something, about which they have no cognitive understanding. Another issue is that the constructivist underpinning of Living Difference does not deal with the epistemological position of the adult, in relation to the child. From an ontological viewpoint, the experience of the student is unrelated to the experience of the teacher who is presenting the concept: In a practical way this gulf cannot be bridged: interaction may lead to sympathetic understanding but not a cognitive, empathic understanding.

Due to the advocacy of a strict adherence to this methodology, a few of the interviewees openly challenged the syllabus describing it as being too prescriptive. Both, in the sense of being required to teach according to a set methodology but also, as a direct implication, rejecting other pedagogical stances, the participants criticised the legal enforcement of Living Difference. P2 stated

"Why get rid of something that I know does the job, to then think you are not following the legal requirements?"

Hannam advocates the cycle of enquiry utilises a ' philosophy for children' approach: However, this does not negate the prescriptive nature of the agreed syllabus. Would a critical realist approach, as proposed by Wright (2001 and 2004) solve the issue of relating to the new GCSE content? Would not Jackson's interpretative approach, being more sensitive to the faith communities (1997), allow for a more in depth understanding of religious concepts? One head of department (P4) felt that "it(LD) doesn't necessarily work with other pedagogies". Hannam, by encouraging a use of P4C (2016), goes some way to allowing for various teaching techniques and deals with the issue of recognising the plurality of the students involved. However, at the time of the interviews, no allowance was made for teachers wishing to experiment with different approaches in their classroom practice. In its present form (2016), Living Difference still requires teachers to base their practice on the methodology and a concept led pedagogy, restricting attempts at pedagogical experimentation and further originality.

As a result, a consistent approach, for all the participants, was that they used the parts of the agreed syllabus that they felt were relevant and useful to them. Whatever the variation of implementation, none used the agreed syllabus as a whole. A future review of the agreed syllabus, needs to carefully investigate the points raised through the voices of the teachers in this research, to make Living Difference more relevant to teachers in all the variety of secondary institutions that now exist. As such, it is recommended that the pedagogic position of Living Difference needs to be more vigorously reviewed, aiming for greater inclusion of a wider variety of pedagogical practice.

### III. Clarification on concepts:

Closely affiliated to the issue of pedagogical diversity is the question of an insistence on a concept led method of teaching. A significant group of the participants questioned the assertion of singularly using concepts to teach Religious Education. It was felt that there were a number of limitations to this approach, particularly with regard to the knowledge element of the GCSE curriculum. It was also stated that this approach limited the general knowledge of students with regard to religions and limited opportunities for investigating the spiritual dimension of Religious Education. As one respondent, said describing the Living Difference methodology, “here’s a concept and here’s a couple of religious ideas about it but never actually going in depth about what religion actually is” (P1)

As such, in accordance with the previous recommendation, an investigation might look at how a content based scheme of work could use the methodology and thereby bring the agreed syllabus into greater proximity with the GCSE, not only with regard to content but also in terms of methods of assessment. The vast majority of participants referred to summative forms of assessment being used in their practice, contrary to the nature of the agreed syllabus. One participant stating “Our exams in year 7 and in year 8 were all based on information assessments”. (P3) A possible answer to this issue may be to investigate a mixed approach of both content and concept based learning.

#### IV. Inclusion of A Wider Variety Of Teachers In The Future Reviews Of Living Difference.

Essentially, the agreed syllabus is written by the RE advisor for Hampshire, with some help by the primary advisor and some advanced skilled teachers. It is also influenced by a select group of representatives from the local SACRE and a few teachers from the secondary and primary sectors. However, what is evident from the findings of this investigation appears to be a lack of understanding of the functional and practical existence of the classroom



teacher. Participants stated that there were many challenges teaching RE at KS3. From a lack of time, the frequent use of non-specialist teachers to a conflict of pedagogical methodology implemented by school policy, these difficulties were compounded by being obliged to plan extensively the Living Difference agreed syllabus.

P6, an NQT, said that “getting to grips with Living Difference at the start of the year plus being thrown all these other school policies at the same time was just very difficult”.

However, it is not just difficult for NQTs as policies and practices are continually changing in schools. It is an acknowledgement of this empirical reality, that begs the question, are SACRE in touch with what teachers of religious education are experiencing? One of the findings of this research was that there was a gap between the theoretical aspect of Living Difference, as explained by Erricker (2010) and how teachers implemented the document. A potential recommendation for bridging this gap, would be that SACRE increased the use of practising teachers having an input into the next agreed syllabus. Apart from demonstrating support for teachers and having a greater depth of analysis, Living Difference’s reputation for authenticity would be increased.

#### V. Strengthening the place of pedagogy

According to one participant.....

“Living Difference doesn’t encourage a massive amount of reflection on pedagogy” (P4)

One of the initial questions of this thesis referred to teachers’ understanding of the pedagogical underpinning of the agreed syllabus. The findings of the research showed the majority of participants had little detailed knowledge of pedagogy referring to religious education and even fewer were conversant regarding the pedagogic underpinning of Living

Difference. The participants were more interested in what they saw as instructional strategies that would fit their situations and their students. Several participants were unaware of the pedagogical nature of the agreed syllabus. As such no link was found between experience, the quality of the teacher and the conscious application of pedagogical theory. Consequently, Living Difference may be appreciated as an effective tool in the classroom , but this research shows that most participants could not explain why.

If specialists who support Religious Education believe, as demonstrated earlier by Erricker (2010) and Baumfield (2011), that a deep comprehension of pedagogic theory is beneficial to classroom practice, then classroom practitioners need to be persuaded that this is the case, in order that they may use valuable time studying its application. Pedagogy should not be seen, simply, as a subject studied in training which is left behind in the reality of the classroom.

Some possible answers may lay in the provision of the training of teachers.

A) Firstly, in training, the application of Living Difference would benefit from it being set in the context of practical advice on time management of planning and preparation. How do RE teachers prepare a cycle of enquiry, methodologically and in detail, whilst balancing all their professional functions?

B) Advisors may need to clearly demonstrate how a pedagogical understanding of Living Difference can make its application more effective in the context of the limited curriculum time the subject has. Alternatively, as demonstrated by the respondents, teaching religious education can become just a mechanical exercise.

