Creativity in Religious Education

Introduction
At its Summer 2001 meeting SACRE looked at the issue of promoting creativity in RE. There is a sense among many teachers that the curriculum is so prescribed and outcome focused that it is no longer possible to be creative as a teacher or promote creativity among pupils. RE has suffered from this perception in some schools but not all, as can be seen from the work produced annually for the Barnabas Awards. SACRE is keen to promote creativity among teachers and among pupils and so has produced this guidance for teachers of RE. It is our hope that Heads and Co-ordinators of RE will find this useful as the beginning of a conversation with their departments in secondary schools and whole staff in primary schools as to promoting even more excellent RE. SACRE is indebted to Professor Ken Robinson for the All Our Futures report, which serves as a basis for this guidance.

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Chairman of SACRE

Defining what we mean - What is meant by creativity?

Creativity: defining what we are talking about
Here are some definitions commonly associated with creativity as set out in the All Our Futures Report:

Sectoral definition – creativity belongs within the arts. Within a school context creativity could be seen to be confined to Art, Music, English/Drama. This definition underplays the role of creativity in other areas of the curriculum – which are often seen to be skills and knowledge based.

Elite definition – creativity is the preserve of the few and is found among those with unusual talents. The focus here is on great men and women. Schools have a responsibility to promote such talent among their pupils but to do this at the expense of others is questionable in the eyes of some.

Democratic definition – everybody can be creative if they are given the opportunity. They will be creative in different ways but these ways are no more or less valuable.

The All Our Futures report favours the latter definition but goes on to define creativity in the following way:

*Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value.*

The breakdown of this definition is as follows:

- It must always involve thinking or behaving imaginatively;
- It must always be purposeful
- It must generate something original
- It must produce something of value

Here imaginative activity is a process that produces something which provides an alternative to the expected, conventional or routine.
Being original
Creative activity can be original in three ways:

- **Individual** – it may be original for that person relative to their previous work/output.
- **Relative** – it may be original relative to that person’s peer group, pupils in the class/year.
- **Historic** – it may be truly original relative to the total output in that field of expression.

Being original as part of a creative response also means that a person has the ability to be original. This is more than thinking creatively, it implies that a person must have the knowledge, understanding and skills in order to produce something original.

In fact the common misapprehension is that creativity occurs irrespective of the cultural-skills background of the ‘artist’ – this shows how influenced we are by the elite theory of creativity.

In order for teachers to promote creativity or be creative they must have a developed understanding of what they are trying to achieve.

**Being a creative RE curriculum manager**
As stated above being able to be creative means that you have to have a good level of knowledge and understanding of what you are already doing. A key question in this regard has to be around the professional competencies of those managing RE:

- Does the Head or Co-ordinator of RE understand how the Agreed Syllabus was designed to work?
- Are they aware of the flexibilities available in the planning and delivery of RE?
- Are they sure they understand the outcomes they are trying to achieve with staff and pupils relative to the Agreed Syllabus and their own context?
- How much training has the Head or Co-ordinator had to be able to fulfil their duties?

A useful audit tool in this regard is the Needs Analysis and Target Setting Grid at the back of each copy of the Agreed Syllabus (pages 59 – 61) and SACRE encourages its use for the better management of RE in all schools.

Managers of RE need to be creative with the resources available at all Key Stages. Often there are resources in the community which can further the aims of RE in the classroom, particularly in areas of the Agreed Syllabus that some schools find difficult to manage. Looking beyond the school for the most appropriate resources takes time, effort and a certain amount of creativity. What should be noted is that these outside resources often draw upon the world of arts and music to make their interests interesting to others.

**Ludgingan Community Primary School**
During a five week period the school worked with Ambassadors for Christ around themes in the Old Testament. The programme used story telling, music and drama to further pupil knowledge, understanding and reflection around some of the most important resources available to Christians in understanding their faith.
One way of promoting creativity in the planning of RE is to see where different curriculum areas can work together to promote different yet related outcomes. Such creativity presumes that Heads of Department and Co-ordinators are working together on curriculum development.

