

## **Andrew Wright's Critical Realism, Clive Erricker's Radical Postmodernism and Teenage Perceptions of Spirituality**

### **Introduction**

This article is a report of my doctoral research completed in 2007. My research was carried out among secondary school pupils in England aged 12–17. Its purpose was to find out what they understood spirituality to be. When I say 'spirituality' I do not mean religious spirituality or the 'alternative' or 'countercultural' spirituality which was the primary focus of this conference. Instead I am addressing the distinctive debate in England about the nature of that spirituality, or to use the exact term, 'spiritual development', which has to be promoted by law in English schools. I will refer to this as spirituality-in-education.

All English schools must, by law, enhance the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, intellectual and physical development of their pupils (Education Reform Act, UK Parliament 1988). This law challenged traditional spirituality, which was essentially understood in the context of religions. Because *all* schools must provide for the spiritual development of *all* pupils, the spirituality enhanced in education could not be exclusively religious, since most of our students have no formal religious attachment.

Because most schools were unclear about the nature of this spirituality that they were supposed to be promoting, in 1993 the government curriculum authority published explanatory guidance (National Curriculum Council 1993). This was closely followed by similar guidance for schools from the government department responsible for school inspections (Office for Standards in Education 1994a) and for inspectors on how to evaluate students' spiritual development (Office for Standards in Education 1994b). All three sets of guidance posed a compromise between religious and non-religious interpretations of spirituality. As well as recognising that for some people spirituality is about their relationship with God, they included in their definitions, for example, the search for meaning and purpose, self-knowledge, creativity, feel-

ings and emotions. The government guidance of 1993–4 was the source of an academic debate that has continued until the present day.

### *Key questions*

The main purpose of my research was to give teenage students a voice in this debate in which they have never previously been consulted, although its outcomes affect them directly. This paper addresses two of my key research questions:

1. What do teenagers think spirituality *is*?
2. To what extent do teenagers' ideas mirror the opposing theories of radical postmodernist Clive Erricker and critical realist Andrew Wright?

Other scholars could have been included but Erricker and Wright represent the polarities of the debate in which they have been the most consistent contributors.

## **Theory of spirituality: the debate between Erricker and Wright**

### *Wright's interpretation of spirituality*

The debate between Wright and Erricker centres on their perceptions of reality, particularly those realities claimed by religions. Wright gave the title 'contemporary consensus' (Wright 1999: 11) to what he saw as the embodiment of romantic and relativist theories of spirituality and consequently the loss of the Christian basis for contemporary spirituality in the National Curriculum Council (NCC) and Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) guidance. With some justification he censures NCC, OFSTED and others who biased the 'consensus' towards what has become known as the anthropomorphic definition (Wright 1998); a bias which, he claims, leaves no room for the spiritual development of believers. Wright criticises those who support the consensus as having given insufficient attention to faith perceptions, 'an extraordinarily rich vein of spirituality' (Wright 2000: 31).

The core of Wright's interpretation is that spirituality derives from the public realms of faith systems, rather than the private world of the imagination and personal interpretation of experience. For anyone, be they of faith or not, to understand spirituality requires knowledge of those belief systems, which in turn requires the acquisition and use of the language of faith. Initially Wright defined spirituality in an exclusively Christian context as:

‘. . . the developing relationship of an individual, within the Christian community, with God’. This is achieved not by human reason or introspection but through the redeeming death of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, enabling a ‘life lived in proper relationship with God’. (Wright 1996: 73.)

Wright is not suggesting that schools should re-define spirituality on Christian principles. Rather he uses his example of Trinitarian Christianity to demonstrate the point that if one religious tradition is incompatible with the ‘consensus’ then the same may be true for the rest, with the result that the NCC and OFSTED definitions of spirituality do not take account of that of children from *any* faith community. He argues that the distinctive spiritualities of the world’s faiths ‘must be understood, in terms of their own inner integrity, as nominalistic’ (Wright 1996: 86) rather than culturally relative expressions of a universal religious experience.