C) There should be greater access and increased provision of free/low cost training for non-specialists both in and outside of schools. In all cases of the participants, non-specialists outnumbered specialists in the Religious Education departments. For Living Difference to be

attractive to schools and more effective in the classroom, non-specialists require a deeper knowledge of the religions and subsequently, the pedagogical understanding of the subject. It is rather like asking a non-linguist to teach a language that is alien to them.

D) Teacher and student active participation in research led projects. Gearon (2013) summarises Stern's conclusion on research led pedagogy, suggesting that one of the best training strategies is for teachers to get together and discuss their own experiences of a given topic. Yet Stern (2013) also advocates teachers actively participating in research to develop their own understanding of pedagogical issues. I have suggested earlier that regular local meetings of teachers of religious education would be advantageous for several reasons. However, Stern's suggestion of active participation in research takes this a step further. This would demonstrate to specialists and non-specialists alike the positive influence of practical pedagogy on classroom progress.

#### B) Recommendations for Teaching RE Nationally.

The research parameters for this investigation were limited to a local geographical area and the Living Difference Agreed syllabus. As such there is limited justification for applying these observations on a national scale. However, I have taken into account previous recommendations of reports on the national state of RE, such as Ofsted (2013), the All Party Parliamentary Committee On RE (2013), Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) Final Report (2018), and Erricker's investigation into the future of Religious Education(2013). It may be suggested that some of the above recommendations arising from this research for the local provision of religious education, could also be applied nationally. Nonetheless, although the respondents ably discussed the strengths and challenges of using Living Difference, there was both a stated and inferred opinion that the main challenges originated

from both local and national government. An experienced head of department said “ I think the main issues have come from outside” (P5). Despite the limitations of the research in this thesis, it may be profitable to point out two conclusions.

I) The outstanding observation is that fundamentally, the issue of time given to the subject is crippling its progress and provision in many state schools (APPRE 2013). This analysis is certainly echoed in the experiences of many of the teachers interviewed. As long as schools are not held accountable for its provision, it was inferred that the teachers felt there was no pressure to support them in their efforts. This raises the question, who is actively lobbying for the presence of religious education, not only at KS3 but also throughout the entire state sector? Despite efforts from a variety of interested groups including the Religious Education Council of England and Wales and the APPRE, there appears to be no legitimate response from the government. As yet, there appears to have been no movement on making schools accountable. Have the representatives of the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church and other religious groupings applied enough effort to support religious education in the state sector? Is it the case that the religious interests in protecting ‘Faith Schools’ have led to undermining the promotion of religious education in the state sector? It may also be the case that these representatives have capitulated to the notion that we now live in a ‘secular society’. Such a stance intimates a lack of confidence in teaching religious education. Whatever the explanations offered, it is difficult to comprehend why further progress has not been made.

II) Mentioned in the Ofsted Report, ‘Realising the Potential’ (2013), was the recommendation to the government that the Department of Education and professional associations clarify the aims and purposes of religious education. Considering the variety of interpretations and the mainly utilitarian responses from the participants, this is an issue

that is fundamental to the future. In 2017, the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) published their interim report. Its primary recommendation is that “There should be a national entitlement statement for religious education which sets out clearly the aims and purpose of RE and what pupils should experience in the course of their study of the subject (CoRE, 2017,p.7). Within their final report (CoRE, 2018) they expanded on this issue and clarified their perspective on the purpose of RE, renaming the subject ‘RE and Worldviews’ ( CoRE, 2018, p6)

For many participants of this research, fulfilment of this recommendation would be welcome. From the teachers to those responsible at government level, it is suggested that there is a further national discussion on what we understand to be religious education and whether this fits into the national curriculum. If it is the case that the subject is beneficial to the students, then a statement of intent and how this would be made accountable needs to be made legally binding. Such a move would justify the place of religious education in our schools. The idea of a national entitlement for each student as suggested by CoRE (2018) would go some way to fulfilling this recommendation.

### 3: Implications For The Stakeholders.

Upon consideration, there are many implications that arise from this research. However, to make these manageable, I have focused on those that would have most impact. These recommendations have implications for a variety of stakeholders.

#### 1) Teachers of Religious Education.

Being a Reflective Practitioner.

Living Difference was seen by most of the interviewees to be an asset both in planning and application to classroom practice. This required time for it to be embedded and, in many cases, investigating which elements were appropriate for the individual situation of the teacher and the school. It also required resources to be put aside to aid reflection on the meaning of religious education for teachers. Personal reflection is an essential constituent of religious education, not just pedagogical theory but also the teacher's position regarding the huge variety of religious, ethical and philosophical issues. Probably, more than any other subject, religious education requires the teacher to be aware of their own situatedness regarding key issues in life. The axiom "know thyself" attributed to Socrates, is especially pertinent at this point. This, by necessity, includes reflecting upon inclusion of the spiritual aspects of religious education; without this facet, one may suggest that the subject is not religious. Many observers of religious education have noted the development of a utilitarian and secularist form of the subject which ignores the relationship to religion that is lived (Erricker & Chater, 2013; Gearon, 2013). Allowing themselves to a liberal and political pedagogy, isolating religion derived from a position of faith and spirituality, teachers may be accused of ignorance at best and secularist bias at worse. However, if Living difference is chosen as a school's agreed syllabus, then it should be remembered that the starting point is the experience of the students and this should not begin unless the teacher has explored the issue that is studied for themselves. As Denzin suggested, to understand the greatest reality of a person or situation, one has to attempt to understand fully the context of the situation. (Denzin, 1989).

## II) Schools

For schools in SE Hants, the implications are both philosophical and practical. The question needs to be asked, at key stage 3 and key stage 4, what do they see as a rounded curriculum fit for the education of the whole child, and is religious education (and Living Difference in this instance) part of that experience? In effect, the obligation to provide an hour per week, per year group is not being enforced. This may provide schools with an opportunity to assess why and how they make provision for religious education. However, if the subject is to be taken seriously, it must be resourced as such. Part of this requirement is not only for time and relevant materials, but also for the employment of specialist teachers of the subject. Within the area that the research took place, the majority of lead teachers were not specialists and consequently found more challenges with Living Difference. This thesis also demonstrated where religious education was supported adequately, it could make an outstanding contribution to results, to the ethos of the school community and to the educational experience of students.

