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DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH:

**CHILDREN'S CONCEPTS
AND
THEIR PLACE IN
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

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St John's College**

**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The School of Education
University of Durham**

MMV

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- 3 MAY 2007

ABSTRACT

The thesis addresses the issue of what are primary school age children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* and explores their place in the teaching of Religious Education in the UK.

A synopsis of the doctrines and death rite practices of the six major religions are reviewed. The place of those concepts in Religious Education is presented and discussed.

Qualitative and quantitative research method techniques are employed using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Two age groups of primary school children are targeted for the purposes of the interviews and main research study questionnaire — 7-8 (Year 3) and 10-11 (Year 6) year olds. A total of fifteen interviews was conducted as a pilot study. The main research study questionnaire involved 763 respondents from eleven schools — 406 from a multi-faith and multi-cultural region and 357 from a culturally more homogenous region. These elements allow for age and gender demographic factors and for the environmental factors — belonging to a faith community and living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region to be analysed. Four hypotheses were formulated and focused on the patterns of association between children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* and four independent variables — age, faith, gender and location. The following hypotheses were tested for evidence of the patterns of association between the variables through a quantitative test of significance:

1. Age: Younger children are as able as older children to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*
2. Faith: Children with no faith-base are as able as those with a faith-base to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*
3. Gender: Boys are as able as girls to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*
4. Location: Children not living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region are as able as those who do to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*

The results of the analysis were as follows:

- Age hypothesis: there was a difference between younger and older children.
Faith hypothesis: it was possible to trace differences according to faith-base.
Gender hypothesis: there was only a difference between boys and girls with respect to what they think comes after death.
Location hypothesis: there was a difference according to location.

The tests of significance were then complemented by examining patterns in the qualitative data to explore trends and exceptions where appropriate. A range of examples of the children's responses are used to illustrate the findings and are evaluated.

This research shows that children are willing and able to express their concepts of *death* and *life after death* regardless of age, faith, gender or location. The research affirms that children are capable of considering the concepts of *death* and *life after death* and they should be given the opportunity to explore them further. School is an advantageous and universally available place where meaningful consideration of the search of these concepts should occur as school is a familiar environment for discovery, learning and understanding for children. Religious Education is the most relevant area of the school curriculum where children's discovery and learning can be focused on the exploration of these concepts through investigating ultimate questions with the rites of passage and doctrines of the major world religions. The quantitative and qualitative data produced and analysed in this thesis provide sufficient confirmation to support the meaningful and worthwhile updating of Religious Education syllabi for implementation by teachers and those responsible for Religious Education.

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Finally, I should like to share my deep gratitude and love for my parents, Jean and Michael, and 'my little brother', Guy who always believe in me and continually love, care, encourage and support me in all my endeavours no matter where they take me on my unique life's journey.

Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark;
and as that natural fear in children is increased by tales, so is the other.

Francis Bacon

Death belongs to life as birth does.
The walk is in the raising of the foot as in the laying of it down.

Rabindranath Tagore

The word death means a lot to me it can bring tears to my eyes!
It signifies never seeing life as meaningless.

Year 6 girl

The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.

Plutarch

CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Contents	5
Tables	9
Figures	10
Acronyms	11
Chapter One	
Introduction	12
1.1 Background.....	12
1.2 Background of research interest	15
1.3 Research questions to be investigated	17
1.4 Summary of chapters	19
1.5 Defining the term ‘concept’	21
Chapter Two	
Understanding Death and Life After Death in the Major World Religions	22
2.1 Outline of chapter	22
2.2 Introduction.....	23
2.3 Christianity	30
2.4 Judaism	33
2.5 Islam	35
2.6 Hinduism.....	36
2.7 Sikhism	37
2.8 Buddhism	38
2.9 Place of death as the end of existence.....	39
2.10 Nature of the taboo of death	40
2.10.1 Impact of the taboo in Western society.....	41
2.10.2 Impact of the taboo on children	47
2.11 Summary of chapter.....	50
Chapter Three	
The Place of Death and Life After Death in Religious Education in England	52
3.1 Outline of chapter	52
3.2 Place of Religious Education in the English school system	53
3.2.1 Introduction.....	53
3.2.2 Education Reform Act 1988.....	54
3.2.2.1 Central principles of the Act.....	54
3.2.2.2 School organization	57
3.2.2.3 Religious Education in State maintained schools.....	58
3.2.2.3.1 Organization of Religious Education syllabi.....	58
3.2.2.3.2 History of Religious Education syllabi.....	60
3.2.2.3.3 Overall content of Religious Education syllabi	62
3.2.3 Religious Education in faith schools.....	64
3.2.3.1 Voluntary controlled schools.....	64
3.2.3.2 Voluntary aided schools	65

3.3	Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study	67
3.3.1	Introduction	67
3.3.2	Aims	68
3.3.3	Subject sample	68
3.3.4	Validity and survey process	69
3.3.5	Model Syllabuses	69
3.3.5.1	Introduction	69
3.3.5.2	Model Syllabus: Faith Communities' Working Group Reports	70
3.3.5.3	Model Syllabus Model 1: Living Faiths Today	73
3.3.5.4	Model Syllabus Model 2: Questions and Teachings	74
3.3.5.5	Identified shortcomings of the Model Syllabuses	75
3.3.6	Religious Education syllabi followed in the death and life after death children's concepts study	77
3.3.7	Birmingham Agreed Syllabus	78
3.3.8	Durham Agreed Syllabus	82
3.3.9	Birmingham Diocesan Guidelines	84
3.3.10	Durham Diocesan Syllabus	87
3.3.11	Summary	92
3.4	What are ultimate questions?	92
3.4.1	Introduction	92
3.4.2	Meaning and purpose of ultimate questions in Religious Education	92
3.5	Plowden and Swann education reports	95
3.5.1	Plowden report 1967	95
3.5.2	Swann report 1985	100
3.6	Summary of chapter	101

Chapter Four

Review of the Concepts of Death and Life After Death Research Literature 102

4.1	Outline of chapter	102
4.2	Introduction	102
4.3	Concepts of death	104
4.3.1	Children's concepts of death	104
4.4	Concepts of life after death	106
4.4.1	Children of 5-8 years of age concepts of life after death	106
4.4.2	Children of 8-14 years of age concepts of life after death	110
4.4.3	Children's concepts of life after death through death education	112
4.4.4	Goldman and children's religious thinking	115
4.5	Summary of chapter	126

Chapter Five

Research Methods 129

5.1	Outline of chapter	129
5.2	The National Religious Education Festival Study	129
5.2.1	Introduction	129
5.2.1.1	Aim of the National Religious Education Festival	131
5.2.1.2	Quality Religious Education	131
5.2.2	Aim of the National Religious Education Festival Study	133
5.2.3	Aim of the Festival questionnaire	133
5.2.4	Questionnaire design, content and validity	133
5.2.5	Subject sample	136
5.2.6	Questionnaire distribution	136
5.2.7	Information to school children	137
5.2.8	Validation process	138

5.2.9	Analysis of death and life after death question	138
5.2.10	Findings.....	139
5.2.11	Manipulation of data	140
5.2.12	Discussion	143
5.3	Death and life after death children's concepts study	146
5.3.1	Introduction	146
5.3.2	Aims	146
5.3.2.1	Overall aim	146
5.3.2.1.1	Subsidiary aims.....	146
5.3.3	Pilot Study No.1	147
5.3.3.1	Aims	147
5.3.3.2	Questionnaire design, content and validity	147
5.3.3.3	Subject sample.....	149
5.3.3.4	Data collection process.....	149
5.3.3.5	Validation process	150
5.3.3.6	Analysis	150
5.3.3.7	Findings	151
5.3.3.8	Discussion	152
5.3.4	Pilot Study No.2	155
5.3.4.1	Aims	156
5.3.4.2	Interview design, content and validity.....	156
5.3.4.3	Subject sample.....	158
5.3.4.4	Data collection process.....	158
5.3.4.5	Validation process	159
5.3.4.6	Analysis	160
5.3.4.7	Findings	160
5.3.4.8	Discussion	161
5.3.5	Main research study: Questionnaire.....	164
5.3.5.1	Aim.....	165
5.3.5.1.1	Subsidiary aims.....	165
5.3.5.2	Questionnaire design, content and validity	165
5.3.5.3	Subject sample.....	169
5.3.5.4	Access and data collection process.....	170
5.3.5.5	Validation process	171
5.3.5.5.1	Piloting the questionnaire	171
5.3.5.5.2	Main research study distribution of the questionnaire.....	171
5.3.5.6	Data entry and analysis.....	172
5.3.5.7	Manipulation of data	173
5.4	Summary of chapter.....	174

Chapter Six

Presentation of the Data and Analysis	175
6.1 Outline of chapter	175
6.2 Main research study: Questionnaire	175
6.2.1 Introduction.....	175
6.2.2 Primary schools in Birmingham	176
6.2.3 Primary schools in Durham.....	177
6.2.4 Response rate	177
6.2.5 Hypotheses	178
6.2.6 Age hypothesis: Younger children are as able as older children to conceptualize death and life after death.....	182
6.2.6.1 Hypothesis discussion and confirmatory conclusions.....	202

6.2.7 Faith hypothesis: Children with no faith-base are as able as those with a faith-base to conceptualize death and life after death	205
6.2.7.1 Hypothesis discussion and confirmatory conclusions.....	233
6.2.8 Gender hypothesis: Boys are as able as girls to conceptualize death and life after death	235
6.2.8.1 Hypothesis discussion and confirmatory conclusions.....	250
6.2.9 Location hypothesis: Children not living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region are as able as those who do to conceptualize death and life after death.....	252
6.2.9.1 Hypothesis discussion and confirmatory conclusions.....	268
6.3 Summary of chapter.....	269

Chapter Seven

Discussion of Developing Children’s Concepts of Death and Life After Death in Religious Education

in Religious Education	271
7.1 Outline of chapter	271
7.2 Extent and attitudes to the death taboo	272
7.2.1 The schools	272
7.2.2 The children	274
7.2.3 Response to adult inhibition of death taboo.....	276
7.3 Nature and style of Religious Education	278
7.4 Inclusion of the concepts of death and life after death in Religious Education....	280
7.4.1 Exploring the concepts of death and life after death through ultimate questions	281
7.4.2 Exploring the concept of death as a rite of passage	282
7.4.3 Exploring the concepts of death and life after death through various faith communities’ teaching	283
7.4.4 Implications of this research for Religious Education	285
7.5 Conclusion	288

Chapter Eight

Conclusion.....	289
8.1 Summary.....	289
8.2 Overall conclusion.....	292
8.3 Recommendations for future research.....	294

Bibliography

Appendix 1: Education Acts	317
Appendix 2: Birmingham Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction (1950)	318
Appendix 3: Birmingham Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction (1975)	322
Appendix 4: National Religious Education Festival Primary and Secondary School Age Questionnaires.....	324
Appendix 5: Pilot Study No.1: Festival Questionnaire.....	326
Appendix 6: Pilot Study No.1: Modified Festival Questionnaire.....	330
Appendix 7: Main Research Study Questionnaire.....	333
Appendix 8: Summary Table of Practical Research Project in Chronological Order	338
Appendix 9: Publication: Listening to Children Talk About Life, Death and Life After Death.....	339
Appendix 10: Publication: Death and Beyond: Some Ultimate Questions	344

TABLES

		Page
Table 2.1	Adherents to religions in UK in millions	25
Table 2.2	Percentage of UK population adhering to religions	26
Table 2.3	Adherents to religions worldwide and in UK in approximate millions.....	27
Table 2.4	Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 19	29
Table 2.5	Summary of the main features relating to death and life after death of the major faith communities in the UK.....	51
Table 3.1	Primary school years	58
Table 3.2	Secondary school years	58
Table 3.3	Religious Education syllabus followed in Birmingham schools.....	77
Table 3.4	Religious Education syllabus followed in Durham schools.....	77
Table 3.5	Ultimate questions Key Stage 2 Diocese of Durham R.E. Syllabus 2000	89
Table 5.1	Number of respondents to the <i>Festival</i> questionnaire from Years 3 and 6 in a Birmingham school	151
Table 5.2	Number of interview participants from Years 3 and 6 in a Birmingham school.	160
Table 5.3	Number of respondents to the <i>Festival</i> questionnaire and interviewees from Years 3 and 6 in a Birmingham school.....	161
Table 6.1	Ages and sample sizes of participants from schools in Birmingham.....	176
Table 6.2	Ages and sample sizes of participants from schools in Durham.....	177
Table 6.3	Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 11	183
Table 6.4	Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 7	184
Table 6.5	Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 8	189
Table 6.6	Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 10	196
Table 6.7	Comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 11	207
Table 6.8	Comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 7	208
Table 6.9	Comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 8	214
Table 6.10	Comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 10	222
Table 6.11	Comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories — Question 11	236
Table 6.12	Comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories — Question 7	237
Table 6.13	Comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories — Question 8	241
Table 6.14	Comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories — Question 10	246
Table 6.15	Comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 11	253
Table 6.16	Comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 7	254
Table 6.17	Comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 8	258
Table 6.18	Comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 10	263
Table 6.19	Summary of quantitative analysis	269

FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1	18
Figure 2.2	30
Figure 3.1	76
Figure 6.1	183
Figure 6.2	185
Figure 6.3	190
Figure 6.4	197
Figure 6.5	207
Figure 6.6	209
Figure 6.7	215
Figure 6.8	223
Figure 6.9	236
Figure 6.10	238
Figure 6.11	242
Figure 6.12	247
Figure 6.13	253
Figure 6.14	255
Figure 6.15	259
Figure 6.16	264

ACRONYMS

AT	Attainment Target
CEM	Christian Education Movement
DBE	Diocesan Board of Education (Church of England)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ERA	Education Reform Act (1988)
LEA	Local Education Authority
n	number — sample size
NCC	National Curriculum Council (1988-1993)
<i>Festival</i>	National Religious Education Festival
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
QCA	Qualifications Curriculum Authority (Oct 1997 to date)
PCfRE	Professional Council for Religious Education
RE	Religious Education
RI	Religious Instruction
SCAA	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (1993-1997)
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education
VA	Voluntary aided schools
VC	Voluntary controlled schools

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

This thesis explores children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*, and their place in the teaching of Religious Education in England.

The questions raised and explored, and the issues discussed throughout the thesis are set within the context of Religious Education. It is a compulsory subject in the school curriculum, alongside the National Curriculum (Chapter 3). There are several integral elements of Religious Education which are important to be aware of for the framework of the thesis:

Religious Education develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of, and their ability to respond to, Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. By exploring issues within and across faiths, pupils learn to understand and respect different religions, beliefs, values and traditions (including ethical life stances), and their influence on individuals, societies, communities and cultures.

RE encourages pupils to consider questions of meaning and purpose in life. Pupils learn about religious and ethical teaching, enabling them to make reasoned and informed judgements on religious, moral and social issues. Pupils develop their sense of identity and belonging, preparing them for life as citizens in a plural society.

Through the use of distinctive language, listening and empathy, RE develops pupils' skills of enquiry and response. RE encourages pupils to reflect on, analyse and evaluate their beliefs, values and practices and communicate their responses.

RE does not seek to urge religious beliefs on pupils nor compromise the integrity of their own beliefs by promoting one religion over another.
(QCA, 2000: inside cover)

It is axiomatic that Religious Education is, and should continue to be, an essential part of education in the United Kingdom (UK) (Chapters 2; 3; 4; 7). It is not the intention of this thesis to consider various alternative approaches to the exploration of religious concepts and 'ultimate questions' (Section 1.2; 3.3; 3.4; Chapter 7).

Children's encounters with death depend on their life experiences both internal and external to the school environment. Children may lose a 'loved one' who could be a relative, a friend or a pet, naturally through illness, old age or prematurely as a consequence of an accident. Road accidents happen frequently and children may be particularly aware of them travelling to and from school¹. Some children will experience a neighbour dying and/or the death of someone with whom they are acquainted. Children may have an awareness of the process of dying through knowing someone who is terminally ill or they themselves could have an incurable condition causing them to be more acutely aware of the prognosis.

For other children their main encounter with death maybe through the media such as the news, on the radio and television, and in the newspapers which is less personal in nature. Children may also watch television programmes, like dramas, soap operas, cartoons or films with a *death* and possibly *life after death* theme.

Children maybe exposed to *death* and *life after death* through music (Grice, 1997, Mitchell, 1998). Their awareness of these concepts maybe enhanced through the words, the melody and the variety of styles ranging from popular to classical. Reading, either fiction or non-fiction, is another way that children maybe exposed to the issues of *death* and *life after death* (Tolkein, 1979).

In more recent years, there has been the growth in availability of computer games as well as the internet, where children may engage with concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Children may access news, faith communities', and Religious Education web sites where aspects of this topic are considered (RE-XS, 1999).

Through the school curriculum via, for example, science — biology and natural history, Religious Education, history, sex education, health education, citizenship and collective worship, children may encounter concepts of death. Many children learn about the stages of life or life cycles, reproduction and nutrition of a range of animals and plants at school. Similarly, the channel of media through, for instance, natural history programmes on television, provides children with encounters of the concepts of death due to an awareness of animals killing other animals for food or dying naturally. This reflects the diet of human beings as well as hunting and fishing.

¹ In 2003 there were 1.2 million road deaths globally, 3,508 (2% up on 2002) of which were in the UK. In the UK, the total number of casualties was 290,607 (4% down on 2002) of which 33,707 (6% down on 2002) were serious casualties (Cadbury Learning Zone, 2004).

During these life experiences some children may have the opportunity through their family, school and/or faith community to explore and discuss what they think and to ask questions about *death* and the possibility of *life after death*, and to find out other people's viewpoints and beliefs. However, in my experience, many children do not have this opportunity to develop their understanding, despite death being a certainty of life itself. This is in spite of children's innate interest and fascination with issues of *death* and *life after death*. It is also regardless of their capacity to reflect on life experiences, and their ability to develop and refine their conceptual awareness.

In current Western post-modern society, death is widely perceived to be a taboo subject (Jupp & Rogers, 1997, Walter, 1994). Some people's stance appears to be borne out of wanting to protect children from all that is often associated with death, including the sorrow, pain, doubts, questions and potential fear-factor, and thereby minimizing the risk of these happening. Perhaps this is reflected in how many people's experiences, views, knowledge and understanding of *death* and *life after death* are coloured and moulded by cultural influences and changes in society. With all the changes in health and living conditions and medical provision during the twentieth century in England and Wales, for example, the death of children has become less frequent and more people are living long lives as adults. Overall, throughout the twentieth century life expectancy at birth has progressively increased (Hicks & Allen, 1999).

One of the major consequences of more people surviving long into adulthood has been that the process of death and dying has become sanitized in many families and communities, including to some extent in faith communities, as they are distanced from it. Today, fewer people die in their family home surrounded by their family and friends than in the past (Brown, 1994, Griffin, 1991, Walter, 1994). They die instead in hospital or residential care which further distances the issue from day to day life. However, in the past thirty years the hospice movement has sought to promote palliative and bereavement care and with the advent of supportive care in the community, once again more people are being enabled to die in their own home (Robinson, 1997, Saunders, 1990, Walter, 1994).

Those adults who wish to avoid children, particularly those of primary school age, having a forum in school to explore the issues and questions of *death* and *life after death*, exacerbate the extent of the taboo. From my professional teaching experience, it would be helpful for children if adults, including parents and those involved professionally in education, for example, headteachers, Religious Education co-ordinators, and staff and students in teacher training, did not perpetuate this attitude. It raises the question whether there is a tendency to over-protect children from some aspects of life's experiences by trying to make them appear risk-free or at least minimize the possible effect of taking risks? Consequently, there is an increased need to research children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* and their place in Religious Education.

Death as a taboo and its impact on exploring the concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children is discussed further in Chapters 2 and 7.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH INTEREST

My interest in children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* and the issues surrounding their exploration with children, especially in an educational context and school environment, originates from eleven years' teaching experience. Six of those years were taught in a six hundred and thirty pupil multi-faith, multi-cultural primary school in Handsworth, Birmingham where I was Religious Education co-ordinator and responsible for organizing the daily collective worship throughout the three-form entry school for three and a half years.

Through teaching I became particularly aware of children's instinctive interest in ontological issues and 'big questions of life' or namely *ultimate questions* (Section 3.3; 3.4; Chapter 7). In particular, this included expressions of concern and sympathy for the death of their relatives, friends, neighbours, and pets, as well as for the bereavement experiences of their family, friends and acquaintances. In addition, the children demonstrated a sense of their own mortality and future death, and the questions all these experiences raised for them. They willingly discussed their theories of the purpose of life and the possibility of *life after death* with their peers and teachers (Jepson, 1997). The children appeared to value the time and space to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. All this was regardless of whether the children had previously any personal experiences of bereavement or not.

Sometimes the informal discussions and debates were spontaneous and at other times they were a planned part of the school curriculum, especially in the Religious Education scheme of work. Some of the children whom I taught had personal experiences of bereavement while others had none at that time. A number of children, to my knowledge, did then experience bereavement for the first time within a year or two of teaching them. The children were keen to share their own thoughts and if they belonged to a faith community, as most of them did, they would readily incorporate the perspectives of their religious beliefs and practices too. The major faiths represented at the school were: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism (in declared numbers rank order).

It became increasingly evident that little research had adequately focused on and explored the important concepts of *death* and *life after death* from primary school age children's perspectives (Chapter 4). There seemed to be a lack of research that demonstrated children's awareness of these concepts and the range of individual understanding and need, set within the school context and environment. Nor was any link made as to how such concepts could contribute to broadening children's Religious Education experience in all types of schools. This raises the question of whether many children have the opportunity to discuss the concepts of *death* and *life after death*, and, if so, with whom?

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO BE INVESTIGATED

The research is to investigate children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*, and their place in Religious Education in England. Two age groups of children selected from Key Stage 2 should enable and facilitate the research project to focus on exploring the following questions on the concepts of *death* and *life after death*:

1. What are primary school age children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*?
2. What is the place of the concepts in the teaching of Religious Education?