With the multi-faith composition of Britain in mind, Wright provides a universalised form of his definition of Trinitarian spirituality, which could also be applicable to people of any or no religion:

Spirituality is the developing relationship of the individual, within community and tradition, to that which is – or is perceived to be – of ultimate concern, ultimate value and ultimate truth (Erricker & Erricker 2000: 88).

### *Erricker’s understanding of spirituality*

Erricker opposes the ‘consensus’ because, in his view, it is still too wedded to religion. Radically anti-realist, Erricker denies the existence of any objective reality. He views all knowledge as constructed according to the ideological assumptions of its creator; hence all knowledge is relative and only human narratives can be accepted as ‘truth’ (Erricker & Erricker 2000: 131). Consequently, any understanding of spirituality that takes its meaning from the ‘meta-narratives’ of religions (p. 62) should be rejected as being entirely linguistically and socially constructed by politicians and others in power, such as religious leaders. Erricker’s stance on spiritual development is consistent with his radical post-modern position. He champions spiritual freedom and in accordance with his views on education generally he believes that children should be allowed to construct their own ‘narrative meaning’ (which seems to be one of his terms for spirituality) from their own experiences and listening to the experiences of other children.

It is consistent with his stance on the fluidity of language that Erricker never gives a clear definition of what he believes spirituality to be. Sometimes it appears as 'narrative meaning' (Erricker & Erricker 2000: 62), at other times it is 'children's poetics' (p. 68). Erricker sees spirituality/faith as a process, an 'ontological category' for which epistemology is unnecessary. This process he describes as:

... an artistic endeavour that is creatively ongoing and of which the rational is but one aspect, alongside the intuitive and the emotional. Addressing the integration of these capacities in what we might call the construct of autobiography, by means of the process of narrative pragmatics; this we can call a pedagogy based on poetics or narrative construction. (Erricker & Erricker 2000: 69.)

Erricker is careful not to suggest a prescribed outcome because that would be 'to undermine the process itself'.

Both Wright and Erricker have had a profound impact on the theory and teaching of spirituality-in-education. My question was; how far do their ideas represent the views of students who are at the receiving end of spiritual education? Before answering this question I should say something about my research methods and data analysis.

## **Research methods and data analysis**

My research was conducted over five years, and was preceded by a pilot study, which trialled questionnaires and interview methods. 385 questionnaires were completed in four comprehensive schools by students across the full ability range aged between 12 and 18 (in addition to a further 250 in the pilot study). 177 of these were male and 208 female. 173 students described themselves as Christian, 104 as Muslim, 104 as having no religion, 3 as Pagan and 1 as Rastafarian. The questionnaire consisted of four open questions and one multiple choice question. The first three questions asked students to explain their understanding of the terms 'spirit', 'spirituality' and 'spiritual development'. The fourth, a context question, asked if they thought everyone could be a spiritual person and the fifth asked them to select from a long list the three school subjects that made most contribution to their spiritual development. Finally, students were asked to indicate whether they would be prepared to be interviewed further on the subject. Of those who volunteered 17 male and 17

female students were interviewed. These represented a cross section of age, religion and ability; these variables forming the basis of analysis during the research. Interviews were conducted by e-mail with the exception of a few students who preferred to be interviewed by letter.

A fundamental feature of this research is that the interviews were directed by perceptions of spirituality identified through the questionnaire rather than by *a priori* theory derived from scholarly definitions of spirituality. This principle was not derived from a relativist stance that questioned the validity of scholarly definitions but from the desire to hear the voices of young people. This presupposed an interpretive paradigm, which 'begins with individuals and sets out to understand their interpretations of the world around them' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000: 23). In particular the methods used resisted the imposition of external form and structure since this would reflect 'the viewpoint of the observer as opposed to that of the actor directly involved'; adopting the stance that 'theory should not precede research but follow it' (p. 22).

Completed questionnaires were subjected to micro analysis at word level (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 57). This stage revealed that some words used were functional rather than descriptive; for example, 'your spirit makes you who you are'. This observation led to the search for and identification of *semantic relationships* as recommended by James Spradley (1979: 107 ff.).