## III) SACRE

As previously discussed, the local SACREs of the geographical area in which this research took place, published action plans to implement and support Living Difference in all its versions. (Portsmouth SACRE Annual Report 2015-16; Hampshire SACRE Annual Report 2016/17). However, there appears to be little independent evidence as to the success of these measures. In essence, this research suggests further commitment by members of SACRE in fulfilling the committees remit. If the recommendations of this thesis are implemented, this will require a thorough scrutiny of SACRE's capabilities and willingness to challenge direct and indirect opposition to the subject. Members will need to investigate

further the functional challenges that teachers have to face and how best to support them in the face of managerial and social pressures which are undermining religious education. At present, the SACREs meet once per term. This provides a very limited opportunity to discuss and review local religious education. More regular meetings of monitoring committees would be advantageous to making progress in promoting religious education. Furthermore, as a committee that is responsible to local councils, it also has the ability to make the council accountable for the provision of religious education. As a political creation, if members wish to secure the future of religious education in state schools, SACRE may need to think in a more political way. Are SACRE prepared to bring pressure to bear on local schools for their lack of provision of Religious education? Are they prepared, if they consider that RE, is an essential constituent of state education, to approach their local member of parliament regarding the situation? On a local level, SACRE, through a wide variety of local initiatives, could have an influence on schools in their area. As such, a review on their own effectiveness may make a significant difference to the amount of time that the subject is given in their authority.

Consequently, as a matter of urgency, a review of how it is to implement its remit in monitoring and supporting the teaching of high quality religious education at KS3 within the local authority area with specific attention to accountability by schools for the provision of the subject is necessary. Moreover for SACRE, it is advised that the constituent members can investigate how they can further promote the reality of lived religion in the classroom.

#### IV) Teacher Training

When this research was undertaken, the respondents were asked about how they came to know about Living Difference .The majority had said they had been on training courses. Not



one participant praised courses provided, conversely, one said that it had taught her nothing. The 'Hampshire Inspection and Advisory Service'(HIAS), regularly provides courses as an introduction to Living Difference both at KS2 and KS3 level. Furthermore, The University of Winchester provides a specific module on Living Difference, regarding its planning and implementation. It would seem that, according to interviewees, there is a weakness in the follow up work in schools, both in developing the skills of newly qualified teachers as they were at the time, Graduate Training Programs (GTP), School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITTS), and in the continuing professional development of established teachers. Where it is felt that RE is supported well in a school, it is suggested by some of the heads of department in the research, that students study planning the cycle as part of their professional training, yet it takes significantly more time, to appreciate how it can work in practice (P1, P2,P3) Consequently, it may be recommended, that for those schools wishing to adopt Living Difference, it would be beneficial to develop closer ties with Hias and the University of Winchester. This may go some way to closing the gap between the theoretical training of the providers and lack of training in the schools.

#### 4: Reflections on the Research design:

The success of any research design should be viewed in the light of how far it has allowed the aims of the project to be investigated. In this case the main aim lay in discovering the views of a group of teachers about Living Difference, their understanding of pedagogy in relation to the agreed syllabus and what challenges that they had experienced. Moreover, in the interviews, the research aimed to delve into the lived experience of teaching Living Difference. The research design itself was indicative of a qualitative study with limited

resources in terms of time and geography. As a full time teacher and head of department, obviously there was a limited time for the research. It often meant relying on the good will of colleagues and compromising on the quality of some responsibilities. Access to the participants was also restricted. This was not only in terms of time and distance, but also underlying tensions where potential participants felt line managers would not agree with providing sensitive information regarding their schools. Access was further limited in that working at weekends has constraints, with participants having personal commitments. As such and with limited transport options, this meant, the research could only take place in a limited area. Despite its geographical size, the area of South East Hampshire has a significant number of secondary schools, as such it enabled the investigation to interview a wide variety of participants from a range of secondary schools. Conveniently, this aided the purposive sampling of this study.

With regard to the qualitative nature of the research, the investigation was specifically limited to semi structured interviews and documentary material that the respondents wished to produce. I deliberately chose to create an atmosphere where the participant did not feel pressured and presented my own attitude as non judgemental. Extrinsically, I felt that this approach succeeded, in that, by the end of the interviews, respondent were relaxed and began to open up more. The sincerity of the answers that I received is shown by the depth of the answers and also the quality of critique given to Living Difference. By the end of the process, the research had discovered a range and depth of knowledge regarding Living Difference, adding to the body of knowledge that had previously not been revealed.

Having provided the participants with a set of suggested questions prior to interviews, there is the issue of whether to use a questionnaire that would have provided improved

triangulation with regard to data. The question was, would this add to 'the voices' of the participants and run contrary to the qualitative philosophy of the research? Securing a sufficient size of sample in the region would also have proved problematic and difficult to achieve. As discussed in the methodology section, there are limitations with questions. Effectively, they are not as objective as they are portrayed. Questionnaires may be leading and also by their nature, have predisposed theories infused into the questions. Using grounded theory as a base for this research, it was the aim to try and avoid any prior judgements before having discussions with the interviews. It was difficult, as it was, to persuade some respondents that the research took no judgemental position regarding the agreed syllabus.

With regard to the interviews themselves, it soon became obvious, that despite the best of planning, they did not always run smoothly. Some interviews were interrupted, there was a case when both recorders broke down and the interview had to be rearranged, on another case the location of the interview had to be moved mid-session. In all these situations, the interviews were not compromised rather it led to a more comfortable atmosphere in which to conduct the session. The positive atmosphere for the participant was essential to the depth of answer that they gave. It was noticeable that responses at the beginning of the interviews were formal and quite specific. As the interviews continued and sometimes strayed from the suggested questions, answers became lengthy. This and other issues showed that the facilitation of good interviews is a work in progress. A further example was that the researcher was continuously aware of interviewer bias during the interviewing process. Great lengths, such as limited interpretation of questions to aid participants, were taken to reduce prejudice during the procedure. During the interview, instantaneous

decisions had to be made, balancing the philosophical ethic of qualitative research and the practical aspect of just letting the interview continue. Overall, the interviews were conducted in accordance to the methodology proposed, they allowed the aims of the investigation to be achieved and were a valid attempt to remove research prejudice from the thesis.