It is from this basis that the methodology was developed from the literature survey to investigate (Chapters 2; 3; 4):

- What concepts of *death* and *life after death* do primary school age children have and express?
- If and to what extent are children's concepts associated with demographic factors such as age and gender?
- If and to what extent are children's concepts associated with environmental factors such as belonging to a faith community and living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region?

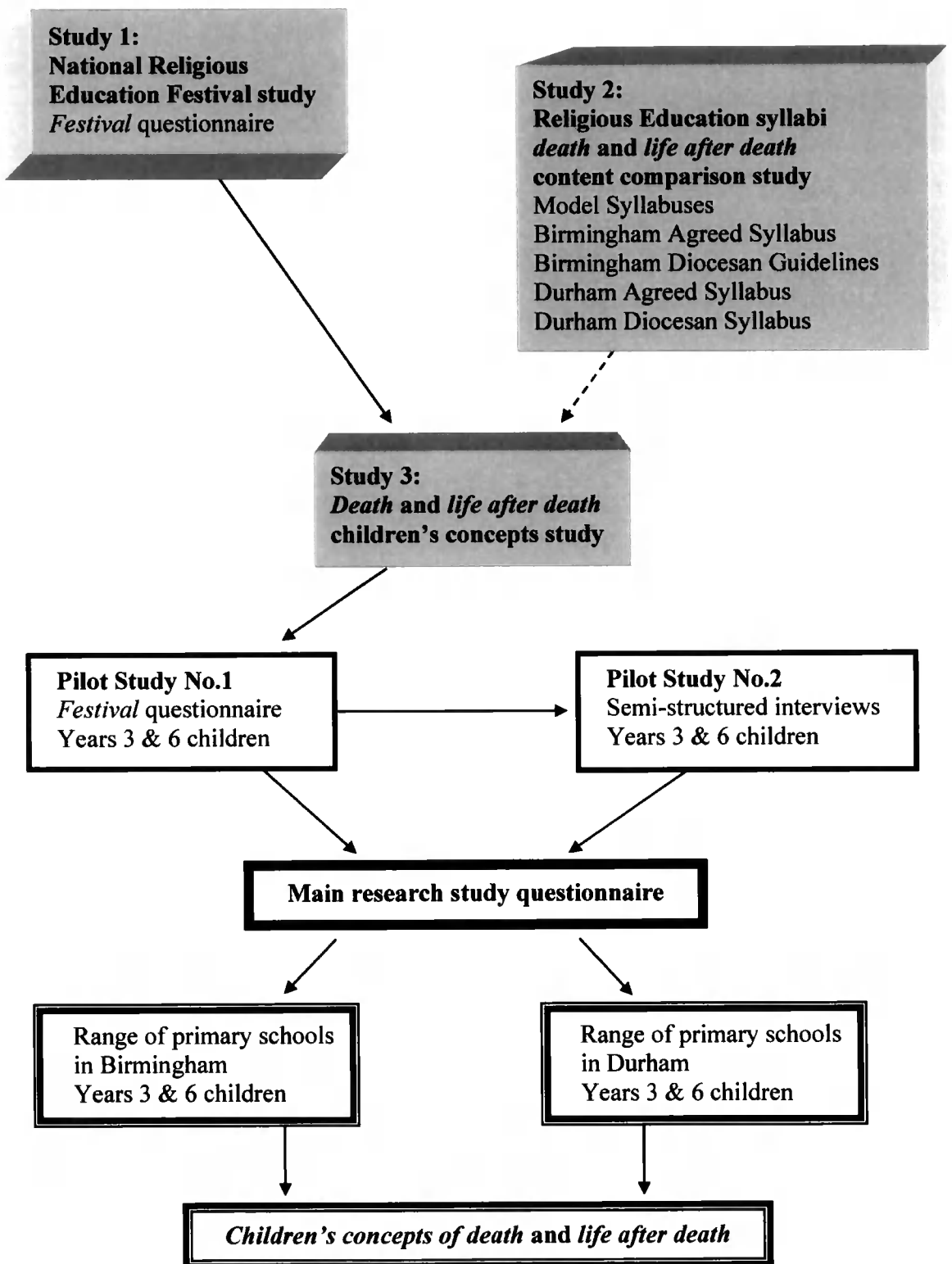
Consequently:

- How might these research findings impact on Religious Education syllabi² in different environments?

A framework of the research conducted in this thesis is summarized and shown graphically in the flowchart Figure 1.1.

² Religious Education does not have a National Curriculum unlike that for other subjects, for example, mathematics. For a fuller explanation see Chapter 3.

Figure 1.1 Framework and sequence of the research conducted in this thesis



1.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

The following is a synopsis of each subsequent chapter of the thesis.

Chapters 2 and 3 are intended to provide the particular national background to this research and facilitate the review of the research literature in Chapter 4.

Chapter Two Understanding Death and Life After Death in the Major World Religions

Considers the understanding of *death* and *life after death* in the context of rites of passage and through the doctrines and death rites of each of the six major world religions. Reference is also made to those for whom death marks the end of existence. The issues and concerns of death as a taboo are discussed and the possible impact that it has on exploring *death* and *life after death* concepts with children.

Chapter Three The Place of Death and Life After Death in Religious Education in England

Presents the place of Religious Education in the English school system and consequently the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study*. The Study reviews the position of these concepts in the Religious Education syllabi in England relevant to the research project.

Chapter Four Review of the Concepts of Death and Life After Death Research Literature

Reviews the research literature on the concepts of *death* and *life after death*, as primarily conducted on children. There follows a detailed review of the more influential research within the context of Religious Education on children's thinking.

Chapter Five Research Methods

The research process and methodology developed and employed in the research project is presented separately as there are three distinct Studies forming the thesis, namely:

1. *The National Religious Education Festival study*
2. *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* (reported in Chapter 3)
3. *Death and life after death children's concepts study*

Chapter Six Presentation of the Data and Analysis

The data and findings of the main research study questionnaire of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* are presented. The analysis is in relation to the research questions and four key hypotheses which reflect the core elements of the research. The effect of four independent variables— age, faith, gender and location, and their association with children's concepts of *death and life after death* is tested for evidence of the patterns of association through a quantitative test of significance. The tests of significance were then complemented by examining patterns in the qualitative data to explore trends and exceptions where appropriate. A range of children's responses are used to illustrate the findings and are evaluated.

Chapter Seven Discussion of Developing Children's Concepts of Death and Life After Death in Religious Education

Discusses the children's concepts of *death and life after death* in relation to the findings of the research, and in particular, those of the main research study questionnaire of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* and their relevance for inclusion in the teaching of Religious Education.

Chapter Eight Conclusion

Summarizes and reflects on the findings of the research presented in the thesis.

1.5 DEFINING THE TERM 'CONCEPT'

There are various ways of defining what is perceived by the term, 'concept'. For the purpose of this thesis the following definition of a concept is used:

A set of ideas and properties which can be used to group things together. It is a generalized idea which may be abstract or concrete. Human cognitive processes are often considered to progress by the formation and elaboration of concepts, resulting from increased experience.

(Stratton & Hayes, 1988: 35)

In other words, a concept involves exploring new pathways of thinking. It is important for children and adults to have opportunities to explore concepts as they encourage and enable personal growth and development. Consequently, the responses given by both children and adults, whether they are verbal or written or visual or physical, form an essential part of the process of developing their concepts.

A complementary, constructive way of perceiving concepts is provided by Elizabeth Ashton:

Concepts are mental structures which help us to assimilate experiences and information, and to formulate, as a result, values, theories and opinions which may, or may not, be based on informed judgement.

(Ashton, 2000: 45)

The variety of concepts and the context in which they may be explored, is limitless. People who explore concepts which are part of a faith tradition's teaching, beliefs and practice, irrespective of being members of that faith community or not, can grow and develop as thinking, reflective and interacting people. The exploration allows people to have a greater awareness of the doctrines, beliefs and practices which are at the heart of a religion's place and purpose, and to which its followers adhere. As I consider it is possible to explore various concepts with children in Religious Education such as God, prayer, forgiveness, love, and pilgrimage, I determined to focus this research on children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*.

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH IN THE MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS

2.1 OUTLINE OF CHAPTER

The chapter has two main parts:

1. The understanding of *death* and *life after death* in the six major world religions
2. Death as a taboo and the impact that it has on discussing *death* and *life after death* with children

The chapter considers the understanding of *death* and *life after death* in the major world religions. Death is widely seen to be one of the 'rites of passage'. Studying rites of passage as part of the Religious Education curriculum, is one unequivocal way of exploring *death* and *life after death* with children. A summary of how *death* and the possibility of *life after death* are perceived by the major world religions is then presented in terms of the doctrines and death rites³. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism are represented in communities across the United Kingdom (UK). Brief reference is included to death as the end of existence. An awareness of doctrine and death rites are helpful in relating them to, and hence having a better understanding of, children's perceptions of *death* and *life after death*, and how their thinking may be associated with the teaching, beliefs and practices of the faith communities.

The way in which adults of all ages and backgrounds appear to struggle or avoid discussing concepts of *death* and the possibility of *life after death*, seems to generally pervade Western society at the present time. There are also those who articulate that these issues should not be debated which exacerbates the notion of a taboo. All the children in the research project live in British society, and are thereby, exposed to its influences and perceptions. Therefore, the way society in general views death is essential background for discussing children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Children are influenced by the society in which they live and by the teaching, beliefs and practices of the faith communities to which they belong.

³ Rite means custom or observance.

The experiences I had of this apparent taboo in relation to the research project exploring children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*, and the impact on children, especially within the school context and curriculum, are discussed in Chapter 7. However, Chapter 2 aims to examine what appear to be the general principles and underlying nature of this taboo, and then discusses the possible impact that the position has on children and their concepts of *death* and *life after death*.

It is outside the remit of this thesis to give a detailed discussion and examination of the concept of such a taboo from the different social science and theological perspectives. Any deliberations are confined to the context and parameters of this particular research project.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Death is widely understood by people from theologians to Religious Education specialists, from anthropologists to philosophers, and from healthcare professionals to the general public as one of the 'rites of passage'. The Dutch anthropologist, Arnold van Gennep, first coined the term 'rites of passage' in 1908 as a way of explaining how people move or pass from one social status to another (Davies, 1997). He described how such a move would involve the three stages of pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal, or in other words separation, transition and reincorporation. Van Gennep believed that rites of passage could be applied to numerous situations. The term is now in common usage throughout society.

Consequently, as Langley describes, death is seen to be one of the rites of passage alongside birth, initiation which is often during puberty, and marriage (Langley, 1993). It is part of the life cycle of every human being. All religions are concerned with rites of passage as they are inextricably bound to each faith community's teaching, beliefs, practices and rituals. These beliefs and practices contribute to the distinctiveness and uniqueness of each religion. How each faith community views the process of a member dying; how it mourns and celebrates the life of a deceased member; and whether it expresses belief and hope in life after death or an afterlife, generally has an impact on the way life is lived by the believers. In other words, people's understanding of *death* underpins and influences their understanding of life and the possibility of *life after death*. Myrtle Langley in a chapter on primal religions comments:

In all cultures the transition from life to death has been surrounded by ritual. (Langley, 1993: 16)

Langley notes that some 250 million people out of 1392.5 million across Africa, the Americas and Australasia belong to a primal religion (Langley, 1993, White, 2001). Death rites are important to these faith groups, for instance the funeral for a high-ranking member of the Torajo people of Indonesia may last for three weeks. The bodies are usually buried in the cliff face alongside life-sized wooden models of the deceased. (Langley, 1993). Stretching back over thousands of years, all four main regions of the Aborigines of Arnhem Land, in the north-east of Australia, with their approximately thirty language groups, had a complex series of death rites which can last up to several months (Lock-Weir, 2002). These include painting the deceased's body with the appropriate totemic clan designs, burial or being placed high on a tree platform, later cleansing the bones with red ochre and putting them to rest in a eucalyptus log coffin in the settlement or out in the bush. At the heart of their rites is the cycle of life and death through the 'Dreaming' where creation and re-creation of the world is not only continuous but also omnipresent (Dalglish, 2000, Langley, 1993, Lock-Weir, 2002, Randles & Hough, 1993).

For the purposes of this thesis the major or principal religions referred to are: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism as these faith communities are now a recognizable part of British society. They are referred to in the 1988 Education Reform Act (1988; Section 3.2.2) and other Government produced Religious Education documents, for example, the Model Syllabuses (1st edition 1994 and reprinted 1998; QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c, SCAA, 1994c; Section 3.3.2) and the 'Glossary of Terms for Religious Education' (SCAA, 1994b). Members of these six faith communities were invited to form working groups with the National Curriculum Council (NCC) which had been established in 1988 and became the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) in 1993 when the NCC and the School Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC) combined. Subsequently from October 1997 it was known as the Qualifications Curriculum Authority (QCA). The groups were to provide guidelines on Religious Education for the Agreed Syllabus Conferences which are responsible for producing each Locally Agreed Syllabus (SCAA, 1994c; Section 3.2).

Table 2.1 shows the adherents to the principal religions in the UK. The figures are shown in millions or parts of millions. The figures in the year 2001 column are taken from the results of the 2001 Census and are shown to three decimal places (Simpson, 2004, UK Government, 2003). The figures reveal that the vast majority of people who say that they belong to a religion in the UK are Christian. While the figures reveal that the number of Christians has fluctuated between 1975 and 2001 they average out at forty million. Muslims form the next largest group with about one and a half million people and they have steadily grown in number since 1975. By 2001 there were about half a million Hindus. There are about a third of a million Sikhs and nearly a third of a million people are Jewish. In 1975 there were the same number of Jews and Muslims in the UK, but by the 2001 Census, whereas the Muslims have more than doubled in number the Jews have steadily declined. Those people who are part of the group forming 'other' include Buddhists⁴ and Jains.

Table 2.1 Adherents to religions in UK in millions

Religion	Year			
	1975 (millions)	1985 (millions)	1995 (millions)	2001 (millions)
Christian	40.9	40.1	39.4	42.079
Hindu	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.559
Jewish	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.267
Muslim	0.4	0.9	1.2	1.591
Sikh	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.336
Other	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.331
Total Adherents⁵	42.3	42.3	42.2	45.163

(Simpson, 2004, UK Government, 2003, White, 2001)

⁴ In the 2001 Census there were 152,000 people who said that they were Buddhists (UK Government, 2003).

⁵ Between 1975 and 2001 the UK population rose by approximately four million from the 1971 Census figure of 55.5 million (White, 2001).

Table 2.2 shows in percentage terms the relation between those people who say they are Christian and those who are not. The figures in the year 2001 column are taken from the results of the 2001 Census and are shown to one decimal place (Simpson, 2004, UK Government, 2003). In the Census analysis a further distinction is made between Trinitarian and non-Trinitarian Christians⁶. The figures reveal that in the UK, Christianity continues to be significantly the largest religion represented in the population. This is the situation even though there has been an increase in the percentage of those people who say that they belong to a different religion. On average between 1975 and 2001, three-quarters of the UK population said that they belong to a religion.

Table 2.2 Percentage of UK population adhering to religions

Religion	Year			
	1975	1985	1995	2001
Christian Trinitarian	73%	71%	67%	71.6%
Non-Christian	3%	3%	5%	5.4%
All Religions Total	76%	74%	72%	77%

(Simpson, 2004, UK Government, 2003, White, 2001)

⁶ A person who believes in the doctrine of the Trinity as contrasted with a Unitarian. The doctrine of the Trinity is the central Christian dogma that the One God exists in Three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and one substance (Livingstone, 1977: 521). Non-Trinitarian churches are: Christadelphian; The Church of Christ, Scientist; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons); Jehovah's Witnesses; Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (White, 2001).

Table 2.3 shows the figures for the adherents to the religions worldwide alongside those for the UK. The figures for the UK represent the numbers in approximate millions to three decimal places and are taken from the 2001 Census (Simpson, 2004, UK Government, 2003).

Table 2.3 Adherents to religions worldwide and in UK in approximate millions

Religion	Worldwide (millions)	UK (millions)
Baha'i	7.1	0.001
Buddhism	360	0.152
Christianity	2,106	42.079
Hinduism	811	0.559
Islam	1,188	1.591
Jainism	4.2	0.025
Judaism	14.4	0.267
Sikhism	23.3	0.336
Zoroastrianism	2.5	0.000

(Barrett, 2001, Simpson, 2004, White, 2001)

Jenny Randles and Peter Hough start their book 'The Afterlife: An Investigation into the Mysteries of Life After Death' with a chapter entitled: 'A Universal, Global Belief' and begin with the following assertions:

The belief in an afterlife is universal. It permeates time and culture, evolution and philosophical revolution. Some of the greatest civilisations have evolved on the premise of a world beyond this world, a dimension not of the physical but of the soul. Mankind's most celebrated philosophers have promoted the idea that there exists a place of spirit, a dimension of love and light, or, for some, a pit of suffering – a fiery Hell. Alternatively, this other world is a place of limbo, a staging post until the 'self' is reborn in flesh anew. (Randles & Hough, 1993: 9)

For members of the six principal faith communities of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism, death is not final; there is the possibility or hope of some kind of existence that continues after a person has finished their earthly life (1988). The former principal of Ridley Hall Theological College, Cambridge, the Rt Revd Hugo de Waal, describes the continuance of an intangible element as ‘the continuity of person’ (de Waal, 2003). The intangible element is believed to be the essence of a person, that which makes them unique. Within each faith community there is diversity in the manner of expressing teaching, beliefs and practices.

The following review is a synopsis of how *death* and the possibility or hope of *life after death* are perceived broadly by the many followers of the principal world religions through their doctrine which is rooted in each religion’s holy book. The main death rites, which are part of the sociology of religion, are also presented because they are important to members of a faith community as they help to bind that community together during a time of mourning. The death rites are connected to the period of death as they demonstrate care for the dying, care for the deceased and bereaved through the funeral and mourning rites, and also any act of remembrance. This should facilitate a clearer understanding of any similarities and differences which may be found in children’s concepts of *death* and *life after death* compared with the religions’ teachings, beliefs and practices. The following summary provides the most salient and common aspects of each religion’s doctrine and death rites. It should be noted that beliefs and practices vary within each faith community. The synopsis is summarized in Table 2.5 which is at the end of the chapter.

It was understood that when planning the research that the children who would be invited to participate would include many from the six faith communities. Therefore, in addition to the explanation given earlier, another reason for presenting the following religions’ viewpoints on *death* and *life after death* is that children who participated in the research project recorded that they belonged to them. In summary, this was subsequently confirmed as follows: Table 2.4 shows the total numbers (n) and corresponding percentages (%) of children who were 7-8 years of age in Year 3 and 10-11 years of age in Year 6 in the Birmingham and Durham schools in response to the question asking about their religious affiliation (Question 19, Appendix 7) on the questionnaire which formed the main research study (Figure 1.1; Appendix 7; 8; Chapter 5).

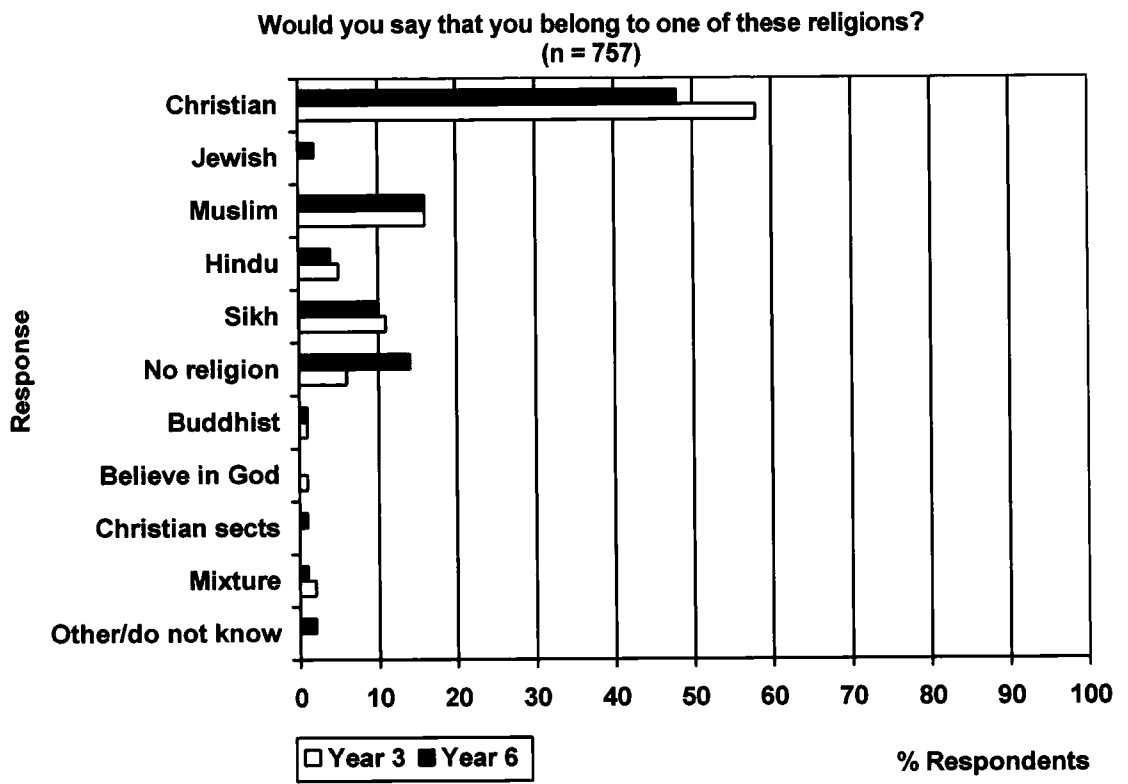
This information is also represented in the form of a bar chart in Figure 2.2. More than half the children said that they were Christians. The other principal religions together made up a much smaller percentage with the Muslims being the next largest group, closely followed by the Sikhs. There was a smaller proportion of Hindus and a very small percentage of Jews⁷ and Buddhists compared with the other religions. The spread between the younger, Year 3, and the older, Year 6, children was nearly the same for each of these faith communities. More than double the children in Year 6 said that they belonged to 'no religion' compared with those in Year 3. The overall proportion of children who did not belong to a religion was 10%.