### Bishop Cornish VA CE School

During the academic year 2000 – 2001 pupils did work around the theme of WATER. In RE pupils at KS1 looked at the story of the Ark and at KS2 they sacrament of baptism. Pupils also did a project about the need for water in Geography and how that impacted on the lives of people in the Developing World and about water conservation in this Country. Pupils did work to support a charity providing clean water to African Villages and looked at how they could conserve water at school and the home. The Music co-ordinator introduced the music of Central African Pygmies who use water as a musical instrument and developed a piece of music with a group of pupils which used water as the medium through which music was created. Pupils produced written work around the theme of WATER to support the national literacy strategy and mathematical work to support the national numeracy strategy.

This work clearly met the aims and objectives of RE in the school in a creative way.

### Wadebridge Community Primary School

In a collaboration between RE, Music and Drama pupils staged a performance of the life of St Piran written and produced by a teacher in the school. Pupils investigated the lives of Cornish Saints and the particular contribution that St Piran made to the story of Christianity in Cornwall. The story expressed through song and drama, with the aid of design technology, was a testament to cross-curricular mapping and invention.

### Being creative as an RE teacher

Many teachers express their lack of confidence in delivering RE, even though this is often unfounded. For a teacher to be creative they need feel confident about what they are doing and all schools need to look at the training they provide for their teachers delivering RE. The issues are not necessarily the same for the primary and the secondary teacher and so at this point we shall consider them separately.

**Primary**

Part of the joy of primary teaching is the ability of the teacher to plan in such a way that subjects interact with each other for mutual benefit. Although teachers feel more and more constrained in this matter nevertheless opportunities are there within the school day. The question comes as to what can be done to promote originality in the classroom context. How best can the teacher deliver the Areas of Learning in the Agreed Syllabus and the Levels of Attainment and still be original when he or she has another ten curriculum areas to deliver? In the end it will come down to the vision of the teacher in the classroom.

### St Minver Community Primary School

With no easy access to a Hindu Mandir the KS1 teachers decided to make their own. Using papier-mâché, cardboard cut outs, silver and gold foil, cloth and paint they used traditional designs to make life size models with their pupils. These will remain as a permanent resource for the school.
Secondary
What many schools make-up in expertise they lack in time. Although departments need to be clear on how they further develop their staff as ‘experts’ in the field of RE. To be creative means that time must be given to a process and many secondary RE teachers do not feel they either have the time to build up the relationships necessary with pupils to foster creativity or time in lessons to make the opportunity real. Nevertheless, creativity can be seen in many RE classrooms in secondary schools. Familiarity with the Agreed Syllabus is essential and the ability to see more than one way of evidencing attainment is also key to being creative. As with primary colleagues the teacher’s vision is what will promote creativity.

Poltair Community School and Sports College
In work on Buddhism at KS3 teachers looked at the use of mandalas in promoting meditation and reflection among practitioners. By investigating traditional forms of the mandala and the symbolism contained within them pupils were then asked construct their own mandalas which reflected their concerns about their lives using Buddhist symbols and creating their own. By doing this pupils were reflecting on their own lives and seeking to communicate that to others through the use of this medium.

Saltash Community School
Pupils in KS4 were asked to produce a piece of work on a moral issue related to world poverty as part of their KS4 Coursework. In the final presentation pupils were asked to prepare and deliver a 3 minute summary of what they had found out and how that had impacted on them as individuals.

Being creative as a pupil
There is question that goes back to the 1940’s in RE: what are we trying to do in religious education? Two answers have emerged:

1. we are educating pupils about religion;
2. we are educating the religious within the pupil.

These two answers are reflected in the Learning about Religion (AT1) and Learning from Religion (AT2) in our Agreed Syllabus. Pupils may be creative in one or both of these ways. They may be creative about how they find out about the religions they are studying and how they present information about that religion.

Threemilestone School
A Y3 pupil was told that he was going to spend a half-term studying Sikhs. Using his own initiative he asked his parents to take him to the library to look for books and asked to go on the internet to look for web pages on Sikhs. One question he wanted to know was did Sikhs have one God or were they like Hindus with many gods. He decided that if he found a web site he might be able to e-mail a Sikh and ask his question. When asked how he would present that information to his class he thought of drawing a picture of a Hindu and of a Sikh and in the form of a speech bubble (like in a comic) he could present their points of view.

This shows that he was motivated to learn in RE and he was thinking creatively about getting information on the subject they were studying and presenting that information to others. This Y3 pupil was relatively creative.