As a reflection, there is the consideration of the use of other forms of data, such as teacher observations. The issue again was that considering the limitation of time, resources and access, would this extensively profit the aims of the research? It was considered that observations of single lessons would be of limited value. Having observed and been observed, in over a hundred lessons, there is extensive evidence to show that such lessons are not truly representative of everyday practice. On a practical level, requesting significant time relief from daily teaching duties from senior management teams of the schools participating would not have been tolerated. Ultimately, the aim of the research was explore teachers' experiences and reflections upon Living Difference, not the students.

A final comment regarding the research design relates to the ever present shadow of researcher bias and the struggle for authenticity. In this situation there is always the issue of both being the 'insider' and the 'outsider'. Within the research design and the theoretical underpinning of its structure, there was always the intention to approach all aspects of the procedure with an open mind. Attempting to appreciate the personal, social and educational situatedness of the interviewees was paramount in the methodology.

Discovering the themes was undertaken in a systematic way but questions were raised if opinions were too close to the researchers' ; was this because of the my influence or was this an independent judgement? The answer to this lay in analyzing the rest of the interview

and seeing if there was a consistent pattern both within and across interviews. It may still be concluded that the research method was undertaken in a conscientious manner, a determination to be an authentic representative to the views of the participants and fulfilled, in large part, while acting as an outsider the aims of the research.

### 5: Final Steps

In practice, if circumstances allowed, there are several directions that would allow the conclusions of this research to be developed further.

The context of this investigation was during the publication of Living Difference and Living Difference (Revised) which I have discussed earlier. However, a more recent edition, under the guidance of Hannam (December 2016), has said to have addressed some of the issues raised by this research (Living Difference 3 p85). Described as stating the differences between itself and earlier versions, it asserts to have more emphasis on enquiry, develops the role of the teacher and is less prescriptive regarding pedagogical viewpoints. However, it is still concept based, the cycle remains the same, there is an emphasis in the use of questioning aligned with philosophy for Children (P4C) and it is still the legally binding document for state and voluntary schools within Hampshire. The methodology remains the focus of the agreed syllabus and it is still a conceptually based document. In this case, has a trick been missed? Could not the views of teachers, who were not supportive have been consulted extensively? Was there not a chance to experiment with a 'critical realist' stance and, specifically, how can the new document relate directly with the new style GCSE? Further research may interview present teachers regarding this new version. It would be

interesting to know if they saw any difference between this and previous versions and also if they still observed a 'cafeteria approach' to elements of the agreed syllabus. Does this reflect the state of religious education just locally or in a wider area? A further study of Living Difference may compare teachers from a different local authority, with a different pedagogical stance.

The final issue raised by this research refers to an issue of omission, that of spirituality. A further study may target this concept specifically to its provision, when teaching according to Living Difference. Its aim would be to investigate what teachers of religious education at KS3 view of the role of spirituality in their classroom. In this research, by its significant absence it seemed to be the elephant in the room'.

Although not in the questionnaire, the issue of the place of spirituality in religious education came to light. Both Ofsted and the agreed syllabus place spirituality as intrinsic to the aims of both SMSC and RE. Spirituality is a concept which is assessed by Ofsted and upon which a school can fail its inspection. Living Difference includes spirituality within its *raison d'être*, "to support students in developing their own coherent patterns of values and principles, and to support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development." (Living Difference Revised, 2011, p.13). And Ofsted states its aims are to, "ensure that RE promotes pupils' spiritual development more effectively by allowing for more genuine investigation into, and reflection on, the implications of religion and belief for their personal lives" (Ofsted, 2010, p.8).

However, the Agreed syllabus does not define the concept of spirituality, in which case how is it to be developed? The results from the research in this thesis display a distinct absence

of attention to the concept, instead 'concepts' seem to be interpreted in empirical terms and related to knowledge of or evaluation of various interpretations.

So the question is raised, what is religious education, even within Living Difference, without an active investigation into spirituality? Maybe this is a fundamental flaw or something that has just be missed in the literature? Possibly teachers are including, what they see as spirituality, in their practice. This is an area for future research for there was little evidence of it in this investigation.

At the beginning of this thesis, it was observed that the experiences of teachers of religious education with a greater variety of positive/negative perspectives would improve the present body of literature regarding Living Difference. This research has attempted to provide a platform for those voices, not in an effort to undermine the agreed syllabus but to view it through an authentic and pragmatic lens. Furthermore, the enquiry highlighted the gap between pedagogical theory and teachers' application of the methodology in the classroom. Following the methodology mechanically may produce good religious education but, according to the research, it rarely demonstrates an understanding of pedagogical theory. Moreover, there is still a tension between religious educational needs, such as demographic patterns, in a local area and those demanded on a national level. The outcome of that debate will have a significant impact on the very existence of the agreed syllabus. However, presently, the phrase 'it's good but....' seems to summarize respondents' perspectives regarding 'Living Difference'. With this in mind, ultimately, a judgement on Living Difference, in the present educational climate, will not be made by academics, advisors or this thesis. State schools, in practice, have relative freedom to choose how they teach religious education. As such, Living Difference has still to prove itself as an attractive

methodology to those managing religious education in the wide variation of those schools. Further research, to aid this target, may ask the question what would persuade a teacher of religious education to choose this syllabus.? Consequently, it is suggested, future research should listen to more teachers' voices and from an even wider selection of schools. Visiting schools in local authorities which have chosen Living Difference, as opposed to it being the legal obligation, would provide a more independent and alternate set of assessments. It would also provide an insight as to how the methodology works in a different social context. Furthermore, to provide even greater depth of understanding, it might also be considered to interview pupils who have experienced different teaching approaches. However, it appears that there is still significant work to be done for Living Difference to fulfil its potential and become attractive to a wider selection of schools and teachers.