Table 2.4 Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 19

Would you say that you belong to one of these religions? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)						
Response	Age				Total Respondents n	Total Respondents %
	Year 3 n	Year 3 %	Year 6 n	Year 6 %		
Christian	201	58%	203	48%	404	53%
Jewish	0	0%	9	2%	9	1%
Muslim	54	16%	68	16%	122	16%
Hindu	17	5%	17	4%	34	4%
Sikh	38	11%	40	10%	78	10%
No religion	19	6%	59	14%	78	10%
Buddhist	2	1%	4	1%	6	1%
Believe in God	4	1%	2	0%	6	1%
Christian sects	1	0%	3	1%	4	1%
Mixture	8	2%	6	1%	14	2%
Other/ do not know	0	0%	8	2%	8	1%
Total Respondents	344	100%	419	100%	763	100%

⁷ The figures only apply to Year 6 children because there were no Jews in any Year 3 class. All the Jews were in the Jewish school and permission was only given to work with the Year 6 children in that particular school (Chapters 5, 7).

Figure 2.2 Graph showing comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 19



In the following Sections 2.3 – 2.9 summaries are given, drawn from a number of authoritative sources, of the main aspects of how *death* and *life after death* is considered in the six major religions. These are summarized in Table 2.5 which is at the end of the chapter.

2.3 CHRISTIANITY

Central to Christian teaching is the belief that death is not the end; it is only the end of the earthly life as beyond death there is the hope of eternal life in God’s presence in heaven⁸. This is believed to have been made possible through Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry, death, and particularly resurrection which are described in the New Testament. Christians believe that, just as Jesus was bodily resurrected by God, three days after His

⁸ Historically the weighing of souls after death was a popular symbol notably throughout the twelfth century. Sculptural examples are Gilbert’s ‘Last Judgement’ of angels weighing souls in Autun Cathedral, Burgundy, France and in Vezelay Abbey, Burgundy, France (Brooke, 1969: 120). Similar ideas are found in Islam to this day (Section 2.5).

death by crucifixion on the cross, then for the deceased there will be bodily resurrection too.

The Bible teaches that there will be a day of judgement which will mark the end of the world as it is known and God will judge those remaining on earth who will then be sent to heaven or hell. There has been a move away from perceiving hell to be 'hell, fire and damnation', to it being more the possible separation of one from God's eternal presence and thus annihilation. The following extract sums up how many Christians today view the possibility of hell:

Nevertheless it is our conviction that the reality of hell (and indeed of heaven) is the ultimate affirmation of the reality of human freedom. Hell is not eternal torment, but it is the final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and so absolutely that the only end is total non-being.

(The Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England, 1995: 199)

For Christians there is an issue about how to conceive the part between death and universal resurrection and judgement because the Bible is unclear and opinions vary among clergy, theologians and laity. There is a broad distinction between the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions about how to conceive this intervening period between death and resurrection.

Roman Catholic doctrine perceives that the intervening period is a transitional state where the deceased are in purgatory. This is a period when purgation or purifying the deceased from their sins takes place. It is believed that the 'Saints' such as St. Francis, would have very little or no time in purgatory. They, along with Mary, the mother of Jesus, are understood to be able to intercede with God on behalf of the deceased to aid the process of purification for them. Therefore prayers are said regularly, especially in church, for the dead (Roberts, 2004).

The Protestant view is that there is no transitional state after death. There is a tendency for Protestants to be ambivalent or agnostic about the intervening period. Traditionally, they do not pray for the dead because they believe that their final destination is set by their life. The beliefs are that the deceased maybe 'sleeping' or 'somewhere else' or in heaven while waiting for the day of judgement and universal resurrection. Until World War I the Church of England seldom prayed for the departed, but the circumstances and impact of the war in the trenches changed that view and the

needs of the bereaved, and so, there were prayers proposed in the 1928 Prayer Book which was never authorized by Parliament. Currently, there are optional prayers for the dead in the Church of England's liturgy. Prayers for the dead are not normally said, however, by most evangelical Christians and across the non-conformist denominations (Roberts, 2004).

When caring for the dying, prayers are said and often there are readings from the Bible, especially Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my Shepherd' in the Old Testament. As part of a dying person's preparation for death a member of the clergy may 'lay on hands' and share Holy Communion, namely bread and wine, symbolising Jesus' body and blood. Unction or final anointing may be given too. Where possible, family and clergy are present at the time of death and will pray together for the deceased and the bereaved.

Throughout the death rites Christians show respect for the dead body. In Christian rites of death, which take place during the funeral, the central elements are that the truth of eternal life is affirmed and care is demonstrated to the mourners in their loss. Christianity shows a positive attitude to the dead body through the priest meeting the coffin outside the church or crematorium and preceding it for the funeral service. This is in contrast to some other faiths which see the dead body as polluting the living because it is considered to be evil and corrupt, for example, by the Hindus (Section 2.6). Since the late nineteenth and through the twentieth centuries, it has become increasingly common for Christians to be cremated rather than buried. This is a combination of a practical response to the effects of the industrial revolution with the dramatic increase in people living in towns and cities with greater pressure on space including graveyards, the overall rise in population and a subtle move in the perception of resurrection theology.

After the funeral service, which includes thanksgiving to God for a life lived and a celebration of the deceased's life, there is a wake. The wake continues the theme of celebrating the deceased's life and demonstrates that life must go on for the bereaved. Other parts of the mourning rites include prayers and words of comfort for the bereaved as well as visiting the bereaved by family, friends, and members of the clergy and laity with a particular interest and ability in pastoral care.

Christians remember fellow believers in a variety of ways which includes some sort of memorial with an inscription giving the name and dates of the deceased. Frequently on a plaque or tombstone there is also a verse from the Bible. The bereaved visit the grave or where the ashes were laid and may place flowers there and pray. Some bereaved will make a point of visiting the memorial on specific dates such as birthdays, Christmas or the anniversary of the death. All Souls' Day and All Saints' Day are occasions when the deceased are remembered in the Church's calendar as well as at Easter.

This synopsis has been drawn from the following references: Brown, 1999, Davies, 1997, Grainger, 1997, Holloway, 1992, Langley, 1993, Livingstone, 1977, Palmer, 1983, Parrinder, 1980, Prickett, 1980, Randles & Hough, 1993, Rivett, 2003, Sheridan, 2000, Smart, 1969, Tober & Lusby, 1987.

Table 2.5 consolidates beliefs and practices of the death rites in the six major religions reviewed.

2.4 JUDAISM

Across the various traditions in Judaism there is a belief in the immortality of the soul and the existence of life after death. There is an acknowledgement that the details of life after death are unclear and so Jews are discouraged from speculating about it as it is seen to be of little avail. How Jews live their life on earth is central to the faith and hence these other matters are perceived to be of less importance.

Judaism teaches that after death the soul departs from the body and ascends to the world to come or 'olam haba', the body returns to dust. In the Orthodox tradition, there is belief in life after death in God's presence in heaven. If certain sins have been committed then the soul is totally separated from God. There is also a belief in 'the resurrection of the dead to a glorified life' (Smart, 1969: 371). This will take place when the Messiah comes. Those belonging to the Liberal and Reform traditions tend not to claim any certainty about what happens after death.

The focus of care for the dying is prayer. The dying person would try to recite the confession of faith or 'shema Yisrael' with, if possible, the family and rabbi present, especially at the time of death.

The funeral takes place as soon as possible for, historically, hygienic reasons in the Middle East. At the funeral, which takes place in the synagogue, there are prayers and wailing. If there is a burial, members of the immediate family are the first to shovel earth onto the coffin, following prayers. Some Jews are cremated.

In Jewish rites of death the focus is on supporting the family at their time of grief and continuing the memory of the deceased. There is a set pattern of four stages of mourning rites: from death to burial; the 'shiva'; 'shaloshim'; and 'shaloshim to first yahrzeit'. The first stage of mourning from death to burial is when the main focus for the bereaved is on arranging the funeral. Symbolically, the chief mourners tear a lapel or make a cut in their outer clothing. They are exempt from certain religious obligations like regular prayer for this period. The shiva is when for seven days after the funeral close family and friends meet with the immediate family in their home to share their grief and be consoled. Throughout shiva, daily prayers are often said and the immediate family is looked after by, for example, having their meals prepared for them and they may have time off work. Shaloshim is the stage of mourning when the emphasis is on personal grieving and lasts for thirty days after the funeral. During this period the bereaved are encouraged to be sombre in nature and so they may have time off work, avoid cutting and shaving their hair or wearing new clothes and make-up, listening to music or attending functions. The bereaved will, however, usually aim to attend the synagogue services where it is their privilege as mourners to recite the 'kaddish' prayer. The final stage of mourning is for a further eleven months from the end of shaloshim to first yahrzeit which is the anniversary of the deceased's death. Every day the family will say the kaddish prayer and may continue with some of the mourning rites. It is believed that these stages help the bereaved to express and work through their grief with the consoling and support of the faith community. The process is seen to enable the bereaved to return to everyday life without having subdued their feelings.

Jews remember their dead through having some sort of memorial with the deceased's name and dates. Often the inscription will be in Hebrew. If the deceased has been buried the grave will be visited and a stone placed on the tomb to signify remembrance and a prayer is often said during this act⁹. On each anniversary or

⁹ This act of remembrance for the deceased can be witnessed at the end of the film 'Schindler's List' (1993) when the actors are paired with the holocaust survivors or their descendents while visiting Schindler's grave in Jerusalem, Israel. By visiting Jewish cemeteries, such as the old Jewish cemetery in Prague, Czech Republic, one is able to see stones which have been placed on the tombs and some people have left prayers on pieces of paper underneath the stones.

yahrzeit of the death, the kaddish prayer is said and a memorial candle is lit in the home. The bereaved may also as a sign of memorial make a donation to the synagogue or to charity.

This synopsis has been drawn from the following references: Brown, 1999, Davies, 1997, Langley, 1993, Palmer, 1983, Parrinder, 1980, Prickett, 1980, Randles & Hough, 1993, Rivett, 2003, Sedley, 2000, Smart, 1969, Tober & Lusby, 1987, Tobias, 2000.

Table 2.5 consolidates beliefs and practices of the death rites in the six major religions reviewed.

2.5 ISLAM

The teaching in Islam has a strong emphasis on judgement as a believer's earthly life will be judged. The teaching is that after death the deceased is interrogated in their grave by two angels, one sitting on the right shoulder and the other on the left shoulder. If the deceased is judged to be righteous then they will rest in peace until the day of judgement. If they are found to be unrighteous then they will be tortured while waiting for the day of judgement. On that day the dead will be raised in bodily form and their souls judged. They will be held to account before God for all their earthly deeds. If their good deeds, on a pair of scales, outweigh their bad ones then they will be sent to everlasting bliss in paradise¹⁰; if the opposite is found to be true, they will be sent to everlasting torment in hell.

All are walked across a Straight Bridge that spans this world and Paradise, crossing above the pit of Hell fire. For the righteous the passage is broad and easy, but for the wicked it is but a sword's width and they must topple to their fate in the infernal fires of Hell. And yet, even those condemned, if they have but the slightest faith, may be redeemed eventually, either through the intercession of Allah (God) Himself, the angels, the prophets or righteous believers. Only those that do not believe in Allah will stay in Hell forever. (Sheridan, 2000: 86)

The care for the dying involves reading from the Qur'an. Importance is placed on the declaration of faith or 'shahadah' being recited by the person while dying. If possible the family are present at the time of death.

Important aspects of the Muslim funeral rites are praying for God's forgiveness and mercy for the deceased, reciting relevant verses from the Qur'an, and burying the dead as soon as possible for, historically, hygienic reasons in the Middle East. The burial is low in the ground and the deceased are placed sitting facing towards Mecca, in Saudi

¹⁰ In Islam 'heaven' is referred to as paradise.

Arabia. By placing the deceased in this position they are ready to be judged, as previously explained. The body is placed in a linen shroud symbolising that all are equal in death.

The period of mourning can last up to forty days. Muslims are remembered through an inscription, which is often in Arabic, on their grave giving their name and dates, and family and friends visit it. Prayers are often said at the graveside.

This synopsis has been drawn from the following references: al-Khamis, 2000c, Brown, 1999, Davies, 1997, Langley, 1993, McDermott & Ahsan, 1993, Palmer, 1983, Parrinder, 1980, Prickett, 1980, Randles & Hough, 1993, Rivett, 2003, Smart, 1969, Sookhdeo, 2001, Tober & Lusby, 1987.

Table 2.5 consolidates beliefs and practices of the death rites in the six major religions reviewed.

2.6 HINDUISM

Hinduism teaches that each person is trapped in a cycle of many births, deaths, and rebirths or reincarnations. Therefore, death is believed to be a period of renewal rather than the end of life. During the time of cremation, as the body is reduced to ashes, the soul is released from the deceased and is free to find a new body. This is because the soul is believed to be immortal. Hindu doctrine teaches that those who have carried out good earthly deeds will have their souls reborn into a prosperous person, perhaps a priest, whereas those who had been badly behaved will be reborn as outcasts or animals. This is the result of a person's 'karma'¹¹. The soul may go to heaven for reward or hell for punishment as an intermediary place before rebirth. Hindus believe that it is possible to be liberated¹² from this cycle of rebirth and enter everlasting harmony.

The care for the dying focuses on the notion of abstention as this is believed to be necessary preparation for one's death. The dying may sip water from the River Ganges, India which is seen to be holy. If possible members of the family are present at the time of death.

¹¹ One's actions, thoughts and attitudes in this life. (Sheridan, 2000: 89)

¹² Moksha is this ultimate liberation from the process of transmigration, the continuous cycle of birth and death. (SCAA, 1994b: 21)

Central to the Hindu death rites through the preparation for the funeral and during it, is avoiding contact with the deceased's body because it is believed to pollute the living. The funeral rituals may last up to forty days. At the funeral six people carry the coffin and the eldest son leads the mourners. At the temple or 'mandir' verses from the Bhagavad Gita is recited, prayers said and offerings given to the deity. Hindus cremate their deceased. A custom which has developed in the UK to parallel practice in India, is that the family, in particular, will remain at the crematorium for the duration of the cremation (Funeral director, 2001). The deceased's ashes are scattered on the third day and preferably on the River Ganges.

There is a formal period of mourning for eleven months and eleven days. Some Hindus shorten this to eleven days. During that time, as a sign of being in mourning, the family may wear white clothing and shave their heads.

There is no physical memorial for a Hindu. They show their act of remembrance through a simple service and prayers to mark the end of the period of formal mourning eleven months and eleven days after the death has occurred. The service usually takes place in the temple. On the subsequent anniversaries for several years, and then more infrequently, there maybe a short service. The idea of the service is to honour and ensure the well-being of the departed soul.

This synopsis has been drawn from the following references: al-Khamis, 2000b, al-Khamis, 2000d, Blurton, 1992, Brown, 1999, Davies, 1997, Easwaran, 1986, Langley, 1993, Palmer, 1983, Parrinder, 1980, Prickett, 1980, Randles & Hough, 1993, Rivett, 2003, Smart, 1969, Tober & Lusby, 1987.

Table 2.5 consolidates beliefs and practices of the death rites in the six major religions reviewed.

2.7 SIKHISM

The close association of birth and death are crucial to the teaching in Sikhism. They are both considered to be part of the human life cycle which is believed to be a transient stage ultimately aiming towards 'wahiguru' which is complete unity with God or merging with God. Immediately after death a person's soul is judged by God for their earthly deeds. Accordingly, the soul will be reborn into a new human or animal baby or it will spend a period of time in heaven for reward or hell for punishment before returning to earth. Devotion to God is the way liberation is achieved and the cycle of reincarnation broken.

During the care for the dying verses from the Guru Granth Sahib is read. If possible the family is present at the time of death.

The death rites concentrate on celebrating the deceased's life, so grieving is actively discouraged. The funeral takes place at the temple or 'gurdwara'. The focus is on giving thanks to God for the deceased's life and prayers are said. Sikhs are cremated and a custom has evolved in the UK, whereby, especially family members stay at the crematorium for the duration of the cremation which parallels the practice in India (Funeral director, 2001). Hymns are sung during the cremation. The mourners then return to the temple for more prayers. The deceased's ashes are then scattered, preferably in India.

During the ten day period of mourning the Guru Granth Sahib is read at home along with prayers being said. At the temple the family may ask for 'akhand path' which is when the Guru Granth Sahib is read continuously, and it takes forty-eight hours to do so. The family will provide the food which is vegetarian or 'langar' for three days for the community for the duration of the reading. This process is seen to help the family attain peace of mind in their bereavement or 'shanti'.

There is no physical memorial for a Sikh. The family may repeat akhand path on the deceased's anniversary for several years as a way of honouring and ensuring the well-being of the departed soul, thereby demonstrating an act of remembrance.

This synopsis has been drawn from the following references: al-Khamis, 2000a, Brown, 1999, Langley, 1993, Palmer, 1983, Parrinder, 1980, Prickett, 1980, Rivett, 2003.

Table 2.5 consolidates beliefs and practices of the death rites in the six major religions reviewed.

2.8 BUDDHISM

Buddhist teaching about what happens after death explains that the ultimate goal is the liberation of extinction, 'nirvana'¹³. When nirvana is achieved the soul is released from 'samsara', the wheel of existences, of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Consequently the soul ceases to be a separate entity and becomes constant and eternal.

¹³ Literally *blowing out* of the fires of greed, hatred and ignorance, and the state of secure perfect peace that follows. (SCAA, 1994b: 6.) An end to all earthly attachments, and an insight into an indefinable Ultimate, or Supreme Principle, as the Buddha did. (Sheridan, 2000: 94)

Buddhists believe that only a few people can achieve liberation from the wheel of existence in one lifetime so most people are reincarnated after death.

There are no rites associated with the care for the dying. If possible the family along with a priest or monk will be present at the time of death.

What is important in Buddhist death rites is affirming this belief in reincarnation which is seen to be positively supporting the family and friends of the deceased at their time of loss because the emphasis is on new life rather than thinking that death is final. The funeral, therefore, focuses on an act of thanksgiving and has a festive atmosphere. The mourners are able to gain spiritual merit for the living and the dead through the giving of gifts to monks as part of the rite. A photograph of the deceased is placed near the coffin for the duration of the funeral. Buddhists are cremated and their ashes are placed in an urn which is often then buried.

In keeping with their beliefs, the bereaved are actively discouraged from grieving. Buddhists are remembered through some sort of physical memorial. This memorial is usually alongside where the urn containing the ashes has been placed in a graveyard or in the temple. The act of remembrance focuses on the family visiting where the urn has been placed, usually on the anniversaries of the deceased's birth and death.

This synopsis has been drawn from the following references: al-Khamis, 2000b, Blurton, 1992, Brown, 1999, Davies, 1997, Langley, 1993, Palmer, 1983, Parrinder, 1980, Prickett, 1980, Randles & Hough, 1993, Rivett, 2003, Smart, 1969, Teague, 2000, Tober & Lusby, 1987.

Table 2.5 consolidates beliefs and practices of the death rites in the six major religions reviewed.

2.9 PLACE OF DEATH AS THE END OF EXISTENCE

There are those who believe that death is the end of existence in any shape or form. Some of these people view death with fear while others are resigned to it as a natural stage of life. There are those whose stance would be that:

One may live on through one's genes, achievements or in the memory of others, but those properties which defined each individual die along with the body. (Sheridan, 2000: 83)

Many of these people adhere to secularized Western culture and some are dissatisfied with established religions such as those presented earlier in the chapter. Many humanists, like Marilyn Mason of the British Humanist Association hold this

view of death as the end of existence (Mason, 1999, Prickett, 1980, Rivett, 2003). Some existential philosophers, like the contemporary British existentialist, Thomas Nagel, is an example of someone also having such an opinion (Nagel, 1986). There have been political systems which have tried to impose this perspective such as the communist hierarchy in the former Soviet Union. Many people who believe in the finality of death admit that it is impossible to know exactly what happens after death. What appears to be of exclusive importance for a great number of these believers is the here and now (Prickett, 1980, Rivett, 2003, Sheridan, 2000).

2.10 NATURE OF THE TABOO OF DEATH

The Oxford Dictionary defines taboo as:

A ban or prohibition by general consent. (Fowler & Fowler, 1976: 865)

It would seem that a taboo has built up around the subject of death. This general consent has seeped into people's thinking, attitude and behaviour. Adults of all ages and backgrounds and both genders give the impression that they have accepted the taboo of death. It appears that for many people a veil of silence exists, and has to exist, on this topic.

There are those who acknowledge and try to sensitively respond to the taboo. Some of these people are, for example, those who are professionally concerned with the dying, the deceased and the bereaved through health and social care, in particular the hospice movement, the clergy, and pastoral workers, including volunteers, in the faith communities, funeral directors and others involved with funeral rituals, and a range of bereavement support services (Robinson, 2004). Michael Henshall began his foreword to the edited book, 'Interpreting Death: Christian Theology and Pastoral Practice' (Jupp & Rogers, 1997) with the following observational comment:

The state we live in often regards 'the last enemy' with dread, confusion, ignorance and self-inflicted blindness. For many people death has become an unspoken subject. (Henshall, 1997: xv)

In the Introduction it was explained what contributed to the undertaking of this research project exploring children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Section 1.2). Reference was made to various life experiences, especially those associated with working with primary school age children. This provided an awareness and clear understanding that children seem to have an innate curiosity, interest and fascination

with issues of *death* and the possibility of *life after death*. Despite this, however, I became more and more conscious of the apparent lack of opportunities for children to be able to explore, reflect and discuss these concepts openly. It made me reflect about why this was the situation. The following questions seemed pertinent:

- What, then, causes such a taboo to exist?
- Why is it that many children seem not to have the opportunity to explore and discuss what they think and believe about *death* and *life after death*?
- How may children be encouraged to discover what other people think and believe about *death* and *life after death*?
- If many of the adults in children's lives are reluctant to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* with them, with whom should children discuss them?
- For what reasons do some adults think it is inappropriate for children to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death*?

