

## The Shap working party on World Religions in Education



### Angela Gluck

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It was a Tuesday afternoon, I seem to recall. It was definitely raining, that much I remember for sure. At my first Shap meeting, I was heartened by the great mix of academics, practising teachers and faith community leaders.

My initial Shap experience had been at Goldsmith's College in the spring of 1975: a conference brilliantly conceived and competently organised by on our very own Brian Gates on the subject of Peace and Conflict in World Religions. There was a talk about 'Bibles and Bullets in Northern Ireland'--I came across Richard Harris' poem "There are too many saviours on my cross"—and a visit to the Imperial War Museum but I seem to have spent most of the time in the workshops about Jihad, given by the late Riadh El-Droubie. The whole thing left a lasting impression on me.

I was struck by the title of the working party. I could be forgiven for assuming that 'Shap' was an acronym and was struggling to work it out: 'Spiritual Health and Positivity' for example? Not likely, though it was the 1970s! 'Satisfaction, Happiness and Purpose'? Even more improbable.

Naming an institution after a place is a well-established practice but the locations are usually regions or capital cities—not obscure Cumbrian villages. It was much later that I realised that the place was random and had simply been where the first gathering had happened. So, if the founders had got better hotel rates at Puddlington-under-Slush...

Gone was 'comparative' and that was a progressive move. For Shap and—to be fair—a few other contexts, religions could be themselves and valuable in their own right, without points of reference, without any equivalencing. 'World' gave religions a broad canvas and a global reach, literally and metaphorically. It wasn't education in world religions, which would have been



obvious—teaching and learning about world religions. But it aimed at world religions in education—much broader in scope and much more ambitious.

I liked this Shap thing. It complemented my already huge commitment to SCFIDE (Standing Conference on Interfaith Dialogue in Education). Whereas SCFIDE aimed to slay dragons, Shap was about changing the world one article or one lecture at a time. It was much more respectable.

I enjoyed the challenges of organising and contributing to Shap conferences, and writing for publications, including the journal quite regularly. But the undoubted highlight was the honour of editing the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary retrospective volume 'Religions and Education 1969—89', the 'best of Shap' that far. I wanted to call it 'The Shape of Shap' but I think the editorial committee found that frivolous or flippant. I'm sure they were right.

The 1989 conference was a trip down memory lane in the same hotel. I was delighted and impressed that the motorway signs that signalled places including 'Shap' were in the exact same bright blue as the cover of 'Religions and Education'! At the celebratory dinner, I said that proved Shap was on the map. Indeed it was.

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