### Teenage perceptions of spirituality

It would be surprising to find teenagers aware of either the postmodernism that underpins Erricker's thinking or indeed Wright's critical realism. However, it is not difficult to find in students' thinking, individually and collectively, reflections of Erricker and Wright's positions. Students' perceptions fell into five broad groups which I have called clusters—because of the variety of views within each.

The distinctiveness of each cluster may be seen more clearly in table 2 below. Here four of the most prevalent ideas expressed by students are compared across the clusters.

There appears to be very little support here for Wright's theory while Erricker appears to be justified by the majority of student responses, which demonstrate highly individualistic thinking, showing that most students have come to their position with minimal interference from religion. As we have seen, only 9 per cent of nearly 400 respondents associated spirituality directly

**Table 1. Cluster descriptions**

	Whole sample
Cluster B (Spirituality is to do with beliefs)	26%
Cluster O (Spirituality is to do with relationships with others)	6%
Cluster P (Spirituality is to do with personal identity)	50%
Cluster R (Spirituality is to do with religion)	9%
Discrepant cases (There is no such thing as spirituality)	4%
No response	4%

**Table 2. Extended cluster analysis**

Cluster	Description	The real me	The spiritual struggle
<b>B</b>	Spirituality means holding beliefs	The spirit inside is created by God or 'something else' such as a universal essence. This person inside acts as a discipline and guide.	Everyone has the potential to be spiritual. Some people are more spiritual than others because they take their spirituality seriously and make the effort to strengthen their relationship with god.
<b>O</b>	Spirituality is characterised by caring relationships based on a knowledge and understanding of others.	The real self is often hidden behind the need to conform and make friends.	Everyone is spiritual to some extent but those who get on better with friends and family and are tolerant of other people and live at peace with others, respecting their point of view actually put their spirituality into practice while others don't.
<b>P</b>	Spirituality is individual identity, sometimes referred to as personality, character, soul or essence.	The inner person is the authentic, pure self that is hidden from all but closest friends. It is free and not subject to social conventions.	Everyone has a spirit but to be a spiritual person, the spirit must be acknowledged and understood. Some people are more aware of their spirituality than others and some choose not to show their spirituality. Spirituality may be intermittent and awakened by experience.
<b>R</b>	Religion is a prerequisite for spirituality.	The inner self is the God-given conscience.	Some more than others because some people are more religious.

with religion (Cluster R), the largest group (Cluster P) perceiving spirituality as individual identity, sometimes referred to as personality, character, soul or essence. This individual identity, also called the 'inner person' is the authentic, pure self that is hidden from all but closest friends. It is free and not subject to social conventions. This is precisely what Erricker demands for young people; that they should find spirituality in their 'metaphorical constructs' unhindered by the claims of others (Erricker & Erricker 2000: 63).

### Teenage perceptions and Erricker's interpretation of spirituality

According to Erricker, children are to find spirituality in their own experiences and personal narratives, not in imposed narratives 'to which they are

The eternal spirit	Relationship between spirituality and the spirit
After death the spirit goes on to a new life in a new place, that may be heaven or hell. Its destiny reflects the quality of the life lived and is decided by God. It is possible that the dead can communicate with the living.	The spirit determines one's humanity and uniqueness; it controls and guides our lives. Spirituality is a dynamic process that awakens awareness and recognition of the spirit, giving rise to specific traits such as a sense of direction and an instinct for good or evil as well as helping us understand our beliefs.
The spirit lives on in some form.	The spirit determines one's humanity and uniqueness; it controls and guides the emotions. Spirituality is a process that enables one person to uncover the spirit of another by helping us understand their beliefs. Spirituality enables us to do this because it gives rise to specific traits such as respect for others' beliefs.
The spirit continues after death but is apparently earthbound. It exists either a ghost or in the memory of loved ones, where conversations may be had.	The spirit determines one's humanity and uniqueness; it controls and guides our lives. Spirituality helps us understand ourselves and gives rise to specific traits such as confidence and receptivity.
After death the spirit goes on to a new life in a new place, that may be heaven or hell. Its destiny reflects the quality of the life lived and is decided by God.	The spirit determines one's humanity and uniqueness; it controls and guides our choices and beliefs. Spirituality gives rise to specific traits such as religiosity and helps us understand our religion and that of others.