2.10.1 Impact of the taboo in Western society

There is a widespread taboo in Western post-modern society surrounding death (Henshall, 1997, Walter, 1994). What seems to pervade is that death is widely perceived to be a taboo subject, although not the only taboo, where once it was sexual matters which were a major taboo. It appears that this attitude reversal has taken place since the Victorian period through the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first century. It means that there is a general avoidance of the conscious recognition of death and its associated issues among people. This includes contemplating one's own mortality and future death and that of close family and friends, as well as practical arrangements, for example, making out a will, having a 'living will', and personal involvement in the planning of funeral arrangements.

One of the major consequences of this position is that people, adults in particular, tussle to contemplate and reflect on death as well as to discuss it with others. In these circumstances, such people then appear to strain to find or indeed lack the language to express their opinions and convey their feelings about *death* and the possibility of *life after death*. They especially seem to struggle when they experience bereavement and/or when someone they know is bereaved. Many bereaved are all too conscious that people they know avoid speaking with them, stop contacting them, and shun arranging to meet with them (Lewis, 1966). Some bereaved have even witnessed people they know

crossing over the road, for instance, to evade having or needing to converse with them (Neuberger, 2004, Neuberger & White, 1991).

It is in the context of death and bereavement that Rabbi Julia Neuberger commented on Radio 2's The Jeremy Vine Show during one of the Monday Health and Wellbeing Hour's that 'people have lost the language of communicating with the bereaved about the death of their loved ones as society is not too good at allowing grief to happen and talking about these things' (Neuberger, 2004).

Peter Jupp supports this claim, for example, in his discussion about some of the notable changes linked to the context of death since the 1840's in British society.

The fact that bereavement has become less visible may make the rest of us feel more comfortable. The internal pain and constriction remains. Indeed, they may be even sharper because their invisibility cancels the old signals of need for special consideration. (Jupp, 1997: 6)

It is apparent that other cultures around the world reflect more the attitude and behaviour of 'living with death'. This may be partly because in other cultures death appears to be more visibly and practically around. The people are more in touch with death through their beliefs, practices, customs and rituals surrounding this rite of passage, and through the relative frequency with which they participate in them. These circumstances are also inter-connected with the effects of living in environments which are regularly faced with natural disasters like famine, flooding and earthquakes, malaria or the pandemic of HIV and AIDs on people of all ages and both genders throughout the society in which they live.

I have first-hand experience of witnessing some of this through several travel encounters while living with people from different cultures, social structures and faith communities in Africa, Asia and Australasia. Each of these different groups of people gave the impression of having a deep sense of being willing and able to live with death. It did not matter whether these people were male or female, young or old, what their social background or faith commitment was, whether they were Malawian, black South African, Indian, or Aborigine, they all knew with a real sense that part of life is to be able to live with, and thereby, accept death and in particular, the death of loved ones. The people I met seemed to be openly accepting of the death of their family, friends and acquaintances as well as their own future death. For the vast majority of these people, it was apparent that their perceptions of *death* and the belief and hope of *life after death*

were inextricably bound to their personal faith as a practising member of a faith community — tribal or international. This was their view even if it might appear that there was no other choice for them due to the often harsh realities of trying to survive in order to provide the basic necessities to live for their families and themselves.

Being aware of the narratives of the experiences and lives of others encourages people to take stock and try to view circumstances and opinions from a different, maybe fresh perspective. As a result, people's concepts modify, grow and develop as they become more widely aware and better informed about others' beliefs and practices.

In contrast, possibly all too frequently, in Western post-modern society death and dying seems to have become more sanitized and distanced from people as health and living conditions and medical provision during the twentieth century changed and improved (Brown, 1994, Griffin, 1991, Parrinder, 1980, Walter, 1994).

Jane Griffin noted:

Since the 1950s there has been a developing trend towards hospital deaths, this trend can be seen in the pattern for all deaths ...

Attitudes to death and medical advances as well as a number of inter-related demographic, economic and social factors have contributed to this change in the place of death from home to hospital.
(Griffin, 1991: 7)

However, through the hospice movement seeking to promote palliative and bereavement care during the past thirty years, and with the advent of supportive care in the community, once again more people are being enabled to die in their own home (Arnold *et al.*, 1997, Robinson, 1997, Saunders, 1990, Walter, 1994).

One of the major effects of changes in health and living conditions, during the twentieth century, has been that the death of children, and infant mortality in particular, and women in or as a result of childbirth has become far less frequent. This is then coupled with more people living long lives as adults and a progressive increase in life expectancy at birth.

The life expectancy of new born children in 1999 is 75 years for boys and 80 years for girls. In 1901 baby boys were expected to live for 45 years and girls for 49 years. (Hicks & Allen, 1999: 8)

In England and Wales, for example, during the mid nineteenth century death rates from conditions not attributable to micro-organisms was 1,221 per million and had fallen to 192 per million by 1971¹⁴ (McKeown, 1979). In the UK, by 1900 infant mortality¹⁵ was 140 per thousand live births (Hicks & Allen, 1999). Since then infant mortality has steadily declined to 5.8 per thousand live births recorded in 1999¹⁶ (Hicks & Allen, 1999, White, 2001). Roy Porter stated what the fall in infant mortality rate represents:

In 1950, the UK experienced 26,000 infant deaths; within half a century that had fallen by 80 per cent. (Porter, 1997: 3)

Porter explained infant mortality from an historical perspective and the context of its impact on society:

Infant mortality — the number of babies dying in the first year of life — became accepted in the nineteenth century as a reliable index of the health of a population. In western Europe today an infant mortality rate of around 9 per 1000 live births is the norm¹⁷. In early modern England it was some fifteen times higher, and elsewhere worse still: before 1750 France had over 200 deaths per 1000 live births, Geneva 296. Expectation of life at birth typically averaged under thirty years (though huge infant and childhood mortality rates skew that figure). In cities deaths exceeded births, and towns depended on an influx of incomers from the countryside to maintain the population. The young of all classes were at greatest risk — from the bloody flux, scarlet fever, whooping cough, influenza, smallpox, pneumonia; these and a multitude of now unidentifiable fevers killed perhaps 40 per cent of Europe's children before the age of fifteen. (Porter, 1997: 236-237)

Jupp noted one of the main consequences of more people living into old age:

By consequence, it is the elderly who die. At the very time when we have to cope with the death and the funeral of a partner, we have less energy to deal with it. (Jupp, 1997: 5)

¹⁴ Deaths in the prematurity, immaturity, other diseases of infancy class from conditions not attributable to micro-organisms, increased in the late nineteenth century, and did not decline until 1901 (McKeown, 1979).

¹⁵ Infant mortality is the deaths of infants under one year of age (Hicks & Allen, 1999, Porter, 1997, White, 2001).

¹⁶ This is the same number for England and Wales, and overall for the UK (White, 2001).

¹⁷ See also (McDevitt, 1996).

The huge advancements in public health, individual health and medical care during the twentieth century rendered in the Western world a whole range of once common infectious diseases virtually obsolete. Throughout society this has affected people's lives and lessened their awareness and contact with death and dying. As a consequence, there has been a notable change in the causes and patterns of people dying. Jupp referred to three consequences connected to the 'change in the nature of disease':

First, the age of normal death is beyond retirement age; second, chronic and degenerative diseases have become major aspects of health care; third, death is much less likely to be sudden and unexpected and, instead, dying typically takes place over a relatively long period. (Jupp, 1997: 5)

When death does occur as an infant, as a child, as a teenager, as a young person or as a result of an accident, especially where there are children and young people involved, then these are widely viewed to be harrowing experiences. The distress and trauma are seen to be worse because of them being less common than formerly (Jupp, 1997). This may be in part why now there is such a variety of bereavement support agencies on hand across the UK (Brown, 1999, Jupp, 1997, Stubbs, 2000, Winston's Wish, 2004).

Another factor which adds to the alienation of people from death and dying and consequently contributes to the perpetuation of the taboo, is the fact that fewer people die in their family home and usually with some relatives at the bedside, but instead in hospital or residential care situations where relatives may not be present. This is the institutionalization of death and dying (Jupp, 1997, Walter, 1994). Jupp commented on its effect on the family and friends of the deceased:

When institutions become the context for death, families experience a loss of control and participation in the dying of their relative. In a long perspective, this control has shifted away from dying people, their family and neighbours, towards specialists and their institutions, the clergy, the medical [and health] profession[s], the funeral directing sector and the managers of cemeteries and crematoria. (Jupp, 1997: 6-7)

There are numerous other ways that Western society continues to perpetuate the taboo of death. One situation, by way of example, is the fact that the United States of America (USA) Pentagon forbids images of the coffins of dead servicemen and women from being represented in the media whether on television or in the press. This has been the protocol since at least the beginning of the 1990's. The funeral of service military personnel may be reported providing the deceased's family give permission.

At times of conflict and war the public are reminded of this precedence. There was fairly extensive news coverage when some photographic images were circulated around the world of the arrival in the USA of coffins containing the bodies of several USA service people who had been killed while serving in Iraq in 2003-2004. The coffins were draped in the Stars and Stripes. The Pentagon then condemned the images being shown and tried to put a halt to them being further published and beamed around the world (News, 2004).

There are occasions in communities and in a nation's life when, as a result of some devastating disaster, people are encouraged to be aware of, respect and join in with a call by the authorities to acknowledge and celebrate, with thanksgiving, the life of the deceased. A period of official mourning for the victims and their families caught up in a specific tragedy may be arranged. There are members of the public who respond with an open, outpouring of grief. In the UK and other parts of the world there was public mourning on a large scale following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales as a result of the fatal car crash in Paris, France, in the early hours of 31 August 1997. The bombing of the Twin Towers in New York, USA on 11 September 2001 gave rise to public displays of mourning in different parts of the world, too. Another incident where there was a similar demonstration of public bereavement was in reaction to the bombings in Madrid, Spain in March 2004. There was also heartfelt public grieving, especially locally, as a result of the school hostage tragedy in Beslan, Russia in September 2004. The Russian authorities declared a period of forty days' national mourning to mark the disaster. There are more examples, too, with the hostage killings of Kenneth Biggley and Margaret Hassan in Iraq in 2004, and the widely devastating natural disaster of the Asian tsunami (26 December 2004).

The media responded to all these incidents with detailed coverage of the events. The reports resonated with a myriad of images and a sea of words. Maybe these reports help to weaken the taboo of death on society as it would be hard to completely ignore them on every occasion. What appears to vary is the value put on a person's life from culture to culture, throughout the world. Brenda Watson and Elizabeth Ashton observed:

The outburst of grief and affection for the Princess which followed was truly remarkable. It took many by surprise that such large numbers of people across the world, from all walks of life, all social classes, different religions and faiths, and belonging to such a range of political parties, should have united in mourning. (Watson & Ashton, 1997: vi)

Henshall passionately noted and laid the following challenge in his foreword:

The paradox of our present age is that while not wishing to tangle with death many are significantly curious about it. A society that fails to reflect on the last things (heaven, hell, death, judgement) earns and deserves the label superficial. ... Life is enriched not by seeking bolt holes in materialism, but by asking questions about what life is ultimately concerned to offer. (Henshall, 1997: xvi)

2.10.2 Impact of the taboo on children

The main possible impact of the death taboo on children seems to be the extent to which, both knowingly and unknowingly, adults project it onto them. Many adults wish to protect children from death and associated issues. They seem to desire and hope to guide children towards a risk-free and cocooned life. These adults appear to be either unaware of, or actively choose to ignore, children's innate capacity, interest, fascination and curiosity with death. They seem to think that by protecting children from exploring the issues of death that that will prevent them from developing and sharing concepts in whichever way the children may choose. The adults also appear to think that children can be barred or at least discouraged from asking questions about *death* and *life after death*. If children are not averted from doing these things, the adults certainly hope to minimize them happening, particularly in whatever way they can seemingly control.

Yet despite this children are aware of and witness all sorts of images connected with death and dying, especially through the media as was referred to earlier (Section 2.10.1). Erica Brown pointed out:

Children today are in a strange situation. Witnessing death in their own families and communities has largely been banished and adults speak about the end of life in euphemisms and metaphors. Stories have 'tidy', happy endings. At the same time the media provides young people with a multitude of images of death and destruction which portray other people's experiences. (Brown, 1999: 100)

Although there has been a process of alienation and sanitization of death and dying in the UK as discussed (Section 2.10.1) there are still issues and dilemmas about how the adult family members break the news of death of a relative or friend to their children and whether or not, and if so, how, the children are included in the death rites. Peter Speck, for example, writes about bereavement and belief in the context of a family experiencing the death of a relative and the place of the funeral rite. Included in his chapter under the section, 'Viewing the Body', are some thoughts about the place of a family considering in an informed way, about how children may be given the chance to view a deceased's body before a funeral takes place:

Children may also need an opportunity either to be present or not, since we cannot 'shield' a child from what has happened. However, their choice will need to be informed by some explanation of what they might see and hear. If we [adults] are not able to face the fact of death children will also find it difficult. To tell the child that 'mummy is in hospital', when in fact mummy is dead, can lead to a multitude of problems later. It does not help to shut a child out of the grief that a whole family shares. (Speck, 1997: 103)

David Nuttall includes a section on 'Children and Funerals' in his chapter discussing, 'The Needs of Bereaved People at the Time of the Funeral.' He is keen to stress and acknowledge that children do mourn and that their needs at the time of bereavement should be included in the grieving process which incorporates the funeral:

Some of the needs discussed are not necessarily dependent upon age but it is important not to overlook children's needs, at any stage, and certainly not when thinking about funerals. What is clear and should never be neglected is that children grieve. A significant attachment to another person, parent, sibling, grandparent, or any other, that is broken by the death of that person, will lead to a sense of loss and to its consequence, grief. Its shape and expression may vary with the age of the child but loss is experienced and as it is important in an adult's bereavement for grief to be expressed, so it is in a child's bereavement. Part of that expression involves the funeral. (Nuttall, 1997: 94)

It would seem that adults are faced with a choice either to perpetuate the taboo of death or to be proactive in diminishing its grip, impact and effect on the lives of their peers and especially the next generation, that is, on children. For people to have and to make the opportunity to explore the concepts of *death* and the possibility of *life after death* during a period when they were not necessarily experiencing personal bereavement should, hopefully, contribute to helping a child to better cope with a future bereavement. The way bereavement would be then handled maybe, for instance, smoother and potentially less traumatic while people may also perceive themselves to

be better informed. An exploration of these concepts would furthermore help to make people consider they were more knowledgeable about what the different faith communities' teaching was on the place of *death* in relation to life and any future hope of *life after death*, and whether they would wish to adopt any of these views for themselves. People may also be able to come to some sort of better acceptance and awareness of their own future mortality. Hence the need for children, too, to be given the opportunity to explore and discuss their concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Religious Education in schools is a particularly suitable place for this exploration to happen. The next chapter examines the place of *death* and *life after death* in Religious Education in England and Chapter 7 discusses developing children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* in Religious Education.

2.11 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

The chapter began with a brief exploration of how death is perceived to be a rite of passage. The place of *death* and *life after death* in the six major world religions, which are also represented in the UK population and reflect the religions to which the children who participated in the research project said that they belonged, was then considered. Therefore, how *death* is broadly understood in terms of doctrine and its relation to a belief and hope in *life after death*, and the death rites of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism has been presented. The synopsis is summarized in Table 2.5 at the end of the chapter. Reference was also made to those who believe that death marks the end of existence. For these people the possibility of life after death is irrelevant.

Although some variation occurs in each of the principal world religions, there are dominant identifiable beliefs and practices within each tradition. These also reveal the similarities and differences across the world religions (Table 2.5).

The second part of the chapter explored the notion that death is a major and influential taboo, especially in post-modern Western society. This is the type of society that children in the UK and much of the Western world are growing-up in, and are thereby, exposed to its influences. The extent of death as a taboo tends to be perpetuated, wittingly and unwittingly, by many adults in society. This seems to have a direct impact by discouraging the discussion of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children.

Table 2.5 Summary of the main features relating to death and life after death of the major faith communities in the UK

Faith communities	Care for the dying	Concept of life after death	Funeral rites	Mourning rites	Remembrance
Christian	Prayers Bible reading especially Psalm 23 Laying on of hands, Holy Communion &/or unction = anointing If possible family & clergy present	Eternal life Heaven & hell Day of judgement at the end of the world Resurrection	Respect for dead body Hope of eternal life & resurrection At church or crematorium: thanksgiving Bible readings especially Psalm 23 Sermon, eulogy & prayers Burial or cremation Ashes laid or scattered Many mourners wear something black	Wake = celebration of deceased's life & statement of life must go on Prayers Words of comfort for bereaved Visiting bereaved by 'bereavement support team' of clergy &/or laity	Memorial with inscription Visit grave or other memorial May place flowers there & pray Possibly on anniversaries = birthday & of death Possibly on 'All Souls' & 'All Saints' Days, Christmas & Easter
Judaism	Declaration of faith = shema Yisrael Prayers If possible family & rabbi present	World to come = olam haba Resurrection	As soon as possible at synagogue Wailing, prayers & eulogy Burial – family 1st shovel earth onto coffin Some cremation	For 7 days tear garment 4 formal stages: from death to burial, shiva, shiva to shaloshim, shaloshim to first yahrzeit	Memorial with Hebrew inscription Visit grave Place stone there For 11 months kaddish prayer Anniversary = yahrzeit light candle
Islam	Declaration of faith = shahadah Qur'an reading If possible family present	Final day of judgement Paradise & hell	As soon as possible Qur'an recited Burial = low & deceased sits facing Mecca wearing linen shroud	Up to 40 days	Inscription with Arabic on grave Visit grave Prayers at graveside
Hinduism	Abstinence May sip holy Ganges water If possible family present	Reincarnation Liberation = moksha	Funerary rituals up to 40 days 6 people carry coffin Eldes son leads mourners At mandir: Bhagavad Gita recited, prayers & offerings Cremation: especially family there for duration of cremation Ashes scattered on 3 rd day preferably on River Ganges, India	Formal for 11 months 11 days Some shorten to 11 days Family may wear white & shave heads	No physical memorial Simple service & prayers on 11 months 11 days & on anniversary for several years & then longer intervals to honour & ensure well-being of departed soul
Sikhism	Guru Granth Sahib reading If possible family present	Reincarnation Liberation = unity with God = wahiguru	At gurdwara: thanksgiving & prayers Cremation: Especially family there for duration of cremation Hymns Return to gurdwara: prayers Ashes scattered preferably in India	Grieving actively discouraged At home: 10 days of Guru Granth Sahib reading & prayers At gurdwara family may have akhand path = 48 hr continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib in turn family provides langar = vegetarian meals for 3 days for community – helps family attain shanti = peace of mind	No physical memorial On anniversary for several years & then longer intervals family have akhand path to honour & ensure well-being of departed soul
Buddhism	If possible family & priest/monk present	Reincarnation Liberation = nirvana	Thanksgiving, festive Mourners gain spiritual merit for living & dead through gifts to monks Deceased's photo near coffin Cremation Ashes in an urn & buried	Grieving actively discouraged	Memorial Urn placed in graveyard or temple Visit usually on birth & death anniversary

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLACE OF DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

3.1 OUTLINE OF CHAPTER

The chapter has two main parts:

1. The place of Religious Education in the English school system
2. Religious Education syllabi *death* and *life after death* content comparison study

This chapter focuses on exploring the second main research question: What is the place of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* in the teaching of Religious Education?

The impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) and its consequences are discussed in relation to the teaching of Religious Education and in particular, the inclusion of exploring the concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children (1988; Appendix 1). ERA re-affirmed the legal status and position of Religious Education in the life of schools in England and Wales.

There is a longstanding historic dimension to the place of Religious Education in the British school system. The chapter moves on to examine how Religious Education is part of the school curriculum in England and Wales. The system in Scotland is similar but operates separately and is outside the scope of this thesis. The focus is on the different types of State schools in England responsible for educating children who are 7 to 11 years of age in the primary school. These types of schools were included in the research for the thesis.

The second part of the chapter considers the place of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* in Religious Education in England through the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study*. The Religious Education syllabi which were used by the schools in Birmingham and Durham that participated in the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* are examined (Section 5.3). The Model Syllabuses produced by the

Government are analysed as there is a relation between them and the other Religious Education syllabi¹⁸.

3.2 PLACE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE ENGLISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

3.2.1 Introduction

Since at least 1870, when the State took national responsibility for education, Religious Education has held a central place in the school curriculum of the UK, unlike its position in many other countries (1870; Appendix 1). Until 1988 Religious Education was the only compulsory subject. There are historic reasons for this situation which are connected with the foundation of the British education system and the underlying philosophy of the guiding principles for the curriculum and school community (Section 1.1).

In the UK, education is primarily determined by Government legislation. The most important legislation of recent times for the British education system was the 1988 Education Reform Act which is widely referred to as 'ERA'. Central to the Act was the introduction of a compulsory National Curriculum and the place of Religious Education additionally, alongside it (1988; Appendix 1).

The State maintained education system is organized according to the countries which collectively form the UK. In practice, this means that separate Government legislation is produced for England and Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. While there is commonality in the legislation, there are also notable differences in the Government directives. As the focus of the research in this thesis is on State schools in a large city in the West Midlands, Birmingham, and a smaller city and its environs in the North-East of England, Durham, the Government legislation referred to relates to England and Wales only.

¹⁸ 'The Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education' was published in 2004 after this research had been conducted and is considered outside the remit of the thesis (QCA, 2004).

Most Government legislation, since the 1944 Education Act, concerning education has been implemented in schools through and in partnership with each Local Education Authority (LEA)¹⁹ (1944; Appendix 1). More recently, however, there have been some major moves away from this process with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) forming direct links with schools. The Government has wanted headteachers and governors to be more directly responsible and accountable to it in fulfilling its directives which now include many aspects of funding.