Likewise they may be creative about their response to the religions they are studying and how it informs them as human beings.
King Charles VC Primary School
A KS1 pupil reflecting upon creation stories in Christianity and Hinduism noted that there was one big difference in the stories she had heard. For Christians God was outside creation, God spoke and it happened, for Hindus God was part of creation because the hairs on Brahma's body became the grass. Therefore, she felt, the Hindu story was better for protecting the environment because nobody would want to hurt God.

Here the pupil creatively used the ideas she had heard and worked with to come to a conclusion. She was creative relative to her peers who had not sought to reflect so deeply on the tensions between the two stories.

Teachers can also draw upon the other creative talents that pupils have and may seek to manage responses to work differently for different pupils. This is not always easy to achieve given the constraints of the curriculum day but it is possible.

Planning creativity into the RE curriculum
As already mentioned above Heads and Co-ordinators of RE and teachers of RE can plan the curriculum themselves in a creative way. It is also possible to promote a learning environment that is itself going to promote creativity.

Here are some questions that teachers can use to reflect on their own classroom management of RE:

Do pupils have the basic knowledge, understanding and skills to provide a base for creative activity?

How focused are tasks set to indicate that learning has occurred?

Do pupils have a clear concept of what the teacher wants as part of a piece of work: 'what I want you to demonstrate is…', 'how might you express the following ideas found in…' etc?

How open is the task to different expressions that learning has occurred?

How clear is the teacher about what is being assessed and what is being promoted?

How much time is given for creative activity to occur?

Humphry Davy School
KS3 Pupils were asked to produce a plan for the Church of the 21st Century. They were expected to study the traditional forms that churches had taken in this country since Saxon Times and how those forms had developed relative to theology in some denominations. On the basis of prior knowledge pupils were then asked to think about what people would need in the future and how a church might be designed to meet those needs. Pupils were expected to be creative through the medium of Art and Design Technology but were marked on their creative responses to the perceived needs of future generations.

The temptation is to confuse the medium with creativity. Because someone expresses his or her response in Art or Music it doesn’t make that necessarily creative. Originality as opposed to medium is the key.

What will stifle creativity in RE?
Lack of vision
Unless teachers have a vision for RE in their schools creativity will not occur. Likewise RE teachers may confuse creativity with artistic, musical or dramatic expression. Whilst all of these might express creativity it does not follow that they will. Drawing a picture of the Buddha might or might not be a creative exercise.

Insufficient Time
RE teachers will associate creativity with product only and not with process. Hence they will not focus their work in such a way that will give enough time for creativity to be nurtured and promoted. This impacts on RE in different phases in different ways. At primary RE is still a low priority for many teachers and its time is squeezed in light of other curriculum pressures. At secondary time is often an issue and some teachers only see their pupils once every two weeks. This doesn't allow pupils the continuity to sustain creative activity. If creativity is to be a reality in RE it must have enough time in the curriculum to be able to deliver a creative agenda. Although it must be recognised that many teachers are creative with the time they have.

Misunderstanding the nature of attainment in RE
RE teachers will not be able to see the connection between attainment in RE and the creative product of pupils. Tasks will become more and more focused on exhibiting the levels of attainment have be achieved by pupils. In the same way there is a danger of confusing the product with the RE attainment. Very often pupils are being rewarded for presentation and English skills not for the RE element.

Pupils perceptions of RE
Pupils may not see RE as a place where they can be creative or express their talent because of the way curriculum has become structured – particularly in secondary schools but also at KS2. Pupils may not see the need to build up knowledge, understanding and skill so they can be creative. This again shows how invasive the elite of creativity theory is. Many pupils have no concept of themselves has having creative abilities or that genius is a lot of hard work.

Always trying to be creative
Creative burnout. Some people want to be creative all the time – we must recognise that this is not possible and plan appropriately.

Conclusion
There are many tensions that teachers experience as professionals and there are too many for whom teaching has ceased to be a joy. Likewise for many pupils school has ceased to be a place where they can develop their individual talents. The All Our Futures report calls for a change in the way we run our curriculum and whilst this is not within the power of Cornwall SACRE nevertheless it believes that RE has an important part to play in creating a more positive environment for learning and the development of the creative potential of our teacher and pupils.