expected to conform' (Erricker & Erricker 2000: 68). Several students revealed how their understanding of spirituality derived from experience. This is not the sort of 'religious' experience that David Hay writes about (Hay 1982) but rather what might be called life-experiences. The most explicit reference to experience was from 17 year old Haley (Cluster P) who wrote in her questionnaire that spirituality 'can't be taught through texts: grows from experience'. Expanding on this during interview she added:

I believe you gain spirituality through experience in life . . . the spirit can change because situations change . . . you yourself change to deal with what is being thrown at you.

According to 15 year old Fiona (Cluster P), spirituality grows out of the experience of introspection; looking 'deep within yourself':

I think that spirituality occurs when people have to assess their lives . . . I think a spiritual person who does take the time to look at themselves [*sic*] is likely to be a stronger person than someone who gives up.

Also, Erricker's insistence that spirituality should be constructed without the influence of religious formulae also has resonance with students.

A key finding of this research was the extent to which Christian and Muslim students showed no awareness of the meanings of spirituality in the teachings of their religions. Only six Christian students (4 %) refer to God in their definition of the 'spirit' although seventeen (11 %) do so in relation to spirituality. References to the Holy Spirit, or to the Trinity generally, were totally absent from all Christian responses both through the questionnaire and

**Table 3.**

	<b>Christian</b>	<b>Muslim</b>	<b>No Religion (N/R)</b>
Belief	34 %	26 %	16 %
Relationships with others	5 %	5 %	5 %
Personal identity	43 %	43 %	62 %
Religion	12 %	16 %	5 %
Discrepant cases	1 %	2 %	7 %
No response	9 %	9 %	11 %

Totals exceed 100 % because students gave multiple responses.

interviews. The only Muslim students to associate spirituality with God were the 6 per cent in Cluster B(ii) and a few of the 12 per cent in Cluster R. Most of their comments could be classed as demonstrating 'awareness'; typically 'having an interest in God' or 'something to do with God'. This is not to say that these students did not take their religion seriously; just that they did not associate it with spirituality. It would be reasonable to say that students display in their thinking about spirituality the independence from the influence of religious teachings that Erricker prizes. Moreover there are some points in which the views of teenagers overtly support aspects of Erricker's theory.

Several students convey a sense of integration, defining spirituality as, for example 'your beliefs, values and morals', or 'thoughts, beliefs, emotions'. Such ideas are comparable to Erricker's understanding of 'faith' as the integration of all aspects of personal life (Jackson 2004: 62). Others recognise the extent to which 'the spiritual' as a dynamic force 'governs one's positions'. For example 17 year old Imogen describes the spirit as 'emotions which make you see the differences between right and wrong' and Cathy similarly says, 'I think your spirit is inside of you . . . helping your mind to make up your personal decisions'. Closest to Erricker's position is this 15 year old girl:

Spirituality is the feelings and emotions that motivate you to do something. It is something deep within you that makes up your beliefs and morals.

However, although many of the students involved in my research expressed broadly relativist views, their highly individual responses to my questions owes more to the absence of teaching about the nature of spirituality by Church, Mosque, or school than adherence to Erricker's extreme anti-realist stance. This was apparent particularly in students' responses to Q3, 'Can everyone be a spiritual person?' A sizable minority (42 %) who denied universal spirituality did so with a realist agenda; for example some had prescribed understandings of spirituality that excluded materialists, those without beliefs and those who 'do bad deeds'. This does not in any way support Erricker's contention that 'all knowledge is relative and only human narratives can be accepted as 'truth' (Erricker & Erricker 2000: 131), for it follows that *all* human narratives must be true and therefore all definitions and forms of spirituality must be true. Even the 58 per cent of students who believed that everyone could be spiritual argued from a belief in equality rather than adherence to relativism. From Erricker's perspective, personal narratives and knowledge may not be evaluated epistemologically because all knowledge is of equal potential value. Thus there are no criteria (except the intuitive faith of the individual) for evaluating

one truth against another. This is the supreme weakness in Erricker's position. Taken to its logical extreme, it provides a justification for those who distort undeniable historical 'knowledge', such as those who deny the Holocaust.