3.2.2 Education Reform Act 1988

3.2.2.1 *Central principles of the Act*

Central to ERA is the following principle:

The curriculum for a maintained school satisfies the requirements of this section if it is a balanced and broad curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life. (1988: Section 2)

These values are intended to permeate the whole of the curriculum and the life and ethos of the school. Teachers have the responsibility of promoting these values and providing opportunities for personal growth and development. When Professor John Hull of the University of Birmingham was editor of the *British Journal of Religious Education* he wrote in his editorial of the spring 1989 issue about ERA. He stated:

It is important to notice that the development of society is a goal of the curriculum. The spiritual and cultural development of society at large is to be promoted by means of a balanced and broad-based curriculum. (Hull, 1989b: 59)

The centrality of these spiritual, moral, social and cultural values was strengthened through the 1992 Education (Schools) Act by their inclusion in the new inspection framework and the requirement for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to keep the Secretary of State informed (1992; Appendix 1). Inspections should cover among other things: 'the spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of a school's pupils' (Department for Education, 1994: Para 127). The Act introduced a new system of

¹⁹ The 1902 Education Act introduced LEAs to replace school boards and other committees. They became responsible for elementary (primary) and other than elementary schools ie secondary, teacher training, technical and adult education, and denominational school management except that the denomination maintained a majority on the school governing body and responsible for denominational Religious Instruction (Appendix 1).

independent four yearly school inspections by the Office for Standards in Education, commonly known by its acronym, 'Ofsted', which began in September 1994 for primary schools.

Over the last few years, a great deal of debate both in academic circles and in the public arena has focused on defining 'spiritual' and the understanding of 'spiritual and moral development', especially of children in a school environment. Dr David Winkley, for example, questioned whether it is possible, or indeed desirable, to measure spiritual and moral development in children (Ofsted, 1994, Winkley, 1995). Winkley explored spiritual and, in particular, moral development and judgement as a life's journey (Chapter 7). Partly in response to the on-going debate the Government education agency, the National Curriculum Council (NCC) wrote a discussion paper entitled: 'Spiritual and Moral Development: A Discussion Paper'. The paper, published in April 1993, described what the NCC believed was meant by spiritual development:

The term needs to be seen as applying to something fundamental in the human condition which is not necessarily experienced through the physical senses and/or expressed through everyday language. It has to do with relationships with other people and, for believers, with God. It has to do with the universal search for identity – with our responses to challenging experiences, such as death, suffering, beauty, and encounters with good and evil. It is to do with the search for meaning and purpose in life and for values by which to live. (NCC, 1993c: 2)

Eight aspects of spiritual development were briefly explained including:

Search for meaning and purpose – Asking "why me?" at times of hardship or suffering; reflecting on the origins and purpose of life; responding to challenging experiences of life such as beauty, suffering and death. (NCC, 1993c: 3)

These two statements specifically refer to death and suggest that spiritual development comes from being able to respond to that type of challenging experience with which people are faced as part of their life's journey. Thus, if schools are to fulfil the expectations of the central principle of ERA then children must be given the opportunity to explore the issues surrounding *death* and the possibility of *life after death*. This concern is shared by Erica Brown:

To deny children opportunities to understand about death and to explore their own feelings is to sell them short. (Brown, 1999: 100)

The Religious Education curriculum and the daily act of collective worship are established places in school life where the central principle of ERA, especially the spiritual and moral development of children, may be promoted and the expectations fulfilled. In the section on 'Government aims' in Circular 1/94 this notion was reinforced:

Religious Education and collective worship make an important, although not exclusive, contribution to spiritual, moral and cultural development. These activities offer explicit opportunities for pupils to consider the response of religion to fundamental questions about the purpose of being, morality and ethical standards, and to develop their own response to such matters.
(Department for Education, 1994: Para 4)

It is worth noting the inclusion of the phrase 'fundamental questions' as the exploration of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* are inextricably linked to this type of questioning. There is a fuller explanation and discussion on 'fundamental questions' or 'ultimate questions' later in this chapter (Section 3.4; Chapter 7).

Additionally, in spite of the NCC's 1993 discussion paper on spiritual and moral development, in the same afore mentioned section of Circular 1/94, the Government's concern and expectations for schools to address their pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural needs and development were reiterated and clearly stated:

The Government is concerned that insufficient attention has been paid explicitly to the spiritual, moral and cultural aspects of pupils' development, and would encourage schools to address how the curriculum and other activities might best contribute to this crucial dimension of education.

The set of shared values which a school promotes through the curriculum, through expectations governing the behaviour of pupils and staff and through day to day contact between them will make an important contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development and should be at the heart of every school's educational and pastoral policy and practice. Every attempt should be made to publicise the school's values to parents and the local community and to win support for them. The great majority of schools pay considerable attention to this aspect of their role.
(Department for Education, 1994: Paras 1 & 2)

Teachers who encourage children to make connections across their various learning experiences would positively enhance children's awareness, understanding, growth and development of these needs and values as presented in ERA. Exploring concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children is an important dimension of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as Religious Education parse (Chapter 7). The *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study*,

presented later in the chapter, analyses whether the Religious Education syllabi suggest the exploration of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Section 3.3).

Some key elements of Religious Education in terms of its organization and place in the English education system are considered next.

3.2.2.2 *School organization*

A National Curriculum for England and Wales made up of different compulsory subjects and collectively forming eighty per cent of the school curriculum was first introduced through ERA, as previously mentioned (Section 3.2.1; 1988). One of the key features of ERA was to make the subjects taught through the National Curriculum obligatory for all pupils during their years of compulsory schooling which is between the ages of 5 to 16. Prior to this the only compulsory subject was Religious Instruction, as Religious Education was then known, which had been laid down in the 1944 Education Act (1944). John Hull pointed out the nuances of the 1944 Education Act and ERA of 1988 concerning the stage at which pupils should cease to receive Religious Education in their schooling:

The 1944 Act did not say that only pupils under the school leaving age should receive religious education; the law applied to pupils in *schools* not to pupils of a certain age. The new Act makes it perfectly clear that this is indeed the intention, and it is now clear that pupils in sixth forms of schools and in sixth form colleges must all receive religious education as part of their basic curriculum. (Hull, 1989b: 60)

Since 1988 the Government has made a number of revisions to the implementation of the National Curriculum and the provision for Religious Education and collective worship and may decide to make further amendments at any time (1992, 1993, Department for Education, 1994, Department for Education, 1995; Appendix 1).

With the introduction of the National Curriculum the chronological age groups across the school system became standardized and organized. Therefore, 4-5 year old children start their compulsory schooling in Reception before moving on through the consecutive school years culminating in Year 11 for 15-16 year olds. Thus, Key Stage 1 is the infant years, Key Stage 2 is the junior years, and together they form the classes of a primary school. Key Stages 3 and 4 are at secondary school level. The Key Stages and corresponding school years are summarized in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2.

Table 3.1 Primary school years

Key stage	School year	Age	Key stage	School year	Age
1	Reception	4-5	2	Year 3	7-8
1	Year 1	5-6	2	Year 4	8-9
1	Year 2	6-7	2	Year 5	9-10
			2	Year 6	10-11

Table 3.2 Secondary school years

Key stage	School year	Age	Key stage	School year	Age
3	Year 7	11-12	4	Year 10	14-15
3	Year 8	12-13	4	Year 11	15-16
3	Year 9	13-14			

3.2.2.3 Religious Education in State maintained schools

3.2.2.3.1 Organization of Religious Education syllabi

Religious Education, since ERA, has a separate identity and status in the school curriculum as it is not specifically one of the subjects which form the National Curriculum but rather is in a unique position alongside it (1988, Department for Education, 1989). This situation has arisen and can be explained from its historic origins (1870, 1944; Appendix 1).

As a consequence of the 1944 Education Act, the overall legal management and provision of Religious Instruction for State maintained county schools and voluntary controlled schools was decided at a local level through the setting up of a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) (1944). Each LEA was encouraged to appoint a SACRE. There are currently 149 LEAs in England and 22 in Wales (Hagan, 2003, White, 2001).

The framework of the role and function of each SACRE continues today with its 'broad role to support the effective provision of RE and collective worship in schools' (Department for Education, 1994: Para 91). Since ERA each LEA has the responsibility of establishing:

a permanent body, called a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), to advise the LEA on matters concerned with the provision of RE and collective worship. (1988: Section 11)

Some modifications have been made as schools and the communities they serve have changed over the years (1988, 1993; Appendix 1). One of the most important modifications, which was introduced through ERA, was the insistence on increasing the diversity of faith representatives on each SACRE. An Agreed Syllabus Conference was to include leaders of faith communities²⁰, in addition to Christian members, 'which reflect appropriately the principal religious traditions of the (local) area' (1988, 1993, Department for Education, 1994, SCAA, 1994c; Appendix 1). The Christian members of the SACRE represent the Church of England, as the Established Church, (group B) and various other Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholics (group A). In addition there continue to be LEA (group D) and teachers' representatives through organizations like the Trade Unions (group C).

Under Section 11, each SACRE is also responsible for publishing an annual report on its work (1988):

indicating the issues on which the SACRE has advised the LEA, summarising the advice given, and explaining why advice has been offered on matters which were not referred to it by the LEA.
(SCAA, 1994c: Para 1.1)

A SACRE is, therefore, responsible for the local management and provision of Religious Education from a legal perspective. Each LEA is encouraged to send their SACRE's annual report to each LEA school, the Qualifications Curriculum Authority (QCA), any local teacher training institutions where they exist and it should be available for public inspection (1988, Department for Education, 1994).

²⁰ The 1993 Education Act amends references to 'denominations' throughout the Education Acts to 'religions and religious denominations' in order to clarify the term in line with references in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (Department for Education, 1994) (Appendix 1).

An Agreed Syllabus Conference was convened, as 'an occasional body', by the LEA 'to produce and recommend' the Religious Instruction curriculum for the county and voluntary controlled schools within the local LEA. This was also as a result of the 1944 Education Act (1944). Hence it was known as a 'Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education' or more precisely and more frequently prior to the 1980's, 'Locally Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction'. Examples are the 'City of Birmingham Education Committee Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction' (1950) and the 'City of Birmingham District Council Education Committee Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction' (1975) (Standing Conference, 1950, Standing Conference, 1975; Appendix 2; 3).

The membership of the Agreed Syllabus Conference come from the same four groups that make up the SACREs. There were representatives of the Church of England as the national Established Church (group B), members of other Christian denominations including the Free Churches such as Methodists and Baptists which were grouped together (group A), the LEA (group D), and teachers through associations like the Trade Unions (group C). Membership of group A has broadened to include representatives from other faith communities in addition to the various Christian denominations which is parallel to group A on a SACRE, as explained earlier. Some of the Agreed Syllabus Conference representatives would also be on the SACRE (1944, Department for Education, 1994). The 1944 Act gave the Locally Agreed Syllabus legal status and continues to do so.

3.2.2.3.2 History of Religious Education syllabi

The concept of a Locally Agreed Syllabus developed after World War I and in the 1920's with the influence of the Archbishop of York, William Temple²¹ (later Archbishop of Canterbury) and the growth of the ecumenical movement as a consequence of increased co-operation and collaboration between the different Christian denominations. Members of the local denominations came together to discuss the purpose and nature of Religious Instruction. Brenda Watson noted the historical dimension:

²¹ William Temple: Archbishop of York 1929-1942 and Archbishop of Canterbury 1942-1944

The concept of an 'agreed' syllabus is mute testimony to the unfortunate legacy of bitterness and contention bequeathed to present day religious education by the controversies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Watson, 1987: 170)

A local group of headteachers and members of the Church of England and Free Churches produced what is described as the first '*Locally Agreed Syllabus*' for the State schools of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely under the auspices of the local education committee. 'The Cambridgeshire Syllabus of Religious Teaching for Schools' was published in 1924 (Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Education Committee, 1924). The group had no statutory framework from which to work but created a syllabus for professional reasons. Seven other LEAs across England soon adopted it for the schools in their care. During the next few years, other LEAs devised their own *Locally Agreed Syllabus*.

When Birmingham revised its Religious Instruction Syllabus in the early 1970's the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh communities were each invited to send one representative to the Agreed Syllabus Conference (Standing Conference, 1975; Appendix 3). This was unusual at the time.

Only an Agreed Syllabus Conference may recommend an Agreed Syllabus and its recommendation must be unanimously agreed by the committees constituting the Conference. (1944: Schedule 5 Para 5)

The role of an Agreed Syllabus Conference continues unchanged today, but the diversity of its membership has extended, as referred to earlier, and the frequency of revising a *Locally Agreed Syllabus* has altered. This is explained in the next section (Section 3.2.2.3.3).

Under ERA 'Religious Instruction' officially became known by the, then preferred, term of 'Religious Education'. The emphasis in a school context was to be on 'education' — learning about and learning from religion, rather than 'instruction' in a particular religion or any perceived indoctrination (1988, QCA, 2000; Section 3.2.2.3.3). John Hull describes the official name change as, 'one of the most significant features of the new Education Act' (Hull, 1989b). In his editorial for the *British Journal of Religious Education*, spring 1989, Hull explained:

This is the first time in law that religion taught in the classrooms of England and Wales has been called 'religious education'. The expression used in acts of Parliament from 1870 to 1944 was 'religious instruction'. The expression 'religious education' had been increasing in popularity steadily during the previous fifty or sixty years. It was widely felt that the word instruction suggested something too narrow, too authoritarian, and too suggestive of the transmission of a set body of knowledge or doctrine. (Hull, 1989b: 59)

Hull went on to comment that in his opinion:

The change, therefore, from instruction to education in the new Act is long overdue and comes as no surprise. It is, nevertheless, of some significance. Instruction is a content-centred process, which consists in the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the pupil. Education is a person-centred process which aims at human development. (Hull, 1989b: 59)

One consequence of the change in terminology has been that the term Religious Education now no longer includes 'collective worship'. Thus if both terms are being referred to, then both need to be noted. This is in contrast to references made in the 1944 Education Act and intervening years prior to ERA in 1988, when Religious Instruction included both the religious curriculum and the daily act of collective school worship (1944). The latter is still frequently referred to as 'assembly'.

3.2.2.3.3 Overall content of Religious Education syllabi

Another vitally important element of ERA was its emphasis on making a multi-faith approach to the teaching of Religious Education a statutory requirement. This was confirmed with the requirement to have representatives of the different faith communities as members of each SACRE and the Agreed Syllabus Conferences. The 1988 Act stated that an Agreed Syllabus should:

reflect the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are, in the main Christian, whilst taking account of teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. (1988: Section 8 Para 3)

This helped to ensure that all pupils across England and Wales would be exposed to exploring the other faiths, which are a part of British society, in addition to Christianity.

As a result of public debate in the House of Lords and through discussion in the press about what was meant by the phrase 'in the main Christian', the then Government published Circular 1/94 to officially interpret the legislation (Department for Education, 1994: Paras 31-37). The phrase 'in the main Christian' is widely understood to mean

that at least fifty per cent of the content of Religious Education should focus on Christianity and the remainder to incorporate the other faiths. Circular 1/94 stated:

As a whole and at each Key Stage, the relative content devoted to Christianity in the syllabus should predominate. The syllabus as a whole must also include all of the principal religions represented in this country. In this context, the precise balance between Christianity and other religions should take account both of the national and the local position. In considering this, account should be taken of the local school population and the wishes of local parents, with a view to minimising the number who might exercise the right of withdrawal from RE lessons.
(Department for Education, 1994: Para 35)

With this revised focus on the content of the Religious Education curriculum many LEAs chose to require their Agreed Syllabus Conference to review and revise their existing Agreed Syllabus as they did not fully reflect a multi-faith approach. Some LEAs chose not to do this. Birmingham LEA, for example, did not review its syllabus because their 1975 version included different faiths (Standing Conference, 1975; Appendix 3).

In view of the numbers that chose to do so, the 1993 Education Act amends Schedule 5 of the 1944 Act to:

- to require any LEA that has not adopted a new syllabus since September 1988 to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference for that purpose within twelve months ... ie by 1 April 1995.
(Department for Education, 1994: Para 26)

This process has now been completed. The on-going process requires every LEA to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference 'every five years after the completion of each further review' to make any necessary revisions to its syllabus or to re-confirm its present format (Department for Education, 1994: Para 29).

Each Religious Education syllabus mirrors the format of each syllabus for the subjects of the National Curriculum with targets being set and standards to be reached by the end of each Key Stage (Table 3.1; Table 3.2). It is hoped and expected that the majority of pupils will achieve the targets. The targets for the end of each Key Stage are set out in each Agreed Syllabus under the heading: 'End of Key Stage Descriptions' or 'End of Key Stage Statements' (Standing Conference, 1995a, Standing Conference, 1995b).

A system of two Attainment Targets has been widely adopted in Religious Education syllabi and generally accepted by Religious Education specialists in the UK.

Attainment Target 1 (AT1): Learning *about* religions

- knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs and teachings
- knowledge and understanding of religious practices and lifestyles
- knowledge and understanding of ways of expressing meaning

Attainment Target 2 (AT2): Learning *from* religion

- skill of asking and responding to questions of identity and experience
- skill of asking and responding to questions of meaning and purpose
- skill of asking and responding to questions of values and commitments (QCA, 2000: 4)

3.2.3 Religious Education in faith schools

Faith schools are either *voluntary controlled* or *voluntary aided* in status.

3.2.3.1 Voluntary controlled schools

Voluntary controlled schools (VC) are another development of the 1944 Education Act (1944). Those Church schools which took up the offer of the provision made in the Act of increased State funding and control became known as voluntary controlled schools.

It is believed that the Government thought the majority of Church schools would decide to have voluntary controlled status, although in practice many did not (Dearing, 2001). The various denominations pursued differing policies on this issue. Many Church of England schools became voluntary controlled whereas no Roman Catholic schools chose to — they all chose voluntary aided status. The Methodist Church continued with a policy it was already following, namely to reduce its number of schools. Indeed, by 2001 about half of its schools are in partnership with the General Synod of the Church of England (Dearing, 2001).

Religious Education in voluntary controlled schools must take into account any arrangement which is made at the request of the parents of the school for such education to be in accordance with a Trust Deed or the practice adhered to before the school

became controlled. Consequently, the Religious Education would be denominational orientated. The corresponding diocesan guidelines would be followed. As effectively all voluntary controlled schools are Church of England this means that there is no such agreement (Section 3.2.3.2). These schools should follow the Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, as previously explained (Section 2.3.2.2.1; 2.3.2.2.2; Dearing, 2001, Teece, 1994).

3.2.3.2 Voluntary aided schools

Voluntary aided schools (VA) also came into being as a result of the 1944 Education Act. Compared with voluntary controlled schools they were to have less State financial support, but be more independent. Many Church of England schools became voluntary aided as did every Roman Catholic school (Dearing, 2001).

In voluntary aided schools the content and implementation of Religious Education is the responsibility of the faith community to which the school is affiliated, and the school governors. How this is organized is in part historic and may depend on how the faith community is structured nationally.

The Church of England, for example, is divided into forty-three regional areas across the country each known as a 'diocese'. Each diocese has a Board of Education (DBE) which is responsible for forming a committee or working party to produce the syllabus for Religious Education to be used in schools under its care. The curriculum is often called the 'Diocesan Guidelines for Religious Education' (Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 1994; Section 3.3.9). Durham Diocese calls its guidelines, 'Diocese of Durham R.E. Syllabus 2000' (Shedden & Bellett, 2000; Section 3.3.10; Table 3.4). Where relevant the vast majority of Church of England voluntary aided schools follow their diocesan guidelines and some voluntary controlled schools do so too (Dearing, 2001, Teece, 1994; Section 3.2.3.1). Both the Education Acts of 1944 and 1988 and a Trust Deed of each school govern the provision of Religious Education in Church schools (Shedden & Bellett, 2000, Teece, 1994). The Religious Education in Church of England schools takes largely a multi-faith approach with a strong emphasis on Christianity.

In line with the changes in Religious Education curriculum provision in State maintained schools, a number of DBEs have reviewed their diocesan guidelines for Religious Education (Section 3.2.2.3.3). The DBE of Durham Diocese completed this task in 2000 (Shedden & Bellett, 2000). Other DBEs are in the process of reviewing their guidelines, for example, Birmingham Diocese (Richmond, 2003; Section 3.3.9).

Similar arrangements are made for schools of other Christian denominations, including Roman Catholic voluntary aided schools. The Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales has used the worldwide 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' in producing their 'Curriculum Directory' covering all areas of the curriculum, including Religious Education which was published in 1996 as a result of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The broad framework which the Directory offers was used to draw up the 'Curriculum Map', published in 2000. The Curriculum Map breaks down the learning outcomes in the Directory, for each year group in the primary and secondary school (Table 3.1; Table 3.2). This document included a broad outline for Religious Education.

Each Roman Catholic diocese gives advice on how to use the Curriculum Directory, Curriculum Map and any other relevant resources such as 'Veritas', to the schools for which they are responsible in their area. The schools in the Archdiocese of Birmingham²², for example, were guided to use the Curriculum Map to devise their own scheme of work for Religious Education (Table 3.3). The Archdiocese subsequently decided to use the Curriculum Directory and Curriculum Map to develop and produce more detailed guidelines for Religious Education namely, the 'Birmingham Curriculum Framework for Primary Schools: Learning and Growing as the People of God'. The Framework details learning outcomes and expectations for Religious Education and includes a book with relevant topics for each year group from nursery children through to Year 6. Since 2002, when it was published, schools in the Archdiocese have been encouraged to use that document in their detailed planning for Religious Education as well as the resources, 'Here I am' with primary school children and 'Icons' with secondary school pupils both of which are available nationally. A set of six books for teachers and pupils form the 'Here I am' scheme of work. The Catholic Truth Society has produced a Religious Education scheme entitled, 'The Way, the Truth and the Life'

²² The Roman Catholic Church in the UK is organized as a mixture of archdioceses and dioceses. Birmingham is one of four archdioceses in England and there are fifteen dioceses in England (White, 2001: 430). Diocesan areas are not concordant with the Church of England's dioceses.

for Key Stages 1 to 3 which is also recommended by the Church hierarchy. The Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools is predominantly Christian, essentially from a Roman Catholic perspective, but does include some teaching about the other religious traditions (Joice, 2003, Nichols, 2003).