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## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1: Original Interview Schedule**

**Appendix 2: Revised Interview Schedule**

**Appendix 3: Table Of Initial Analysis Of Interviews**

**Appendix 4: Example of Analysed Transcript**

**Appendix 5: Example of Supporting Documents**

**Appendix 6: Ethics Submission form**

**Appendix 7: Participant Information form**

**Appendix 8: Consent form**

**Appendix 1: Original Schedule:****Participant Interview Schedule****Study Title:** Is 'Living Difference' making a 'Difference'?**Researcher:** Patrick Quirke**Ethics number:****What is the research about?**

This research is being undertaken because of frequent questions raised at SACRE and amongst practising teachers regarding the impact of the 'Living Difference' Agreed Syllabus and seeking suggestions regarding how it can be improved.

The main questions of the research ask what difficulties teachers face when implementing 'Living Difference' and do these originate from a personal or philosophical source.

**Time of the interview**

The interview should take no longer than 1 hour

**Questions**

**The following questions provide the basis of a semi-structured interview. You are free to elaborate on any questions as you wish. Any questions that you feel are intrusive, you are free to ignore.**

- 1) What is your knowledge of the 'Living Difference' Agreed Syllabus and its statutory role in Religious Education?
- 2) What is your understanding of pedagogy in relation to 'Living difference'?
- 3) 'Living Difference' is said to be based upon a 'constructivist pedagogy. What are your views on constructivism in the classroom?
- 4) Does 'Living Difference' encourage reflection upon pedagogical argument?
- 5) Do you find any difficulties in applying 'Living Difference' methodology into classroom practice?
- 6) Can 'Living Difference' be used mechanistically to produce good RE?

- 7) How effective is 'Living Difference' in helping teachers improve their practice?
- 8) Has teaching RE, in accordance to 'Living Difference' caused you to reflect upon any personal issues in your life.
- 9) If, any, what impact has 'Living difference' has on your effectiveness as a teacher?

## **Appendix 2: Revised Interview Schedule**

### **Participant Interview Schedule**

#### **What is the research about?**

This research is being undertaken because of frequent questions raised at SACRE and amongst practising teachers regarding the impact of the 'Living Difference' Agreed Syllabus and seeking suggestions regarding how it can be improved.

The main questions of the research ask what difficulties teachers face when implementing 'Living Difference' and do these originate from a personal or philosophical source.

#### **Time of the interview**

The interview should take no longer than 1 Hour

#### **Questions**

**The following questions provide the basis of a semi-structured interview. You are free to elaborate on any questions as you wish.**

- 1) From your own personal point of view what do you see as the purpose of Religious Education?
- 2) Tell me about the time when you first came across 'Living Difference'?
- 3) What is your knowledge of the 'Living Difference' Agreed Syllabus and its statutory role in Religious Education?
- 4) What is your understanding of pedagogy in relation to 'Living difference'?
- 5) 'Living Difference' is said to be based upon a 'constructivist pedagogy. What do you understand by this and what are your views on constructivism in the classroom?

- 6) To what extent does 'Living Difference' encourage reflection upon pedagogical argument?
- 7) Please describe what you believe to be examples of good practice in Living Difference.
- 8) Can you tell me about any of the challenges you have faced in applying 'Living Difference' to your teaching practice?
- 9) In what ways can 'Living Difference' be used mechanistically, to produce good RE?
- 10) Can you tell me about your experience of 'Living Difference' with regard to progress and assessment?
- 11) How effective is 'Living Difference' in helping teachers improve their practice?
- 12) To what extent has teaching RE, in accordance to 'Living Difference', caused you to reflect upon any personal issues in your life.
- 13) If any, what impact has 'Living difference' had on your effectiveness as a teacher?
- 14) Is there anything you wish to add regarding your experiences with Living Difference?

### Appendix 3

**Table of Initial Analysis Of Interviews**

|    | <b>Question</b>   | <b>No knowledge</b> | <b>Basic knowledge</b> | <b>Working knowledge</b> | <b>Developed knowledge</b> |
|----|---|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1  | A thought out idea/purpose of RE?                                 |                     |                        |                          | 12                         |
| 2  | Possess a basic knowledge of Living Difference (LD)?              | 1                   | 1                      | 1                        | 9                          |
| 3  | Possess a working knowledge of the pedagogical background of LD?  | 4                   | 3                      | 2                        | 3                          |
| 4  | Possess a working knowledge of the methodology?                   | 0                   | 2                      | 3                        | 7                          |
| 5  | Did they describe strengths and weakness of LD?                   | 0                   | 0                      | 2                        | 10                         |
| 6  | Did they describe the strengths and weakness of assessment in LD? | 2                   | 1                      | 2                        | 7                          |
| 7  | Did they feel it helped teacher effectiveness?                    | 3                   | 2                      | 4                        | 3                          |
| 8  | Did it lead to personal reflection?                               | 0                   | 11                     | 0                        | 0                          |
| 9  | How many provided evidence to support their views?                | 2                   | 6                      | 0                        | 4                          |
| 10 | How many discussed spirituality?                                  | 9                   | 0                      | 0                        | 3                          |



## Appendix 4: Example of Analysed Transcript

This is the interview of [REDACTED] at [REDACTED]

My name is Patrick Quirke (PQE). I am a researcher at the University of Southampton undertaking a project into the experiences of teaching teachers in regard to Living Difference. This interview is part of a thesis investigating the experience of teachers who have taught RE at Key stage 3 and are in or around the [REDACTED] area. It specifically targets the opinions of teachers on the Living Difference (LD) agreed syllabus.

The interviewer will take a semi structured model allowing the interviewee to express themselves as they wish regarding the questions which have already been provided.

PQE: Thank you for supporting this project [REDACTED] Can you tell me when you first came across LD.

Q4 [REDACTED]: My experience dates back to the working party that was going to review the existing vision and insight and Clive Erika put forward the model and I can remember him sitting there looking at this type of enquiry he was drawing and I remember saying 'where is the pupil in all this?', and he paused and said 'right in the middle of the cycle', so my involvement dates back to then. It pre-dates it in terms of being able to compare it with the RE that was in Hampshire in Portsmouth before that, then seeing it launched, ever since then trying to make it work! model.