There are other significant differences between my research and Erricker's position. Although my research meets Erricker's requirement that the voices of children are heard, what we hear from students is very different and has inevitably resulted in a different profile of responses. Erricker found categories which he named 'my little pony', 'all-American kid', and 'family orientated'. I found no evidence for these categories but I have found limited evidence of the 'hard man', a characteristic adopted by some boys in order to become socially acceptable. In addition it is clear from my data that some, albeit a minority of students, do understand spirituality in exclusively religious terms. Erricker allows for no such category.

What we have here is evidence of individual perceptions of spirituality based on experience rather than the imposition of ideas from elsewhere, as Erricker requires. However, the pressures and anxieties of these young people which, in some cases, prevent them from realizing their spirituality, raises further questions about Erricker's postmodern stance, which as we have seen, requires that individual perceptions of spirituality remain unchallenged. The most serious practical weakness in Erricker's position is the abandoning of children to their own limited experiences and understanding without apparently offering them any alternatives that might stimulate new insights and directions. This is particularly worrying in the case of children with a violent world view (e.g. Erricker & Erricker 2000: 165). For an interviewer to record a dialogue without intervening, even if the subject expresses extreme antisocial tendencies, is professionally correct. However, Erricker offers his interviewing technique as a model for classroom practice (p. 181), where leaving a child to believe that his or her choice of worldview or lifestyle is as acceptable as any other is highly questionable. Hence Wright is justified in his criticism that Erricker's pedagogy leaves children 'in a moral and intellectual vacuum in which they are forced to fall back on their own resources' (Wright 1998a: 94). The evidence provided by these students supports Wright's arguments. For example one has to ask who will offer students an alternative view of the world that might alleviate the confusion and unhappiness caused by their perceptions of a world where to 'fit in' one has to be a slave to consumerism (girls) or laddishness (boys). This is a reminder of J. Priestley's comment on postmodernism: 'in its extreme forms, [it] allows anybody to interpret anything in any way' that inevitably leads to 'some form of cultural, moral and spiritual anarchy' (Priestley 1997: 28).

## Students' perceptions and Wright's interpretation of spirituality

Wright's view that students' spirituality should draw on 'spirituality as an object of critical study' (Wright 1998: 100) finds strong support from the students. When asked which subjects contributed most effectively to their spiritual development, students' top nine nominations were as follows:

Fifteen-year-old Eliza explains how Religious Education (RE) has helped develop her beliefs, particularly about God:

Personally taking RE has changed my opinions on my Christian points of view, being Christian myself, it has led me to develop my own personal beliefs which I understand more clearly, however I also accept that other people have different points of view and doing RE has enabled me to gain an insight into them and question certain areas of the religion which previously I was unsure about.

When Erricker applies his thinking to religious education, he finds a subject dominated by the teaching of the meta-narratives of religions. He regards the religious content of the curriculum as perpetuating each religion's assumptions, strengthening the claims of religions against a secular world view; in other words, a manipulation of the curriculum to maintain power. One of Erricker's most radical proposals is to separate children's spiritual development from religion altogether, on the grounds that it 'cannot be expressed and reflected on by the children themselves as long as the subject enquired

**Table 4. Students' choice of the aspects of education that make the greatest contribution to spiritual development**

Subject	Number of nominations
Religious education	217
Personal, social and health education	128
Assembly	106
Art	72
Physical education	53
Tutor period	49
History	44
Music	42
English	42

into is defined by the concept “religion” (Erricker & Erricker 2000: 26). These views are not shared by the students who agree rather with Wright’s view that a study of faith perceptions offers ‘an extraordinarily rich vein of spirituality’ (Wright 2000: 31).