The arrangement for provision of Religious Education in Jewish voluntary aided schools naturally focuses on Judaism (Arkush, 2003; Table 3.3). The local rabbi is often in an advisory role concerning the local individual school's Religious Education curriculum. The rabbi will also be involved with leading collective worship in schools on a regular basis in the same way that Christian clergy are invited into schools (Arkush, 2003, Dearing, 2001). At present there are thirty Jewish State primary schools in the UK, twenty-nine of which are in England and Wales. All of these schools have voluntary aided status (Lemer, 2003). There is one Muslim voluntary aided school in England which is in Bradford. That school teaches Religious Education from a Muslim perspective (Hagan, 2003).

In every school the school governors have a key role and responsibility to make sure that Religious Education is implemented in the voluntary aided school they serve.

3.3 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SYLLABI DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH CONTENT COMPARISON STUDY

3.3.1 Introduction

The second part of the chapter considers the place of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* in Religious Education in England through the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study*. Consequently, the second main research question is being explored (Section 1.3).

A review of the literature gave no evidence of any previous study which had attempted to relate the content and context of *death* and *life after death* in the Religious Education syllabi with how children may perceive these concepts (Chapter 4). To meet with the parameters of the thesis, an investigation was planned to focus on the inclusion of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* in Key Stage 2 when primary school children are 7 to 11 years of age (Section 3.2.2).

The *content comparison study* analyses the Model Syllabuses produced by the Government before examining the Religious Education syllabi which were used by the schools in Birmingham and Durham that participated in the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Section 5.3). The relationship between the Model Syllabuses and the other Religious Education syllabi is explained. Particular reference is made to Key Stage 2 in each example given.

3.3.2 Aims

- To investigate whether the concepts of *death* and *life after death* were included in the Religious Education syllabi
- To examine how the concepts of *death* and *life after death* were presented and suggested for exploration in the Religious Education syllabi

3.3.3 Subject sample

The seven Religious Education syllabi examined were:

- Model Syllabus: Faith Communities' Working Group Reports
- Model Syllabus Model 1: Living Faiths Today
- Model Syllabus Model 2: Questions and Teachings
- Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education
- Durham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education
- Birmingham Diocesan Guidelines: Guidelines on Religious Education
- Durham Diocesan Guidelines: Diocese of Durham RE Syllabus 2000

The Model Syllabuses were selected for examination because they are available as guidelines for use by the Agreed Syllabus Conferences throughout England in their preparation for producing the Locally Agreed Syllabi for Religious Education (Section 3.2; Figure 3.1). The respective education boards of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church are able to access them for use in the design and content of their own syllabi. Therefore, the Model Syllabuses may have a direct influence on the Religious Education presented in the syllabi to be taught to children although they are not statutory, nor are they intended as schemes of work for schools.

The respective Birmingham and Durham Religious Education syllabi have been reviewed as they were required to be used by the schools in the two selected locations which participated in the main research study questionnaire of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Section 5.3; Figure 1.1; Appendix 8).

3.3.4 Validity and survey process

For the design and content of the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* to be credible they must have reliability and validity (Section 5.2.4). The association of these components is discussed as follows:

Each syllabus was examined in turn and presented separately. A coding frame was devised based on content analysis and applied to each syllabus as follows (Edwards & Talbot, 1994, Luck *et al.*, 2000, Oppenheim, 1992):

- The general organization and layout of the syllabus
- The format and style of the presentation of the curriculum designated by the syllabus
- The inclusion in the curriculum of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* at Key Stage 2
- Analysis of the detail and manner in which the concepts of *death* and *life after death* at Key Stage 2 were to be taught, and consequently, explored by children through their Religious Education lessons

3.3.5 Model Syllabuses

3.3.5.1 Introduction

In August 1993 the Minister of State for Education asked the then NCC, under the chairmanship of Lord Dearing, to produce Model Syllabuses for Religious Education²³. Members of the six principal faith communities in the UK and selected teachers were closely involved in the project (QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c, SCAA, 1994c; Section 2.2).

²³ In 1997 the agency — the former NCC, changed its name from School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and reprinted the Model Syllabuses without revision but changed the layout.

The Model Syllabuses are reviewed here because part of the role of the QCA is to encourage the use of the non-statutory Model Syllabuses by Agreed Syllabus Conferences when they are producing and, subsequently, reviewing their Locally Agreed Syllabus. The Model Syllabuses are also available for use by the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church by their respective education boards (QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c, SCAA, 1994c; Section 3.2.2.3.1). This relationship is shown graphically in Figure 3.1.

Although the Model Syllabuses are not statutory, nor are they intended as schemes of work for schools, they are meant as guidelines for use by the Agreed Syllabus Conferences in their preparation of the Locally Agreed Syllabi for Religious Education

Each faith community produced a report which collectively was used to develop two models of syllabus:

Model 1²⁴ is structured around the knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a member of a faith community.

Model 2 is structured around the knowledge and understanding of the teachings of religions and how these relate to shared human experience.
(QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c: 1)

Included in both models of the Model Syllabuses is the recommendation for the inclusion of two Attainment Targets in an Agreed Syllabus (Section 3.2.2.3.3):

Attainment Target 1 (AT1): Learning *about* religions
Attainment Target 2 (AT2): Learning *from* religion
(QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c: 5)

3.3.5.2 Model Syllabus: Faith Communities' Working Group Reports

As previously mentioned, the six principal faith communities, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, were invited to form working groups exploring what all children should learn about and from their respective religious traditions in school (1988; Section 2.2). The intention was that there was diversity in the membership of the groups.

²⁴ Phrases and headings shown in **bold** correspond with how **bold** is used in the Model Syllabuses.

The report notes, 'the Working Group Reports are innovative in that':

- each faith group has chosen the areas of study it considers essential to gain an understanding of its religious traditions. Previously, choices were often made by educationalists and publishers in an *ad hoc* way.
- the headings for each column were also selected by the working groups. They reflect key concepts that are particular to each religion, ... rather than generic headings which are sometimes inappropriate for a religious tradition.
(SCAA, 1994c: 3)

By way of introduction, each faith community wrote a synopsis of its core beliefs and practices before setting out in table form what it considered should be the chief areas studied at each Key Stage (Section 3.2.2.2; Table 3.1; Table 3.2). There is a separate table for each Key Stage in Christianity because legally it must be studied throughout the compulsory years of education (1988). As it is unlikely that the other faiths will be studied in the same detail as Christianity, advice is given as to which table of information is seen to be appropriate for a specific Key Stage.

Quite explicitly, the Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh groups expected children at Key Stage 2 to learn about their respective faiths' concepts of *death* and *life after death*. This is expounded as follows.

In the introduction to the Hindu report their concepts of life after death were clearly stated as follows:

Practically all Hindus believe in the doctrine of reincarnation, whereby the eternal soul (atman) transmigrates through different species, from one body to another. This operates according to the law of action and reaction, commonly called 'the law of Karma'. The aim of human life, for most Hindus, is liberation from the cycle of birth and death through union with the Supreme (Brahman). (SCAA, 1994c: 15)

The Hindu report goes on to specifically list 'reincarnation (the cycle of birth and death)' as one of the 'key beliefs' under the heading of 'concepts, truths and values', and under 'family, community and traditions', 'samskars, eg those associated with birth, initiation, marriage and death' as part of 'the journey of life' (SCAA, 1994c). This is presenting concepts of *death* and *life after death* through rites of passage (Chapters 2; 7).

In the Jewish report ‘funerals, mourning and remembrance’ are noted alongside other ‘life rituals’ like ‘brit milah — girls’ naming ceremony’ and ‘marriage’ under the general heading of ‘the people and the land’ (SCAA, 1994c; Section 2.4). Concepts of *death* and *life after death* are also investigated through rites of passage.

In the Muslim report, under the section ‘iman (faith)’, ‘akhirah — belief in the hereafter’ is mentioned (SCAA, 1994c; Section 2.5). Therefore, this is exploring the Muslim doctrine of life after death.

The Sikh report also refers to reincarnation in its introduction. ‘Death’ is specifically listed under ‘ceremonies’ which is under the broader heading of ‘practices’ (Section 2.7). Thus helping children to become aware of the death rites. The Gurus’ martyrs are listed as a topic under two areas of study ‘holy days (gurpurbs)’ and ‘Guru Tegh Bahadur — martyred for the principle of religious tolerance’ (SCAA, 1994c).

By contrast, death is not explicitly named in the Christian or Buddhist parts of these reports. Concepts of *death* and *life after death* may be explored through other topics recorded by each faith community in the report but this is less specific. An example of this is in the Christianity section for Key Stage 2. Under the main heading ‘the Christian way of life’ there are the sub headings: ‘God and humanity’, ‘beliefs, values and experience’, ‘key Christian values’ and ‘personal and corporate commitment and action’. Depending on the direction taken to examine and learn from these areas of study, concepts of *death* and *life after death* could be embraced (SCAA, 1994c; Section 2.3; 2.8).

3.3.5.3 Model Syllabus Model 1: Living Faiths Today

Model 1 was developed using the 'Faith Communities' Working Group Reports' as guidance. A key feature of the Syllabus is the use of the two attainment targets: learning about religions and learning from religion (Section 3.2.2.3.3). Learning experiences related to each attainment target are listed alongside the examples in the 'knowledge and understanding' column in the tables for each of the six religions.

At all Key Stages, pupils will frequently be interested in general religious and moral issues. These might include belief in God, life after death, relationships, personal identity, values, a sense of community, and the need to keep alive traditions and memories which form part of their heritage. Advantages should be taken of the opportunities this provides for them to consider such issues in the light of the teachings of both Christianity and other religions. (QCA, 1998b: 4)

It is relevant to note that the authors of the Model 1 thought that life after death is an example of an issue which children in every age group are interested in discussing and exploring.

There are parallels in the ways in which the concepts of *death* and *life after death* are included in the detail at Key Stage 2 of Model 1 with how they are in the 'Faith Communities' Working Group Reports'.

Included in 'knowledge and understanding' of Hinduism 2b is 'the Hindu way of life' which specifies 'samskars — especially, initiation (sacred thread), death rites (funeral and cremation) (Section 2.6). It is suggested as part of 'learning experiences related to Attainment Target 1' that pupils could 'talk with Hindus about ceremonies linked with initiation and death' (QCA, 1998b). In parallel, under 'learning experiences related to Attainment Target 2', pupils could 'discuss feelings and emotions associated with growing up and death; (and) consider how rituals might help in understanding the changes which occur during life' (QCA, 1998b). Thus concepts of *death* and *life after death* are explored through rites of passage (Chapters 2; 7).

In the 'knowledge and understanding' of Judaism 2b 'Brit Milah, funerals and mourning' are listed as part of 'special marks of the Jewish home' (Section 2.4). The corresponding 'learning experiences' are for Attainment Target 1 'find out about Jewish customs connected with birth and death'; and for Attainment Target 2 'compare traditions and celebrations in different homes' and 'discuss their thoughts and feelings

about death' (QCA, 1998b). Concepts of *death* and *life after death* are again explored through rites of passage.

For those children studying Sikhism (2b) part of their 'knowledge and understanding' of 'ceremonies and celebrations' should include 'death celebrations (gurpurbs)' and the 'martyrdoms of: Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and the sons of Guru Gobind Singh' (QCA, 1998b). Their 'learning experiences related to Attainment Target 1' could be to 'find out about Sikh martyrs' and to 'find out on which occasion the akhand path is performed' (QCA, 1998b; Section 2.7). To 'talk about their own feelings about death and whether or not there is an afterlife' and to 'discuss the meaning of martyrdom and whether beliefs are important enough to give one's life for,' form the essence of the 'learning experiences' for Attainment Target 1 (QCA, 1998b). Thus children would learn something of the death rites and significant elements of Sikh history.

3.3.5.4 Model Syllabus Model 2: Questions and Teachings

The second model focuses on questions and teachings related to the different faiths and shared human experience. Model 2 has in each Key Stage:

Sections on Christianity and the five other religions set out:

- key teachings specific to each religion;
- how these teachings might be explored in relation to children's experiences and questions;
- knowledge and understanding of religions which illustrate the key teachings.
(QCA, 1998c: 7)

The same suggestions under the 'knowledge and understanding' of Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism for children at Key Stage 2 to explore concepts of *death* and *life after death* are laid out as in Model 1 (Section 3.3.5.3). These concepts could easily be explored as part of other topics listed depending on how children were encouraged to question and make connections between their own experiences of life and the teachings, beliefs and practices of the different faith communities being studied. An example is in the section on Buddhism in the topic covering 'stories about Gotama Buddha and how he found an answer to suffering, especially ..., enlightenment, teaching and passing away' (QCA, 1998c; Section 2.8).

3.3.5.5 *Identified shortcomings of the Model Syllabuses*

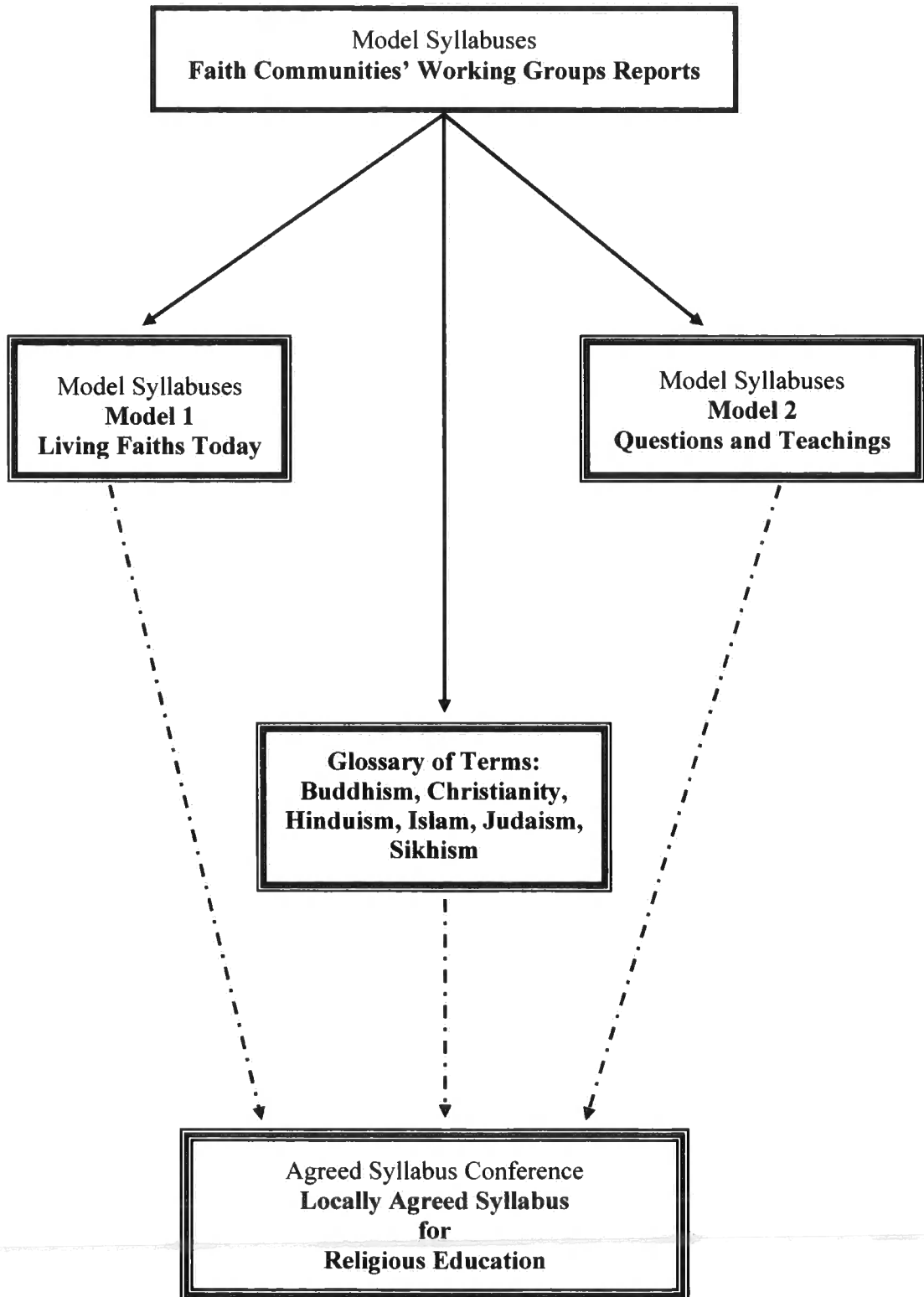
Among the major shortcomings which have been identified, is concern for the lack of consistency across the faith communities in referring to the concepts of *death* and *life after death* as an issue for children to explore when studying the various religious traditions. In the Faith Communities' Working Group Reports the Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh groups specifically included concepts of *death* and *life after death* which would give children in Key Stage 2 the opportunity to explore through their Religious Education. As has been demonstrated, this is reflected in both the two models of the Model Syllabuses with the exception of Islam where the concepts were omitted (Section 3.3.5.2; 3.3.5.3; 3.3.5.4). Where the concepts are recommended for inclusion in a Locally Agreed Syllabus they are considered as one of the rites of passage (Chapters 2; 7). The fact that these concepts could also be discussed in other topics in each faith community, as already noted, is less consistent.

Other major shortcomings include the omission by some of the faith communities to include reference to the diversity and broad divisions within their own religion. The Christian group gave a short synopsis in the introduction explaining about some of the historical divisions leading to different denominations and the current diversity in worship and practice. The Buddhist group, too, have mentioned their different traditions. In contrast, the Jewish, Muslim and Sikh groups did not refer to the diversity within their faith communities. The implication is that diversity may not exist. Due to the nature of Hinduism and allegiance of Hindus primarily to either Shiva, Vishnu or the Great Goddess (Devi) this issue is not so critical (Blurton, 1992, Langley, 1993).

The definition of what 'Islam' means is deficient as there is no indication that it means 'submitting oneself to the will of Allah (God)'. A Muslim is 'one who has made that submission' (Brend, 1991, Langley, 1993). This is important because when people are aware that Islam means submission to the will of Allah then their understanding of what the perspective of a Muslim maybe on matters of faith, life and especially, *death* and *life after death* becomes much clearer.

Figure 3.1 Model Syllabuses and their relation to a Locally Agreed Syllabus

Key:
Optional use - . - . →



3.3.6 Religious Education syllabi followed in the death and life after death children's concepts study

Table 3.3 shows the type of Religious Education syllabus followed by each of the schools in Birmingham which participated in the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Section 5.3; 6.2).

Table 3.3 Religious Education syllabus followed in Birmingham schools

School Type	Status	School	Type of Religious Education Syllabus
Primary	County	GB	Birmingham Agreed Syllabus
Primary	County	RB	Birmingham Agreed Syllabus
Church of England Primary	Voluntary Controlled	MB	Birmingham Agreed Syllabus
Roman Catholic Primary	Voluntary Aided	CB	Roman Catholic Curriculum Map
Jewish Primary	Voluntary Aided	DB	Jewish perspective

Table 3.4 shows the type of Religious Education syllabus followed by each of the schools in Durham which participated in the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Section 5.3; 6.2).

Table 3.4 Religious Education syllabus followed in Durham schools

School Type	Status	School	Type of Religious Education Syllabus
Primary	County	FD	Durham Agreed Syllabus
Primary	County	GD	Durham Agreed Syllabus
Church of England Junior	Voluntary Aided	BCD	Diocese of Durham R.E. Syllabus 2000
Church of England Primary	Voluntary Aided	HD	Diocese of Durham R.E. Syllabus 2000
Church of England Primary	Voluntary Controlled	SD	Durham Agreed Syllabus
Roman Catholic Primary	Voluntary Aided	JD	Roman Catholic Curriculum Map

3.3.7 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus

The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education is analysed as it is used by a number of the schools which participated in the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Table 3.3; Section 5.3).

The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education is organized in a thematic format (Jepson, 1997, Teece, 1994, Teece, 1996).

A thematic approach to Religious Education is when an aspect of religion is explored using material from two or more different faith traditions.
(Jepson, 1997: 19)

The focus in the Agreed Syllabus is through '**Five Areas of Study**'²⁵ which form the basis of the Programmes of Study.' They are:

- Area 1 — Making sense of our world
 - Area 2 — Living together
 - Area 3 — Following guidance
 - Area 4 — Expressing meaning, belief and value
 - Area 5 — Marking special times, places and events
- (Standing Conference, 1995b: 14)

The document goes on to explain that the areas of study 'deal with five questions with which Religious Education in schools is concerned:'

1. How are we to make sense of the world in which we live?
 2. How are we to relate to other people?
 3. How are our lives to be shaped by or traditions?
 4. How are we to express what is important to us?
 5. How, what and why are we to celebrate?
- (Standing Conference, 1995b: 14)

²⁵ Phrases and headings shown in **bold** correspond with how **bold** is used in the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus.