PQE: Thank you, what is your knowledge of the LD syllabus and its statutory role in RE? Q3 [REDACTED] In terms of a locally agreed syllabus as a maintained school it is a grey area because at [REDACTED] now it's an academy. Its status was as a maintained school we still just chose to follow LD, so in terms of being a maintained school, however as I understand, you can opt into a particular agreed syllabus if you are an academy. - Law status.

PQE: If you are not an academy?

Q3 [REDACTED]: then you are expected to as it is a legal requirement, within the law you have to follow the agreed syllabus. Law status.

PQE: Coming onto the theoretical aspects, what is your understanding of pedagogy in relation to LD?

Q3 NPY: On its simplest level it's the cycle of enquiry, going round the cycle when you are planning lessons and delivering and also being able to assess, so as a model it's there at every stage. It's about how, rather than what you do, in terms of pedagogy on it's simplest level it is almost content free and it wouldn't necessarily be just for education as well, but for a wider, more active approach to learning. Q1 Q2

PQE: LD is said to be constructivist pedagogy, what do you understand by this and what are your views on this?

NPY: I don't know, I don't know what it means to be constructivist.

PQE: Constructivist in its sense is – Clive Erika says no knowledge comes without experience, all knowledge is routed in experience, a person does not gain knowledge unless they experience it. Probe and and.



My background is from teaching 'A' Level Philosophy and I find there is an awful lot in 'A' Level Philosophy which links with this approach, so when you say constructivist I immediately think of empiricist view point of knowledge as apposed to rationalist views that there is some objective truth out there, in that sense other words which will come into this would be relativism, is this a relativist stance within education?

Q5

pedagogy

PQE: That is the accusation that people have levelled that he is relativist,

and you can see that but because the cycle is about religion, and religion is about the search for truth, were there are truth claims at least, then you are having to grapple with truth claims, but that still doesn't bypass the fact that this approach can be seen as relativist

Q5

pedagogy

PQE: Someone like Andrew Wright says there is some objective knowledge out there, would you agree or disagree with this within LD?

- Probe

I think the study of religion for a long time, particularly going back to ..... to the people who have trained over the past 20, 30 odd years, their own religious education has got this relative approach so we are so far removed from this religious instruction that, we are in a relativist society where education has to be relevant and I am not even sure what it would look like to have an education based on these absolute truth claims and religion being taught in that way, that's from someone who has taught for 25 years, but not in any faith school.

Q5

Q6

Faith schools  
Experience Q2

PQE: That is really interesting, so what would happen amongst your pupils, if your pupils come from an absolutist point of view? If you had Christians and Muslims - I believe in God - that's not relative, there is an unaffected truth, does that contradict the constructive method?

No, no. Relativism seems to be one of those terms that you immediately associate with constructivism because it is about what you bring to the situation, and the discussion and the debate, and the enquiry is that God exists and that is your fundamental believe, then you really need some skilful teachers to be able to handle this.

Q5

Q3

Q8: challenges

PQE: Those pupils would not have a relative view.

Yes, it relies heavily on the skill of the teachers to deal with that effectively. As I said, my background dealing with 'A' Level Philosophy students those are the sorts of questions we grapple with all the time, and as a teacher I learnt ways of allowing students to say things that are challenged, because it is an enquiry approach but maintaining the integrity of their own belief without them feeling threatened, and that is where the skill comes in. The strength of this approach is that it is about justifying your position, a philosophical enquiry that is going on, so there has to be recognition of the question of how - if you have a faith stand point do you then need to have it justified. So this position where you have a faith position, believing in God, but it doesn't stop you looking at the argument for the existence of God and those two can go hand in hand.

Teacher shall

Q7

Q4

pedagogy

Q4 P

Q1

purpose

PQE: To what extent does LD encourage reflection upon pedagogical argument?

I am not sure what you mean?



Q11.  
Electro-

Q3  
confidence  
Q7  
clarity  
non  
speculative  
Q7  
Q3

cycle

Q3  
spirits  
2  
Q4  
W  
strengths  
Q7  
it.  
Q11.

cycle.

Q3

contributing or gaining from the experience or gaining from those questions. I think the



model itself is a very attractive one; it's inclusive and allows dialogue between different latitudes.

Q11  
effectiveness

PQE: Prayer is a good example?

*spiritual cycle* [redacted]: Yes, there is spirituality in there, it's engaging, engagement with the local faith community, so all of this in the space of between 3 to 5 lessons, and that is one of the things that my understanding of LD has changed, and has particularly when I did some work with some AST's on writing some units and they said a cycle can last between two and five lessons. I tend to find my cycles now last for about 5 sessions. My experience at [redacted] where there are 5 specialist RE teachers, the other teachers tend to write the units towards their professional development, they didn't have the training outside of school, and they were quite prepared to see a cycle done in a lesson, so it was only after that, from my experience, seeing the cycle completed in a longer period of time, and it does change how you understand how the cycle works.

personal knowledge  
Q3, Q9, Q11

Q11

Q6:  
Pedagogy  
argued

PQE: Talking about good practices, can you tell me about any of the challenges you have faced in applying LD in your teaching practices.

*cycle* [redacted]: I think if you were say at the end of Yr9 and were looking at the Holocaust you could have a series of lessons that develop religious understanding and spirituality and the idea about God being there, suffering with them and some genuine debate and discussion, asking philosophical questions, spiritual questions, religious questions and moral questions about responsibility, and go back to the philosophical questions, is God responsible – going back to the cycle, the scheme were we started of at Western Wall in Yr7 and here is God saying he is never going to leave his people, and here we are, 1,000 years later, and his people have been left.

context  
↓

*cycle* During their lessons on the Holocaust, because these lessons have been placed for longer than the existence of LD, it has been quite tricky, we think how to improve these lessons, so on an negative side I think you could have a series of lessons following the cycle on the Holocaust, but actually I don't think you always have to follow the cycle to have good RE. If you follow it rigidly then you do have/can have good RE, but if you abandon it you can still use some key principles.

Q8  
difficult

Q8

hesitant.

= qualifies answer.

PQE: Let me rephrase the word 'challenges' are there any difficulties in applying LD?

[redacted]: That for me was a challenge, why get rid of something that I know does the job, to then think you are not following the legal requirement of lessons in RE.

pedagogical challenge  
Law.