### **The spiritual profiles of subjects**

A review of questionnaire responses and interview records revealed that a number of terms occurred regularly in students’ explanations of *why* they nominated specific subjects. When analysed it became clear very quickly that their explanations described different aspects of subjects that caused students to nominate them. These aspects could be described as each having a different semantic relationship with the subject. The combination of these aspects gave each subject a different profile that described how students perceived its unique contribution to spiritual development. These aspects are best described as:

- Key learning processes contributing to spiritual development
- Personal involvement in activities contributing to spiritual development
- Learning environments contributing to spiritual development
- Substantive concepts contributing to spiritual development
- Personal spiritual outcomes

These aspects were not allocated equally across subjects, as illustrated in table 5.

In realising this breadth of experience in subjects, students unconsciously echoed the debate in scholarship over how schools should promote pupils’ spirituality. This debate is often portrayed as being polarised in support for affective and cognitive approaches (Watson 2005: 149). The key learning processes, personal involvement and learning environments are the principal concerns of those who advocate affective approaches while the substantive concepts are central to the cognitive argument.

I will limit my illustration of the subject profile to RE, being the subject in question.

## The contribution of Religious Education to spirituality

An analysis of subject choice by age, gender, religion, ability and cluster showed that in every category RE headed students' choice of subjects. Table 5 shows that RE is identified as contributing to all the key aspects of subjects discussed earlier, contributing particularly well to key learning processes, subject content and attitudes/personal qualities. A higher proportion of boys (75 %) than girls (61 %) nominated RE, which reflects the greater emphasis boys placed on the connection between religion and spirituality.

Students' reasons for nominating RE illustrate well the differences between clusters. Only 57 per cent of Cluster P nominated RE, one of the lowest figures of all groups, and the reasoning of these students shows why the selection of RE is in keeping with their leitmotif that spiritual development is to do with the inner self, as the following two examples illustrate. Iona (Cluster P) justified her choice of RE with reference to 'meditation periods' which she enjoys in her Roman Catholic school:

The teacher takes the class into a small room, full of cushions, and the students are asked to take a seat and close their eyes, whilst they are played a piece of relaxing music. It is entirely up to the students how they spend this time. They are really expected to sit quietly and reflect on their lives, their emotions or things that are bothering them.

In Iona's rationale we see clear evidence of key learning processes (meditate, reflect), personal involvement (emotions) and learning environment (freedom, relaxation, enjoyment, atmosphere). Husna, a Muslim also in Cluster P justifies her choice of RE with particular reference to personal outcomes:

At home I'm mostly taught about my own religion however at school there was a contrast . . . Other religions which I disagreed with now I have a better understanding and respect for . . . throughout my life I will encounter people with different social/religious backgrounds. It has in general made me a better and more understanding person.

For Husna subject content is only important for its contribution to her personal development and she identifies key attitudes and personal qualities (understanding and respect), concluding that these make her a 'better person'. Iona's and Husna's choice of RE is entirely consistent with their overall Cluster

Table 5. The spiritual profiles of subjects

Subject	Religious education	Personal, social and health education	Assembly	Art
<b>Key learning processes</b>	Talk Think Discuss Express opinion Meditate Reflect	Listen Talk Express opinion	Listen Think Talk Contemplate Reflect Silence	Research Think Express Imagine Create Design
<b>Personal involvement</b>	Feelings	Feelings	Feelings	Emotion Self-revelation
<b>Learning environment</b>	Freedom Choice Enjoyment Relaxation Atmosphere	Freedom Working with friends Developing relationships		Freedom Enjoyment Relaxation Fun Calming
<b>Substantive concepts</b>	Questions Ideas Beliefs Religion Spirituality God Morality Cultures	Morality Racism Relationships Community Problems	Questions Beliefs Religion Morality Bullying World issues People	Issues
<b>Personal spiritual outcomes</b>	Understanding Respect	Understanding		Self-understanding

P theory and they identify, in different ways, aspects of the subject that contribute to their personal development.