The children at Key Stage 2 are expected to cover the material in the five areas of study 'from at least three religions one of which must be Christianity' (Standing Conference, 1995b: 29). On each chart which relates to one of the areas of study there are:

- **key concepts which provide a focus for planning;**
- **the statutory learning opportunities to which all pupils are entitled ('learning experiences');**
- **the statutory and suggested aspects of religions which pupils should encounter ('content');**
- suggestions about focal points of teaching.
(Standing Conference, 1995b: 29)

The Ofsted report, 'The Impact of the New Agreed Syllabuses on the Teaching and Learning of Religious Education', which includes an analysis of Birmingham's Syllabus, noted that it was unclear 'how far the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus draws on the SCAA (the Model Syllabuses) material' (Ofsted, 1997: Para 40). It is clear from studying 'the aims of Religious Education in Birmingham' and the 'Attainment Targets' section that they are adapted from those in the Model Syllabuses (QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c, Standing Conference, 1995b; Section 3.3.3). The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 'has two **Attainment Targets** describing pupils' achievements. The two targets ensure a balance between different aspects of the subject.' They are listed as:

Attainment Target 1: Learning about Religion
Attainment Target 2: Learning from Religion

Although described as two separate Attainment Targets, these two aspects of Religious Education are inseparable and equally important. They must both be addressed throughout every pupil's school career.
(Standing Conference, 1995b: 10)

At Key Stage 2, in the five areas of study these concepts are mentioned under the 'learning experiences' for Area 1 'Making Sense of Our World':

Pupils should have opportunities to learn about and learn from religion by:

- a) developing their awareness of the dependence of human beings on the world around them; the limitations of human life; the experiences of suffering and loss; the mystery of the Universe; responsibility for the environment; experiences of change and continuity in the natural world; the stages of the human life cycle.
- b) developing their knowledge and understanding of ways in which people:
...
— recognise the important stages in the human life cycle; ...
(Standing Conference, 1995b: 31)

Alongside 'b)' under 'content', 'birth, adolescence, adulthood, old age, death: the 4 ashramas (Hindu)' are suggested for material to use. Concepts of *death* and *life after death* are, therefore, explored through rites of passage (Chapters 2; 7). In each chart for the areas of study nothing is suggested under the 'content' for 'a)' of the 'learning experiences' which is linked to pupils 'developing their awareness of ...'. The 'focal points of teaching' refers to 'the teaching of this Area of Study should help pupils in: thinking about the experiences of life which give rise to questions about meaning and purpose ...' (Standing Conference, 1995b: 31). The relevant 'concepts' on which to focus in this area of study which are associated with death are: 'life-cycle, responsibility and mystery'.

In the fifth area of study, 'Marking Special Occasions' death rites are suggested in the 'content' opposite:

- b) developing their knowledge and understanding of ways in which people:
— mark important occasions in the course of their lives; ...
Content:
entering the community of monks and nuns (Buddhist): **baptism and confirmation** (Christian): sacred thread (Hindu): brit milah and bar/bat mitzvah (Jewish): birth and naming (Muslim): amrit (Sikh): marriage: funeral and mourning rites
(Standing Conference, 1995b: 35)

The 'focal points of teaching' states:

The teaching of this Area of Study should help pupils in:
reflecting on why certain places are important to themselves and others;
considering the values and ideals which are expressed in festivals and
celebrations; thinking about the stage they have reached in life and what the
next stage may entail; reflecting on the value of remembering important
people and events in the past.
(Standing Conference, 1995b: 35)

The 'concepts' to focus on in this area of study are 'celebration and remembering'.
In this area of study concepts of *death* and *life after death* are also explored through
rites of passage (Chapters 2; 7).

The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus includes death as a topic for children to explore
at Key Stage 2. It is presented as part of the human life cycle and as a rite of passage,
although that term is not used. Issues of *death* and *life after death* could be explored in
various parts of the other areas of study, but as with the Model Syllabuses discussed
earlier (Section 3.3.3), this is less specific. An example of this is in Area 2 which is
'Living Together'. Under the 'content' section, both 'sick and elderly' and 'children'
are listed as suggestions alongside 'developing their knowledge and understanding of
ways in which people: care for and relate to each other in their communities'. Teachers
need to recognize and be open to the possibility of issues of death coming up in
discussions with children during this topic and for them to be prepared to take such
opportunities to explore them.

3.3.8 Durham Agreed Syllabus

The Durham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education is analysed as it is used by a number of the schools which participated in the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Table 3.4; Section 5.3).

The Durham Agreed Syllabus is organized in a systematic or discrete style (Jepson, 1997, Teece, 1994, Teece, 1996).

A systematic approach to Religious Education explores an aspect of religious faith so as to develop knowledge and understanding of that faith tradition. (Jepson, 1997: 20)

It is stipulated which and how many religions should be taught at different Key Stages in addition to studying Christianity throughout the pupils' primary and secondary schooling. At Key Stage 2 children are taught Hinduism and Sikhism as the core religions along with Christianity. Schools choose either Buddhism, Islam or Judaism as the supplementary religion to be taught in addition to the others. Apart from Christianity the core and supplementary religions vary between Key Stages (Standing Conference, 1995a). Only if a child received all their education up to the age of sixteen in the Durham LEA would they cover all six principal UK religions whereas in Birmingham they should encounter each one to some degree by the end of their primary schooling. The detail for the contents for the teaching of the religions is largely modelled on the guidance in Model 1 'Living Faiths Today' of the Model Syllabuses and the 'Faith Communities' Working Group Reports' (QCA, 1998b, SCAA, 1994c).

The entire Syllabus is organized in such a way that within each religious tradition five concepts form the foundation and they feed into the two Attainment Targets. The concepts are: 'belief, worship, deity, authority and commitment' (Standing Conference, 1995a). Attainment Target 1 (AT1) is 'The Study of Religion' and Attainment Target 2 (AT2) is 'Reflection on Religion' (Section 3.2.2.3.3). These Attainment Targets are similar to the two recommended in the Model Syllabuses (QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c). The detail of the contents for each of the five concepts for each religion varies across the Key Stages.

On analysing the core religions of Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism at Key Stage 2 'death rites' is listed under the concepts of 'belief and worship' for Hinduism: 'ceremonies: naming, sacred thread (initiation), marriage, death rites' (Standing

Conference, 1995a). Concepts of *death* and *life after death* are, therefore, explored through rites of passage and the faith's death rites (Chapters 2; 7). The 'learning experiences' which link with death rites include:

AT2 pupils could:

- Discuss feelings and emotions associated with growing up and death
- Suggest reasons why some people might think of life as a pilgrimage (Standing Conference, 1995a: 33)

Under the concepts of 'belief, worship and authority' in Sikhism, martyrdom is mentioned: 'with special reference to Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh and the Martyrdom of the Sons of Guru Gobind Singh' (Standing Conference, 1995a). The 'learning experiences' which link with martyrdom include:

AT2 pupils could:

- Share ideas about important stages in life
- Think about martyrdom and whether beliefs are important enough to give one's life for (Standing Conference, 1995a: 35)

The references under Hinduism and Sikhism martyrs reflect the suggestions made in the Model Syllabuses (Section 3.3.3). In a similar way to the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus and the Model Syllabuses, *death* and *life after death* could be explored at Key Stage 2 within other listed topics but it is less specific and likely (Section 3.3.6). As part of the 'learning experiences', for example, for Christianity under:

AT2 pupils could:

- Consider feeling of being lost and found
- Consider life as a journey and mark important times (Standing Conference, 1995a: 31)

3.3.9 Birmingham Diocesan Guidelines

The Birmingham Diocesan Guidelines are reviewed here for comparison and because they are used by some schools which were originally going to participate in the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Section 5.3). As detailed later, one Church of England voluntary aided school, which had agreed to work with the research, withdrew as a consequence of the fatal road accident of a former pupil (Chapters 5; 7). The school thought that the children participating in the research would subsequently need counselling.

The Diocese of Birmingham's 'Guidelines on Religious Education' were published in 1994 and so were in circulation before the national Model Syllabuses were published and before many other syllabi for Religious Education had been revised (QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c, SCAA, 1994c, Shedden & Bellett, 2000, Standing Conference, 1995a, Standing Conference, 1995b). The Guidelines are due for revision by the DBE and part of this process has resulted in some guidelines on the theme, 'Responding to God' which incorporates the two Attainment Targets: 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion' (Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 2003). The Attainment Targets parallel those recommended in the Model Syllabuses (QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c; Section 3.3.3). The theme has been written in response to the perceived distinctive nature of Church of England schools discussed both on a local and national level (Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 2001, Dearing, 2001). The purpose of the theme is clearly stated:

Providing pupils with opportunities to respond to God is seen to be the distinctive role of church schools. Religious Education plays a crucial part in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of God and of helping and challenging them to respond.
(Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 2003: 1)

In every respect of the 'Responding to God' theme it would be possible to explore concepts of *death and life after death* with children, especially in the section on 'ultimate questions'.

However, this new approach post dates the research surveys in this thesis.

The 1994 Diocesan Guidelines on Religious Education are based on three Attainment Targets and their 'profile components':

AT1 Knowledge and understanding of religion

- a. **Worship and meditation**
- b. **Celebration**
- c. **Lifestyle**
- d. **Authority**
- e. **Belief and identity**

AT2 Awareness of life experiences

- a. **Natural world**
- b. **Relationships**
- c. **Ultimate questions**
- d. **Expressing meaning**

AT3 Exploring and responding

- a. **Exploring and responding**
(Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 1994: vii)

Central to each Attainment Target are: 'concepts, knowledge, skills, attitudes and human experience'. Within each of these aspects, areas where teachers should specifically focus on Christianity are listed separately from those which relate to the other principal faith communities which are referred to collectively. The introduction states:

For the sake of brevity we have refrained from giving examples except where we thought these were necessary for clarity.
(Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 1994: iii)

The schools in the Diocese of Birmingham are within five LEAs. Most of the schools are in Birmingham LEA while others are in Hereford and Worcester, Sandwell, Solihull and Warwickshire (Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 1994). This means:

Our schools serve a diversity of communities, reflecting the broad educational and community variations of the whole country. They range from inner city to village, from mono-cultural to mixed race communities.
(Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 1994: v)

Throughout the three Attainment Targets concepts of *death* and *life after death* could be explored as part of the vast majority of suggestions listed under each of the 'concepts, knowledge, skills, attitudes and human experience' depending on the direction taken to investigate a topic. In some areas this is more obvious than others. The following are selected examples:

AT1: Knowledge and understanding of religion

Knowledge:

Study the life and teachings of Jesus.

To look at sacred writings from other faiths and to understand their importance to believers.

Look at why people go on pilgrimage.

Look at the reasons why particular places become significant for believers.

How believers express their belief in God and how they speak about God.

Skills:

Use and understand the language of the Christian faith.

Explore different kinds of Christian literature eg poetry, legend, parable, allegory.

Use and understand the language of other faiths.

Human experience:

Evaluate their personal and shared experiences.

Look at how religious faiths put into practice their rules for living eg charity, the langar.

AT2: Awareness of life experiences

Knowledge:

The meaning of prayer and the ways in which people pray.

Ceremonies and traditions marking transition points in life.

Special family occasions.

Skills:

To reflect on the experiences of others.

To pose questions and seek reasoned answers.

Attitudes:

To further develop an awareness for the care and concern for others.

To respect the right of others to hold different beliefs and opinions.

AT3: Exploring and responding

Concepts:

Commitment: To explore the influence of Christian commitment on people's daily lives.

Commitment: To explore the influence of a faith commitment on believers from other faiths.

Skills:

Develop appropriate language and vocabulary to share their feelings with others.

Attitudes:

Develop an enquiring approach to life and to the fundamental religious questions posed by life.

Develop an evaluative approach to religious beliefs, practices and institutions.

Human experience:

Appreciate the range of human experiences into which children will enter.

(Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 1994: 7-12)

3.3.10 Durham Diocesan Syllabus

The Durham Diocesan Syllabus for Religious Education is also reviewed because it is used by a number of the schools which participated in the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Table 3.4; Section 5.3). A revision of the Diocesan Guidelines was completed in the year 2000.

The 'Diocese of Durham RE Syllabus 2000' has the following four 'divisions' and sub-divisions:

A. Christian Foundations

The Bible

The Old Testament

Jesus

God and Prayer

B. Christian Practice

Church Life and Worship

The Church's Year

Followers of Jesus

C. Exploring Faith through the Experiences of Life

The Natural World

Ultimate Questions

Self and Others

D. Other Faiths

(Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 2.1-2.2)

The then Bishop of Jarrow, Alan Smithson, in his foreword as chairman of the Durham DBE comments on the balance across the four divisions:

80% of this Syllabus is given to Christian teaching: 20% to other faiths; but what really matters is that the right attitude be nurtured in the 80% towards the other 20%; if that is not achieved no tipping of the percentage balance matters. (Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 1.1)

The Syllabus follows the guidance suggested in the Model Syllabuses by having the two Attainment Targets underpinning it: 'learning about religions' and 'learning from religion' (Section 3.3.3). Accompanying each sub-division of the Syllabus is a brief rationale offering a statement:

- explaining why the particular approach has been taken,
- explaining why this material is important for R.E., or
- highlighting the essential themes of the section.
(Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 2.3)

Following on from this are 'syllabus charts' for the Key Stages listing which topics and issues pupils should explore in their Religious Education lessons. For each syllabus chart there are 'teaching objectives, programmes of study and learning outcomes'. The programmes of study 'contain both content and process (activities), and are meant to provide detailed guidelines as to what might be studied in this area of the Syllabus' (Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 2.3).

From reviewing the syllabus charts for Key Stage 2 concepts of *death* and *life after death* are explicit in 'life as a journey from birth to eternal life' in the 'programme of study' under 'Church Life and Worship' which is part of the 'Christian Practice' division of the Syllabus (Shedden & Bellett, 2000). The rationale behind 'Church Life and Worship' mentions 'rites of passage' as one of seven areas for exploration in the section (Chapters 2; 7). In the third division which is 'Exploring Faith Through the Experiences of Life' there is a sub-division, 'Ultimate Questions' (Section 3.4). The rationale makes it very plain that children must have the opportunity to discuss the issues of *death* and *life after death* and the questions they raise.

In particular, the subject of death and life after death, though it requires sensitivity on the part of the teacher, is of fundamental importance. All of life is a preparation for death, and the fact of death poses a question mark against the purpose of life and the goodness of God.
(Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 3.81)

Throughout the two divisions, which focus on two broad aspects of Christianity, 'Christian Foundations' and 'Christian Practice', concepts of *death* and *life after death* are implicitly and explicitly woven into the 'teaching objectives' and the 'programmes of study'. In addition to teaching about Jesus' earthly ministry through the parables, other examples include incidents in Jesus' life, the massacre of the innocents, His own death, resurrection and ascension. This is another important way in which children can have the opportunity to explore concepts of *death* and *life after death* in their Religious Education lessons. The rationale for 'Ultimate Questions' makes the point:

In addition, some reflection on this whole area is necessary to an understanding of the resurrection and the Christian hope.
(Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 3.82)

In the sub-section on the 'Old Testament' 'pupils should become familiar with the figures of Abraham and Moses' and through the examples suggested in the parallel 'programme of study' teachers are encouraged to 'link to the theme of journeys; life as a journey; faith as a journey towards God' which connects with how many Christians and people from other faith communities view the relationship between life and death (Shedden & Bellett, 2000; Chapter 2). Concepts of *death* and *life after death* are, therefore, explored through rites of passage (Chapters 2; 7). Images of God in the study on 'God and prayer' implicitly link with concepts of *death* and *life after death*. These concepts are associated with another 'teaching objective' which is in the 'Old Testament' topic 'understand that standing up for God can lead to opposition and persecution' and the theme is developed under 'followers of Jesus' with:

Know that Christians believe they are called to serve God and proclaim the Gospel to others.
Understand that people hold beliefs and values which affect their actions.
Understand that people often have to struggle to uphold their beliefs and convictions in the face of opposition and persecution.
Understand that faith can lead to protest against injustice and to social action.
Know that some people are canonised as Saints.
(Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 3.65)

The examples alongside the 'teaching objectives' listed above, in the 'programme of study' refer to 'sacrifice and martyrdom' and a variety of 'saints' from down the ages (Shedden & Bellett, 2000).

There are examples in other 'teaching objectives' and 'programmes of study' where concepts of *death* and *life after death* could be incorporated depending on the direction

taken in the lessons. In the sub-section on 'the Bible', for example, 'pupils should develop their understanding of how the Bible is used – public and private reading, for guiding belief, for guiding behaviour ...' (Shedden & Bellett, 2000). Another example is in the study area 'self and others' which is part of the division 'Exploring faith through the experiences of life'.

The fourth division in the Syllabus covers the other world faiths of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

Schools should choose not more than two faiths to study during Key Stages 1 and/or 2 and the Board suggests that one of these should be Judaism. (Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 4.1)

A review of the section on world faiths shows that at the beginning of each, there is a fairly comprehensive explanation of the key aspects of the faith community's beliefs and practices, including their concepts of *death* and their hope in *life after death*. The suggested content for teaching these world faiths is presented in the same format as the earlier sections on Christianity. The detail for each Key Stage basically follows the guidance set out in the Model Syllabuses 'Faith Communities' Working Group Reports' and Model 1 'Living Faiths Today' and use is made of the 'Glossary of Terms' (QCA, 1998b, SCAA, 1994b, SCAA, 1994c).

For Buddhism Key Stages 1 and 2 are linked together and concepts of *death* and *life after death* are referred to in the 'programme of study' on the Buddha's 'enlightenment, teaching and death' (Shedden & Bellett, 2000).

The Key Stage 2 section on Hinduism specifically mentions a common practice in the funeral rite in the 'programme of study' as 'travel to India for a family wedding or to scatter ashes in the sacred river' (Shedden & Bellett, 2000). Concepts of *death* and *life after death* are explored through rites of passage.

It would seem that other aspects of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* are less specific in the 'teaching objectives' on Hinduism such as 'describe some aspects of Hindu worship' (Shedden & Bellett, 2000). How concepts of *death* and *life after death* would be part of the teaching on and exploration of Islam, Judaism and Sikhism at Key Stage 2 is also unclear, as it would all depend on the direction the individual teacher takes in the lessons.

3.3.11 Summary

The *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* has demonstrated that it appears that the Model Syllabuses, the Birmingham and Durham Religious Education Agreed Syllabi, and the Birmingham Diocesan Guidelines avoid emphasizing the need and value of the exploration of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children. This is in contrast to the more positive structure with the accompanying rationale in the Durham Diocesan Syllabus for examining these concepts with children of primary school age through their Religious Education.

The *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* has revealed that it is possible that some of the shortcomings highlighted in both Locally Agreed Syllabi and DBE Guidelines may effect and limit a pupil's understanding and response to the main research study questionnaire exploring these concepts. In arranging the sequence of some questions in the questionnaire, note was taken of these shortcomings in order to ensure maximum understanding of the questions by pupils (Chapter 5; Appendix 7).

3.4 WHAT ARE ULTIMATE QUESTIONS?

3.4.1 Introduction

In the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study*, the phrase 'ultimate questions' was referred to by all of the Religious Education syllabi in relation to exploring concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children. A fuller explanation of ultimate questions, sometimes known as 'fundamental questions', follows.

3.4.2 Meaning and purpose of ultimate questions in Religious Education

In a Report of the Farmington Institute Project in 1997, I explained ultimate questions as:

those deep and meaningful questions which are concerned with the meaning and mystery of life. They are the type of questions people [often] ask and ponder at various stages in their lives. The sort of questions are:

- a. Who am I?
- b. Why are we here?
- c. Why did the world begin?
- d. Is there a God?
- e. Do all things come to an end?
- f. What is truth?
- g. Where is happiness to be found?
(Jepson, 1997: 26)

In contributing to a Religious Education resource document, the ultimate questions explanation was described as ‘those deep and meaningful questions which are concerned with the meaning and mystery of life’, and ‘they are at the heart of the Religious Education curriculum’ (Jepson & Draycott, 2001: 22; Chapter 5; Appendix 9), In addition to questions b), d), and g) was included, ‘Is there life after death?’. This list is not exhaustive and some other frequently asked questions include: What is the purpose of life?, How was the world created?, Why do we have to die?, What happens when we die?, How can God let there be so much suffering in the world?

Danny Sullivan and Clive Erricker refer in a similar way to ultimate questions:

RE syllabuses and programmes often celebrate the fact that in engaging in the religious quest we can discover through all the major religious traditions how they respond to the ultimate questions of life: Who am I? Why am I on this earth? Will there be life after death? (Sullivan & Erricker, 1997: 160)

The value and use of ultimate questions in Religious Education is suggested in the Model Syllabuses, the Locally Agreed Syllabi and Diocesan Guidelines as reviewed earlier in the chapter through the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* (Section 3.3). From the comparison study, only the Durham Diocesan guidelines presented a detailed rationale for them (Shedden & Bellett, 2000). The explanation opened with the following pronouncement:

There are experiences, common to all people, which underpin religion and faith and which provoke fundamental questions about life, the universe and everything!

Following some examples of ultimate questions, the rationale continues:

These questions about the meaning, purpose and value of human existence are religious questions. These are the issues with which faith deals, and to which religions seek to provide answers.

But too often in our modern materialistic society, such ultimate questions are ignored (at least until death or disaster strike), and a central purpose of Religious Education must be to **begin** to raise such questions in the minds of children – to begin to sensitise them to the issues with which faith deals.

Pupils need to be asking themselves, however vaguely, the troublesome questions which lie at the heart of religion and life. They need to see that for many people there is more to life than having and getting. This is a vital part of the R.E. syllabus [Durham Diocesan Guidelines], for unless pupils do catch a glimpse of such issues and problems, the concerns of faith will be meaningless.

(Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 3.81)

When exploring ultimate questions, it is important that children have a sense of being secure and comfortable when and with whom they share and develop their opinions and concepts. Children also need to know that they can be completely open and honest. There should be a climate of mutual respect with peers and adults working with them.

From the researcher's teaching experience, primary school children appear to value and enjoy having the opportunity to think through some of life's seemingly more difficult and challenging questions and issues. They are capable of and usually keen to bring to the discussion, knowledge and understanding from their personal experiences and those of others as seems appropriate to them. If they belong to or have awareness of a faith community, then they frequently convey those beliefs and practices too. In this way they learn from each other. Children regularly show that they have an ability to pragmatically reveal their insight into an issue or dilemma which may be lost or stultified later in adulthood. This seems to surprise many adults, especially those who try to be over-protective and cocoon children from the reality of life of which most children are well aware. Most importantly, children appreciate being listened to and consequently value having a forum where that can readily occur. (Blaylock, 2001a, Blaylock, 2001b, Blaylock *et al.*, 2001, Jepson & Draycott, 2001). The rationale for the Durham Diocesan Syllabus for Religious Education on ultimate questions concludes with a message of encouragement for teachers in their use and exploration of this type of question with children of all ages:

We stress, though, that teachers do not have to have the final answers. The task is to help pupils explore the questions when they are raised, and to use materials which might help pupils to raise such questions. (Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 3.82)

Some examples of ultimate questions, which were considered to be most pertinent to primary school age children, were developed and incorporated into the interviews and the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Chapters 5; 6; 7; Appendix 7).