PQE: Is that a problem in saying this methodology is the legal?

Prescriptive

[redacted]: I'm pausing because, it is hard to answer because it's never been anything other than that, and I think in RE where it is a local agreed syllabus we can ask these sorts of questions we can't ask in Maths or English or Science or any other subjects that are national curriculum subjects. I am not sure if those subjects, definitely at Secondary level there is an agreed model on how what you need to follow, I'm hesitating because I know that a lot of work at primary school with literacy and numeracy, definitely the academies, there is a definite model that is followed

Personal  
Q12

Prescriptive

PQE: is it legally binding?



At primary school, English and maths and numeracy there is and it's unusual to have a model that dictates how you are going to teach it.

PQE: That's one thing that makes LD unique. It's the only one that says 'you have to teach this', in a particular way.

Because of this it really forces you into that, it is interesting what you said before there are people that have said 'we are not going to do that', and I think as a professional I think that is not my position to choose not to, my professionalism comes in to say, how do I make it work. In Bay House we had probably 5 different understandings of how LD should work which led to some lively debate.

PQE: In what ways can LD be used mechanistically to produce good RE?

I think I have already explained that already, working with non-specialists, and assessment. I think one of the positives is being able to say we are at this stage of the cycle, this is what we need, we need to apply this at this stage, you can ask a 'what if' question, that works very, very well with the pupils – to say, you remember, we asked 'what if' questions so 'what if' there was no wars, 'what if' God answered every prayer, 'what if' animals had the same rights as humans, so pupils are able to follow the cycle as well. We have even done some co-construction work with pupils putting lessons together to yr9's and they have been able to follow the cycle, it's been that useful – to non-specialists. Moving on to assessment.

PQE: How does it help progress in assessment?

For non-specialists it's given us a very simple approach and a very simple model, if we were to do a written piece of work that would be assessed 5 times a year needs to produce work that needs to be assessed that we can report on, that progress has been made so we are moving away from levels, and how do you manage RE to people who are non-specialists, or even non-specialists who are working without levels, or reporting on levels should I say, to talk about what progress or what work and the enquiry approach when you get to an evaluation is quite straight forward, have they evaluated and have they drawn on the others.

On the negative, I have not seen a model of assessment that is manageable, because when I have had it explained, someone like Pat Hannam has talked about it it seems unwieldy and unmanageable, because it could be that you are assessing the applied bit here or you are assessing the contextualised bit – to do that say over one lesson a week and say we are going to have a standardised assessment on that how do you say, this is the level they have achieved as a lot of work they do has a whole more holistic approach than that and that comes back to teacher judgement and the expertise of a teacher and I think if I can identify one major flaw it would be the levels and how they are translated and how they are assessed. There could be a wide variety of ways that school could assess them.

PQE: How effective is LD to helping teachers improve their practice and does it make you reflect upon your personal issues in life – are they the same thing?

I am not really sure what you mean by 'personal issues in your life'?

PQE: Your actual life beyond teaching.



Probably not really. I would say if there was anything it would be from my background philosophy and also the philosophy man I subscribe to and he gives you lots of ideas that are encouraging physical thinking so it's to do with P for C, when you talk to Pat Hannam she will always be talking about P for C and it seems that she is pushing that more than the other things in LD and I am not sure that is always such a helpful thing, particularly with someone with a background in philosophy where I feel that I need to be going on courses on P for C because it is quite basic in comparison with some things we do. So I would say it has been far more useful as a practitioner and someone planning lessons, I can't really think of anything it can attribute to my personal life. In terms of improving practice, definitely, I think it's been useful in clarifying a model to follow because otherwise it can be quite nebulous in RE teaching, I am now inquiring, I am now applying, I am now contextualising and it really focuses and sharpens your approach, what are you doing now, so there is no wasted time, if you are doing any activity you need to justify that activity, and it is really valuable for that.

cycle

Q12.

P4C

Q12.

Q12.

model

PQE: What you have just said was going to be has LD had an impact on your effectiveness as a teacher, do you want to say any more about that?

Q13

No.

PQE My final thing, is there anything you wish to add about your experiences with LD

Q14.

I think people still haven't yet really grasped what it's about and there were quite a few years when it was introduced that frustration about 'I don't quite get it' and being told by Clive that that the weren't doing it properly, and it wasn't right going to courses, hearing people that network meetings Clive saying we weren't doing it properly, and I would still think now that there isn't enough common understanding and experience of what we really mean by LD, when you look on Hampshire Moodle and you look at some power points there I don't find them inspiring, I don't find them necessarily the kind of things I want to pick up and run with, and also just that whole model, we can show you what this is through a series of power points almost defeats what you, it's far too passive, should have some genuine examples, video lessons, some activities to go on.

little understanding

Q8

resources

Q8

Q5

critique the model

PQE: Would more training help?

Q8.

Yes, but it seems more like a business thing at the moment, and that's happened since the days of Clive, that's not to do with Clive. I think that RE, I moved to Hampshire 20 odd years ago for the RE, it was a professional decision and this was pre dating LD and it was a big network of really supportive RE teachers and I think actually for LD to work more effectively is to say if there was any way that that could work, people share good practice and good dialogue and going back to your question about the pedagogical arguments if that could happen it would be embedded in a better way and it is as simple as that, it does not look as though those days are coming soon. Sorry about finishing on a negative.

Training

Q6

Legend  
 Knowledge Theme  
 Pedagogy Theme  
 LD Strengths/Good practice  
 LD Weaknesses/Challenges  
 Assessment  
 Personal Interactions  
 Teacher Effectiveness

## Appendix 5: Example of Supporting Documents

15/07/2014

LMROA LEIV DNA RLNUATA

ILVE

Tuesday, 15 July 2014

DO NOW TASK: Unscramble the letters



## Learning Objectives



**Level 5** - Are you able to **Explain** what moral and natural evil are and your own attitudes towards why bad things happen? **(Must)**

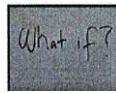
**Level 6** - Are you able to give detailed **Explanations** of moral and natural evil as well as using them to explain evil and suffering? **(Should)**



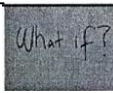
## Starter



- Watch the video clip and answer the question, as you will be expected to feedback to the class:
- Why do bad things happen to good people? Try to think of more than one explanation.