In contrast, 15 year old Eliza from B(ii) has a very different view of why RE contributes to spiritual development, giving an outstanding explanation of how RE has helped develop her beliefs, particularly about God:

In RE I study Judaism and Christianity and this enables me to research thoroughly into the different aspects and nature of God within these religions e.g. the Trinity. It also enables me to understand and accept that everyone has a different opinion on the subject and therefore no one person has the correct answer and I have to accept God in my own way.

	<b>Physical Education</b>	<b>Tutor period</b>	<b>History</b>	<b>Music</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Drama</b>
	Concentrate	Talk Discuss Express opinion	Talk Discuss Express opinion	Listen Create Express	Talk Discuss Create	Listen Talk Discuss Share ideas Express opinion Create Express
	Self-transcendence	Feelings		Feelings Self-transcendence	Feelings	Feelings Self-revelation Self-transcendence
	Enjoyment Calming Discipline Control	Working with friends		Enjoyment Escape Calming		Relaxation Working with friends
		Problems Home	Religion Spirituality Cultures War		Cultures	
	Confidence Self-esteem Improvement					

Personally, taking RE has changed my opinions on my Christian points of view. Being Christian myself, it has lead me to develop my own personal beliefs which I understand more clearly, however I also accept that other people have different points of view and doing RE has enabled me to gain an insight into them and question certain areas of the religion which previously I was unsure about. I believe everyone has their own personal God and this does not have to be encountered through an already established religion. However, an established religion does offer the opportunity to learn about God and his covenant with you as a human being. An established religion is also recognised throughout the majority of the world and therefore people are more likely to accept your beliefs, but as already stated

God is completely individual and personal to everyone and therefore no one has the right to be prejudice against you about your own beliefs. God can be present at any time and anywhere and no one religion can explain Him fully because he is infallible.

Subject content is important to Eliza because it has a purpose, particularly in its contribution to attitudes and personal qualities (understanding, awareness, open-mindedness). Eliza illustrates well the difference between Clusters B(ii) and R, for although she recognises that her religion has shaped her beliefs, her priority is the development of personal beliefs which, crucially, do not have to be encountered through an established religion.

In contrast, Bakir and Janna (Muslims, Cluster R) selected RE because it makes them better Muslims. Bakir and Janna related their personal religious development specifically to the substantive concepts at the core of RE. Both students learnt about other religions but when explaining the influence of RE on their spiritual development both focused on Islam:

(Bakir): RE helped me to become religious and believe what i think is best; ISLAM. . . in school I learnt about islam about the holy cabba but theres lots more to come.

(Janna): In RE i am currently studyin 2 religions which are sikhism and islam. . . in islam i have learnt more about my religion. things such as how to live my life according to allahs will. . . this has helped me alot as i try not to develop jealousy. because Allah hates jealousy cos it destroys a person.

A high percentage (68 %) of Cluster O nominated RE on the grounds that it contributed to their knowledge and understanding of others as well as self. This is the view of Maimuna:

RE. . . helps you grow in your culture and religion because in RE you learn about your religion and other religions. . . I think it's important to learn about other people's lives and religions because then by knowing someone is no good you need to know their religion and beliefs. . . I meant that it is important to understand what other people believe because that helps understand them. I think spirituality is more about understanding people than religion.

The analysis of students' views on RE by Cluster reveals some interesting features about their choice. Students' rationales for selecting RE are dependent

on their understanding and experience of the subject and what they get out of it. Students regard content as more important in RE than any other subject, but as a means to ends (developing beliefs, developing in one's religion, understanding others) than as an end in itself. What is apparent here is that many students from different perspectives have found RE to make a significant contribution to their spiritual development, but that contribution varies for each person. This has an important bearing on the academic debate, supporting Wright's view that the case for RE is easy to make out because it raises 'spiritual questions of fact and value' (Wright 1998: 100) but lending no support to Erricker's claim that spiritual education should be removed from teaching about religions.

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