

The Shap working party on World Religions in Education



Roger Howarth



Way back in 1972 as a teacher of religious studies freshly out of college and entering my second profession after 5 years in the Civil Service I was given an envious job as teacher in charge of RE. It was my task to build the subject department in what was a relatively new comprehensive school led by the youngest headteacher in Birmingham. Supported by an equally young Inspector of RE in the city, one Peter Woodward, I was able to develop a truly multi-faith curriculum in that school. Shap, at that time for me, was the key source of information, conferences, people and inspiration. What is lost in the annals of time, or my memory, is exactly how I came to be a Shap member but what is clear is that it must have some connection with Peter Woodward and my involvement in the whole vibrant multi-faith movement surrounding the Birmingham Agreed syllabus.

Later in the early 1980s, as a Senior lecturer and schools liaison officer at the then Regional RE Centre, in Birmingham, my membership of Shap was consolidated and in my time I enjoyed roles on the editorial board of the Shap Journal and also being the co-editor of the Shap Calendar for a few years, although the knowledge and expertise of my fellow editors certainly outstripped my own. Belonging to Shap was not only significant in my growth as a teacher of religious studies but it opened my mind to the importance of understanding and knowing your fellow traveller in life and how an individual's world view and traditions shaped their very culture and being.



Although I left the "RE World" around the year 2000 in any formal way my strongest memories come from my time in Shap and not surprisingly they are the people. I remember with fondness Riadh-el-Droubie the first Shap person to come and speak to my GCSEs students in the 70s. I recall the wisdom of Hugo Gryn and revelled in being in his company several times; I valued the friendship and support, in particular, of Peter Woodward, Brian Gates, Roger Butler, Vida Barnett, and Herbert Schultze as we promoted the World Religions in Education approach. And finally, for me, Shap brought together some of the finest people of faith and no faith in the UK and Europe who recognised the essential nature of multi-faith dialogue and learning in education.

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