

The Shap working party on World Religions in Education



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I first came across SHAP during my initial teacher training in the early 1980s, but it was about a decade later that I was invited to join the working party. I already knew several members, including Roger Butler, Angela Wood, Lynne Broadbent, Clive Lawton, David Rose and Alison Seaman. This was due to their involvement in the wonderful programme of professional development that I had received in my early career by virtue of the Inner London Educational Authority.

As I joined, I had just completed a period of work as part of a group working with the organisation SCAA (The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority) on the model syllabus for RE. I'd also been elected to the NATRE (National Association of Teachers of RE) national executive and become an adviser for a local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education.

Around the table at SHAP meetings were internationally acclaimed academics, advisers with decades of experience, trainers and authors whose skill and expertise had helped to shape my knowledge and skills as a teacher. It was quite an overwhelming experience to attend and people have since commented that I was uncharacteristically quiet in those early days.

I soon learned that my voice as a practising teacher was very much welcomed. There was always a wonderful sense of fellowship and equality within the working party and I was positively encouraged to contribute to the discussions and decision making. I am sure listening to these experts helped me learn how to express some of the issues that emerged in the RE classroom more clearly and precisely. When I began to be actively involved in RE advocacy, the grounding at SHAP meetings helped prepare me for meetings with



ministers of state, other members of parliament and senior officials who surprisingly did not seem so scary anymore.

As the years went by, I was elected onto the board of the RE Council; encouraged to stand by Prof. Brian Gates who was then the Chair of the RE Council. My role on SHAP then widened from being one of the voices from the classroom to being able to share developments from the other RE organisations I served. I like to think the benefit was mutually beneficial. I was able to inform the organisations about the work and the wisdom of my fellow SHAP members and I and others kept SHAP members informed about the work of different groups.

I was reminded of the significance of SHAP in the history of religious education when I heard Dr Joyce Miller speak recently about her work on the Commission on Religious Education (2018). She reminded those present of the ground-breaking conference at SHAP Wells Hotel in 1969 that led to the formation of the SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education and she had personally attended the SHAP conferences on Hinduism and Islam in the two following years. I can only imagine how it must have felt as a young teacher, to attend those conferences and to explore for the first time, the teaching of world religions.

My own secondary religious education teacher was clearly an 'early adopter' because I was first introduced to world religions as a pupil in 1972; only a year after the publication of Schools' Council Working Paper 36: Religious Education in Secondary Schools. I was then in my second year of secondary education and it began my passion with the subject that has shaped my own career.

Teachers then and now clearly have much to be grateful for in the work of SHAP. It makes me sad to think of the working party coming to an end. However, I have a sense of pride when I think of this history or look on my bookshelves and see the collection of SHAP publications because I know I was a small part of it. Moreover, I have made some life long friendships that I know will endure, so in my heart, SHAP lives on.

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