## What if?



What if bad things never happened to anyone?

Think of a positive point  
Think of a negative point



## How are evil and suffering explained?



- There are many explanations for suffering, some of which have been suggested already.
- Around the room you will find different bits of information, you need to gather notes on 4 of the explanations, before writing up your final argument in the centre.



## Moral Evil



As a result of having choice some humans decide to carry out bad actions which creates moral evil.

moral evil, by punishing people if they commit it. Whilst others believe that an all powerful, all loving God would not allow evil to happen in the first place.

15/07/2014

## MORAL EVIL AND NATURAL EVIL- Part 2

### EVIL How are evil and suffering explained? SUFFERING

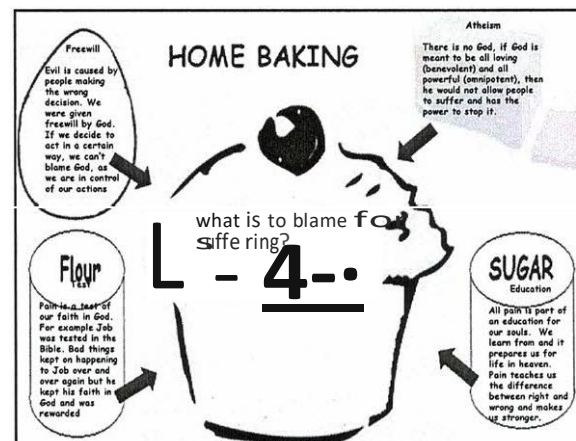
- There are many explanations for suffering, some of which have been suggested already.
- Around the room you will find different bits of information, you need to gather notes on 4 of the explanations, before writing up your final argument in the centre.

### Learning Objectives

**Level 5** - Are you able to **Explain** what moral and natural evil are and your own attitudes towards why bad things happen? (**Must**)

**Level 6** - Are you able to give detailed **Explanations** of moral and natural evil as well as using them to explain evil and suffering?

{Should}





**Appendix 6: Ethics Submission form**

From: Ergo [ergo@soton.ac.uk]  
Sent: 14 August 2014 16:59  
To: Quirke P.J.  
Subject: Your Ethics Submission (Ethics ID:10930) has been reviewed and approved

Submission Number: 10930  
Submission Name: Is Living Difference making a Difference?  
This is email is to let you know your submission was approved by the Ethics Committee.

You can begin your research unless you are still awaiting specific Health and Safety approval (e.g. for a Genetic or Biological Materials Risk Assessment)

Comments

None

Click here to view your submission<<http://www.ergo.soton.ac.uk>>

-----  
ERGO : Ethics and Research Governance Online  
<http://www.ergo.soton.ac.uk>  
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DO NOT REPLY TO THIS EMAIL

## **Appendix 7: Participant Information Sheet**

**Study Title:** Is 'Living Difference' making a 'Difference'?

**Researcher:** Patrick Quirke :

**Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.**

### **What is the research about?**

This project is in part submission for the Doctorate in Education degree from Southampton University. I am Head of Religion and Life issues at Miltoncross school, secondary school advisor to Portsmouth Standing Advisory Committee in Education and member of the Hampshire Research Group. I am undertaking this research because of frequent questions raised at SACRE and amongst practising teachers regarding the impact of the 'Living Difference' Agreed Syllabus and seeking suggestions regarding how it can be improved.

The main questions of the research ask what difficulties teachers face when implementing 'Living Difference' and do these originate from a personal or philosophical source. Secondly the issue of how difficulties are overcome is investigated. By analysing these issues, it is hoped that the results may improve the new agreed syllabus for the area..

### **Why have I been chosen?**

Participants have been chosen because of three criteria

- 1) Their experience of teaching RE and the 'Living Difference' Agreed Syllabus at KS3 in South East Hampshire.
- 2) They may also be identified through membership of SACRE, the Hampshire Research Group and attendance at RE Consortium meetings.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you decide to take part the schedule will be as follows

- 1) A date for an informal interview may be arranged. At this the researcher will outline in detail the nature of the interview and provide a list of questions. A date for the formal 'semi-structured' interview will take place
- 2) The formal interview: This be undertaken at a place and time of convenience for the participant. You may wish to present examples of planning or other material regarding your interaction with 'Living Difference'
- 3) Opportunity for feedback: You will be given contact details to arrange an informal interview regarding the analysis of your interview and materials after authorisation of Southampton University has been given (projected date: July 2015)

### **Are there any benefits in my taking part?**

There are no financial or material benefits for participation. However, participation may be mentioned in a CV. The information from this project will benefit the wider Religious education community by being presented to Portsmouth SACRE, the Hampshire Research Group and a summary being published in the BJRE.

### **Are there any risks involved?**

No risks are involved. The research is planned to be non-invasive and non-intrusive. Senior managers will know that you have taken part in this interview but will not have access to detailed findings.

### **Will my participation be confidential?**

All details of interviews will remain confidential in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and all data will only be used for the purposes originally specified. Furthermore, all aspects of data protection will correspond with the University of Southampton Policy on confidentiality. Interview data will only be accessed by two other people on the team whose contact details will be made accessible to the participants

**What happens if I change my mind?**

Participants have the right to withdraw at any time without affecting any legal rights

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

If any participants feel, in anyway , that they are uncomfortable or have any queries regarding the research, in the first instance they will be given contact details of the researcher and supervisor. Any further queries may be addressed to Research Governance Manager [rgounfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rgounfo@soton.ac.uk) at Southampton University.

**Where can I get more information?**

Further information may be obtained from

Patrick Quirke –

[pquirke@miltoncross.portsmouth.sch.uk](mailto:pquirke@miltoncross.portsmouth.sch.uk)

## Appendix 8: Consent Form

**Study title:** Is 'Living Difference' making a Difference?

**Researcher name:** Mr. P. Quirke

**Study reference:** 27/7/14

*Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):*

I have read and understood the information sheet ref: 10930 and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

☐

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study

☐

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected. I understand that my responses will be anonymised in reports of the research.

☐

### **Data Protection**

*I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.*

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....