3.5 PLOWDEN AND SWANN EDUCATION REPORTS

In conclusion to this chapter, a brief retrospective reference to the very influential Plowden Report of 1967 and the Swann Report of 1985 provide some insight to the way in which concepts of Religious Education have devolved and been influenced.

3.5.1 Plowden report 1967

In 1967 the Plowden Report was published. The Central Advisory Council for Education gathered evidence of the nature of school life in the 1960s from schools across the country which it used to inform its findings and were published in the Report. Two Chapters, 2 and 17, have particular relevance to this research. The latter was specifically concerned with Religious Education.

Chapter 2 considered, at length, the fundamental issues relating to children's growth and development. Section headings include: 'Critical or Sensitive Periods', 'The Interaction of Heredity and Environment', 'The Development of Behaviour', and 'The Emotional Development of the Child'. At the end of the chapter the 'Implications' section noted that:

This chapter has been concerned with some aspects of the growth and development of children on which sound educational theory and practice must be built. (Plowden, 1967: 25)

Five 'more obvious implications' were listed including:

- a) Individual differences between children of the same age are so great that any class, however homogenous it seems, must always be treated as a body of children needing individual and different attention.
- b) Until a child is ready to take a particular step forward, it is a waste of time to try to teach him to take it.
- e) Since a child grows up intellectually, emotionally and physically at different rates, his teachers need to know and take account of his "developmental age" in all three respects. The child's physique, personality, and capacity to learn develop as a result of continuous interaction between his environmental and genetical inheritance. Unlike the genetic factors, the environmental factors are, or ought to be, within our control.
(Plowden, 1967: 25-26)

This was a developmental approach to the understanding of different aspects of children's growth.

Chapter 17 of the Report concentrated on 'Aspects of the Curriculum' of which 'Religious Education' is the first to be examined. It is worth noting that there was a footnote stating:

We prefer to call it religious education (R.E.) although the Education Act 1944 [23 years earlier] refers to religious instruction. (Plowden, 1967: 203)

As mentioned earlier (Section 3.2.2) it was not until ERA in 1988 that there was an official name change to Religious Education.

The Council was aware of the changing nature of schools and the local communities that many schools were serving in the late 1960s. 'We hope that heads of schools and administrators will be sensitive to the needs of minority groups, both for worship and religious education' (Plowden, 1967: 207).

The Council noted its divisions 'in its view on religious education because of the personal beliefs of its members' (Plowden, 1967: 203). It then went on to comment on Religious Education's relation to the 1944 Education Act and the purpose of the school community, teachers' attitudes towards teaching it, the act of worship, the Agreed Syllabus and some general thoughts about the subject which reflect the period in which the Report was written, before concluding the section with four recommendations.

Of particular relevance for this study are the following pertinent statements:

It [Religious Education] should recognise that young children need a simple and positive introduction to religion. ...

There is an urgent need for a reconsideration and re-appraisal of what aspects of religious faith can be appropriately presented to children, at what time and in what way. ... We welcome research which is trying to determine what religious subject matter and concepts are relevant to children's interests, their experience of life and their intellectual powers.

(Plowden, 1967: 207-208)

What was less helpful were the remarks which reiterate Ronald Goldman's position on children regarding their ability or rather lack of ability to understand Bible stories, and the life and teaching of Jesus which 'should be delayed until the later years of the junior school, when children can be encouraged to think critically' (Plowden, 1967: 208, Goldman, 1964, Goldman, 1965b). This is discussed further in Chapter 4. It is of note that Goldman's generalized statements appear to have been taken without due examination or question and are cited in this section of the Report.

The Report's third recommendation was positive and of particular concern here:

Further enquiry should be made into the aspects of religious faith which can be presented to young children. (Plowden, 1967: 209)

An illustration of how the Plowden Report would appear to have influenced the Religious Instruction of one LEA and how it, in turn, was affected by Plowden is Birmingham. The 1950 'Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction', published in response to the 1944 Education Act, was exclusively Christian in content and confessional in approach as it sought to nurture pupils into the Christian faith (Standing Conference, 1950). The content relates only to Old and New Testament biblical teaching, and the spread and influence of Christianity both in the ancient world and various countries at different stages of history, including the UK and 'in particular of our own city' that is, Birmingham (Standing Conference, 1950).

Memorisation is an important agency in the learning process during the junior years. Inspiration as well as instruction can be gained by learning suitable passages from the Bible, hymns and other material. There is some difference of opinion about the value of learning passages which may not be fully understood till later, and the teacher must decide this latter question in the light of the policy followed in his general literary teaching.

(Standing Conference, 1950: 19)

Memorisation has been a widespread feature of primary schooling and particularly for children who were '7 years plus to 11 years plus'. Some of the suggestions for memory work were, the Lord's Prayer, Psalm 23, the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes (Matthew 5.1-12) and the 'golden rule' (Matthew 7.12). The 1950 Agreed Syllabus details are included in Appendix 2.

The next revision of the Agreed Syllabus was published, twenty-five years later, in 1975 which was dramatically different both in content and style of approach to the previous syllabus. The Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh communities had all been invited to send one representative to the Agreed Syllabus Conference for producing a new syllabus (Standing Conference, 1975). The Conference was first convened in March 1970, just three years after the Plowden Report had been published. It is noticeable that when I reviewed the Agreed Syllabus, the Council had been markedly influenced by the Report and by the research of Goldman. The rationale for the Agreed Syllabus clearly stated:

Research into the emotional needs, the thought processes, and the learning capabilities of pupils at various stages of development is also contributing to the transformation of Agreed Syllabuses. Whilst it has always been stressed that one of the major criteria for the selection of material was its suitability for the pupils it is now possible to determine this more accurately. This syllabus has been devised to accord with what is known of the development in the quality of a pupil's thinking at various stages and to cater for his changing interests and levels of comprehension. ...

The Syllabus is based on the developmental phases of childhood and it is important to note that chronological references are approximate. Pupils appear to pass through the various stages of cognitive and of affective development in the same order, but the rate and degree of growth in various aspects of understanding and behaviour are subject to the influence of numerous factors. Teachers will, therefore, at each stage decide what general and particular educational objectives are appropriate to the personal needs of their pupils and will draw up their own schemes of work.
(Standing Conference, 1975: 6)

The approach to Religious Education was no longer to be confessional but 'is thus directed towards developing a critical understanding of the religious and moral dimensions of human experience and away from attempting to foster claims of particular religious standpoints' (Standing Conference, 1975: 4). Members of the Agreed Conference were 'aware of the profound changes which have taken place within the City of Birmingham over the twenty-five years since the last Agreed Syllabus was

published, and of the current ferment in religious education' (Standing Conference, 1975: 3). Hence:

The Syllabus should thus be used to enlarge and deepen the pupils' understanding of religion by studying world religions, and by exploring all those elements in human experience which raise questions about life's ultimate meaning and value. (Standing Conference, 1975: 4)

The 1975 Agreed Syllabus mainly took a phenomenological²⁶ approach to religion. For children in their 'later childhood' who were of 'approximate age 8 to 12 years' the focus was on five areas:

1. Ideals for everyday living
2. Festivals and customs
3. Sacred places
4. Sacred literature
5. Ways of living

Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism are specifically referred to as appropriate in relation to bullet points 2 to 5. Consequently it is understood that the Syllabus was seen as a landmark in the education community. The details of the Agreed Syllabus are in Appendix 3.

In neither the 1950 nor 1975 Agreed Syllabus is there any direct reference to exploring *death* and *life after death* with primary school age children and there is no mention either in the later sections headed: 'Religious Instruction in Adolescence' and 'Religious Instruction in the Sixth Form' (Standing Conference, 1950, Standing Conference, 1975). The concepts of *death* and *life after death*, nevertheless, could be recognized as an issue to focus on by a perceptive teacher (Standing Conference, 1950, Standing Conference, 1975).

Despite several references to 'Religious 'Education' in the rationale for the Syllabus, the title of the document remains the same as for the 1950 Syllabus: 'Agreed Syllabus of Religious 'Instruction' (Standing Conference, 1950, Standing Conference, 1975).

²⁶ A *phenomenological* approach to religion is when equal importance and sensitivity is given to adherents of different religions and their beliefs and practices. A *comparative* approach compares religions with a view to showing the superiority of one, usually Christianity. Similarities and differences of beliefs and practices are explored in both approaches to Religious Education.

3.5.2 Swann report 1985

The purpose of the Government's Swann Commission was to investigate the perceived failure of British schools to address the needs of children from a West Indian background. The Commission's findings were published in 1985 and entitled 'Education for All' (Swann, 1985).

It was noted in the Report that Religious Education was the only area of the school curriculum where children were systematically introduced to the notion of the UK being multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-faith. The Report commented on the merit of Religious Education aiming to prepare children for living in a multi-cultural society. The Swann Report concluded that Religious Education could play a vital role in enabling children to develop a positive attitude towards, and an understanding of, people from the different faith communities:

It is ... important to recall that ... the origins of racism lie to a considerable extent in regarding groups of people as 'strange' and thus 'inferior'. On this basis religious groups within the minority communities which vary from an assumed norm of Christianity and whose religious beliefs are manifested by various forms of dress or behaviour, or by the celebration of particular festivals, may be particularly subject to racism if their faiths are neither understood nor accepted in their own right. Bringing about a greater understanding of the diversity of faiths present in Britain today can also we believe play a major role in challenging and overcoming racism.
(Swann, 1985: 466)

The findings of the Swann Report are still pertinent and relevant to education. The place and value of Religious Education in the life of the school and the education of the whole child are endorsed by the conclusions in the Report. A way of facilitating and fostering children to develop an informed, open, positive and tolerant attitude towards people who belong to the various faith communities is for them to have the opportunity through Religious Education to explore their own and others' concepts of *death* and *life after death*.

3.6 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter has considered the place of Religious Education in the English school system and linked that to the place of *death* and *life after death* in Religious Education through the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study*.

The impact of ERA and its consequences was discussed in relation to the teaching of Religious Education, and especially, the inclusion of exploring the concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children in school. ERA re-affirmed Religious Education's legal status and position in the life of schools in the English school system.

The longstanding historic dimension to the place of Religious Education in the British school system was examined with the focus being on the different types of State primary schools in England as this was the selected group for the research project.

The *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* examined in some detail the place of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* in Religious Education in England. First of all, the Model Syllabuses produced by the Government were analysed. Then the Religious Education syllabi which were used by the schools in Birmingham and Durham that participated in the main research study questionnaire as part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* were examined and reviewed.



CHAPTER FOUR

REVIEW OF THE CONCEPTS OF DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH RESEARCH LITERATURE

4.1 OUTLINE OF CHAPTER

The chapter begins with a review of the literature concerning research on the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. The review is mainly concentrated on the research conducted on children between 7 to 11 years of age and within a school environment as this coincides with the parameters of the research project.

The research project relates to a variety of fields of professional work which include Religious Education, education, psychology — especially developmental child psychology, theology, care for the dying, bereavement, and stages of grief theory. The main focus of the review, however, is broadly within the framework of education, and in particular Religious Education, as this is where the researcher's professional expertise lies.

Thus the purpose of this chapter is to review the research carried out with the age group in question, to see where the strengths and weaknesses of the research lie, and to use the analysis of other researchers to refine the research questions and issues for investigation in this project.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Extensive searches of published research utilizing, for example, BIDs, Copac, Index to Theses, Register of Research in Religious Education, ERIC, and the journals held in the Departments of Education libraries of both Durham and Birmingham Universities, have confirmed that there has been research exploring the concepts of death with both adults and children (Christian Education Movement, 1997, The RE Directory, 2004). However, much of the research has been from a psychology perspective.

Most of the published research which has been conducted on children exploring various aspects of their perceptions of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* has been with those children who have either experienced personal bereavement or who

have a life-limiting illness²⁷. Examples from the UK, USA and Australia include: (Archer, 1999, Black, 1998, Bluebond-Langer, 1977, Bluebond-Langer, 1978, Bowlby, 1998, Bright, 1996, Brown, 1994, Clark, 1996, Glassock & Rowling, 1992, Grollman, 1967, Kastenbaum, 1998, Klass *et al.*, 1996).

Children who have been personally bereaved have usually lost a grandparent, parent, sibling, or other close relative (Clark, 1996). The relative may have died as a result of a tragic accident or through a life-limiting illness for example, cancer. As a consequence, the bereaved child may receive counselling and be part of a bereavement support programme. Those children who have a life-limiting illness, themselves, may also receive counselling as well as advice about how they could try to cope with their circumstances from various professional and interested bodies (Jupp & Rogers, 1997).

Some of the research in education including children communicating about *death* and *life after death* has been usually through one-to-one or small group interviews. *Death* and *life after death* tends to be incorporated as an aspect of a wider research focus. Examples of this type of research in the UK include: (Brown, 1999, Erricker *et al.*, 2002, Erricker *et al.*, 1997, Gates, 1980, Gates, 1977, Hay & Nye, 1998, Herbert, 1977).

It appears that little published research has been carried out including a wider spectrum of children who may not have thus far experienced personal bereavement or who may not have a life-limiting illness at the time the research is conducted. Further, it seems as though hardly any published research on these concepts has been done with children within the school environment, and in particular at primary school age level. Such research as exists, tends to be from a psychology perspective rather than from within education theory and the teaching profession. Consequently, the children selected for research are from specialized groups in the community rather than from those who have yet to experience personal bereavement. It can be argued and stressed that children who have yet to experience personal bereavement can still have ideas and feelings about the issues and questions surrounding *death* and *life after death*. Many children will have encountered and have knowledge and awareness of other types of loss and separation for example, from adjusting to a new environment like changing school or divorce (Brown, 1999, Brown, 2000). The sense of loss and separation which

²⁷ The phrase 'life-limiting illness' is the preferred term to those who are 'terminally ill'. Sister Frances Dominica, Founder and Director of Helen House and Douglas House, Oxford. When Helen House opened in 1982 it was the world's first hospice for children (Dominica, 2001).

these experiences bring and heighten are inextricably associated with aspects of bereavement and the grieving process and the funeral rite (Chapter 2).

4.3 CONCEPTS OF DEATH

The Swiss born psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross is considered to be one of the first people who earnestly explored the process of death and dying which she did during the 1960s. She studied adult survivors from the Nazi concentration camps and asserted that 'something unexpected happens to a person at the point of death' (Kubler-Ross, 1970).

Most of the research on children has tended to focus from a psychologist perspective on a developmental approach to children's thinking for example, both in the UK and especially, in the USA: (Bluebond-Langer, 1977, Bowlby, 1998, Kastenbaum, 2000, Koochler, 1973, Lansdown & Benjamin, 1985). This research, especially where US based, is not inclined to include an examination of how the findings may be applied in practice with children in a school class environment. Researchers who, from an education perspective, make reference to children's concepts of death, have often done so within the context of wider research which has emphasized broad aspects of education and/or Religious Education in general (Section 4.2).

4.3.1 Children's concepts of death

As previously noted, the extensive research carried out by psychologists on the development of children's concept of death has mainly been done in the USA (Speece & Brent, 1984). The studies have focused on analysing the components which are widely agreed by psychologists to form the concepts of death and the relation of them with the age of children. 'Healthy' children were selected for the research but the term 'healthy' was not defined (Speece & Brent, 1984).

Much of the research focuses in particular on three components of the concept of death: irreversibility, non-functionality, and universality (Speece & Brent, 1984). There is a general understanding that these terms may be defined in the following way:

- Irreversibility: the understanding that once a living thing dies, its physical body cannot be made alive again.
- Non-functionality: the understanding that all life-defining functions cease at death.
- Universality: the understanding that all living things die. (Speece & Brent, 1984)

This model was used by Shu-Sum Ng for his PhD research on death and dying with primary school (Year 6 — 10-11 year olds) and secondary school (Year 8 — 12-13 year olds) age children (Ng, 1998).

Only one set of research reviewed by Speece and Brent was a British study which included primary school age children (Anthony, 1973, Speece & Brent, 1984). Disappointingly, much of the research and its application appears to be constrained to death education as a subject in its own right in order to conform to the USA education system (Eddy & Alles, 1983; Section 4.4.3; Chapter 7).

Sylvia Anthony in the UK, however, investigated the first published research of this nature during the 1930s when she studied healthy children's understanding of death (Anthony, 1940). Subsequently, the 1940 text was revised and first published in 1971 (republished Anthony, 1973). The research focused on 128 children who were between 3 to 13 years of age. Anthony asked the children to define the word 'dead'. She reported a developmental sequence to children's understanding of death. Thus 60% of 10 year olds grasped the 'irreversibility' of death and 40% of 11 year olds the 'non-functionality' of death (Anthony, 1973). The implications are that the age of acquisition for irreversibility is 10 years of age whereas for non-functionality it is at least 11 years of age. Anthony did not investigate the 'universality' of death. Anthony's findings also reveal how some young children can fear separation from loved ones through death. She recalled their sorrow and fear (Anthony, 1973).

The psychologists Richard Lansdown and Gail Benjamin conducted research in England during the mid 1980s. They interviewed 83 children who were 5 to 8 years of age. A story about an old lady who died was used as a stimulus for discussion where the emphasis was on 'probe questions' (Lansdown & Benjamin, 1985). They reported

that their results suggest that '7-8 [years] remains the nodal point in conceptual development' (Lansdown & Benjamin, 1985). Their conclusion implies that they wanted to be able to use their findings for caring for 'sick children', especially those with life-limiting illness.

Jane Martin evaluated a story-based approach for young children in Nursery and Year 1 (5-6 year olds) to develop an understanding of death and loss through her work in four schools in Solihull, UK (Martin, 2000; Section 3.2). Her premise was that the topic of death in schools must be addressed in the context of social, cultural and religious influences. She was concerned that the issue was not mentioned in the National Curriculum, even in the revisions which were for implementation from September 2000.

4.4 CONCEPTS OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

Those researchers who have systematically explored the concept of life after death with primary school age children have tended to focus their research, or at least the findings and outcome of their research, on children's concepts of *life after death* rather than including those of *death* as well. Some of them use the term 'afterlife' either interchangeably with or in addition to, life after death, for example, Frangoulis, Jordan and Lansdown, and Higgins (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996, Higgins, 1999). Researchers, for example, Frangoulis, Jordan and Lansdown (1996) conducted their research from the perspective of psychology whereas Nesbitt (1993) and Higgins (1999) carried out theirs from an education viewpoint. A discussion of these two groups of researchers' work which was all conducted in the UK, follows.

4.4.1 Children of 5-8 years of age concepts of life after death

The psychologists Sandra Frangoulis, Netta Jordan and Richard Lansdown conducted research in three schools in London. They gave the aim of their research as:

To try to gain some more or less systematic data from children on what they thought heaven was like, from a range of schools and from families of differing socio-economic status. (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996)

Of the three schools selected for the research, one was of Church of England foundation, one was of Jewish foundation and one was a county school and therefore, a State maintained school, not a faith school (Section 3.2.2). The researchers conducted

their research on children of five, six, seven and eight years of age. This age range was chosen: 'partly because the literature on the concept of death suggests that this is a period of change and partly to examine Piagetian stage theory which has often been invoked in this context' (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996, Piaget, 1929). The headteacher of each school was asked to select at random ten children from each of the four age groups, producing a total of 40 children from each school. This would have produced an overall total sample size of 120 children, but, for school administrative reasons, the final total was 103 children — 60 boys and 43 girls.

The two female researchers gathered their data by one-to-one interviewing of the children from each age group and each school between them. Each interview began with a story with pictures being read with each child. The same story had been used by Lansdown and Benjamin in earlier research (Lansdown & Benjamin, 1985; Section 4.3.1). The researchers in their article explain:

The story concerned an old lady who ran a shop where children would go to buy sweets. One day the children found the shop to be closed. They were later told that the old lady had died. Immediately after the story had been read, the researcher asked the child, 'What do you think happens next?' The researcher then guided the interview based on a questionnaire of 36 items. (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996)

They then reported their criteria for the next phase of the interview process:

The initial objective was to determine whether the child believed in a concept of afterlife. If not, the interview was terminated shortly after exploring their belief in God. If the child did believe in an afterlife this was explored further along six main themes. (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996)

Is it fair to assume that children who do not express a personal belief in life after death may not have a concept of what the possibility of life after death may be like? The researchers did not state in their aim that a personal belief in life after death was a criterion for a child being a participant in the research project. Were there any of the 36 children who did not respond with a belief in life after death, who did not do so in the way for example, the researchers anticipated, at possibly a pre-determined stage to one or more of the thirty-six items on the questionnaire? What was the language the researchers used with the children to establish a belief in life after death? Did they use the phrase afterlife or life after death? Would this have made any difference to how the children responded, and consequently, the ensuing findings and discussion? The thirty-six items on the questionnaire are unknown as they are not reported.

The six main themes which were explored, during the next phase of the interview, with each child who expressed a belief in life after death were:

1. How do people get there?
2. What does it feel like to be there?
3. What does this 'place' look like?
4. What do people do there?
5. Can they come to life again?
6. Can we communicate with people who have died?
(Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996)

Immediately after being interviewed, every child was asked 'to draw what their idea of an afterlife looked like' (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996). What exactly were the children asked to represent pictorially? What would be the purpose of drawing, for example, an image of heaven and hell, and how would they be identified? It is worthy of note that it appears that the researchers viewed life after death as a 'place of being, a location' (Chapter 6). Is it likely that children only view life after death in terms of a location and should it have been assumed?

The results from the research covered various aspects of life after death. These findings are based on the results from 67 children who 'believed in an afterlife' from an original sample of 103 children. The first category of result was 'belief in an afterlife' where it was found that social class and ethnic origin presented 'no significant differences' in this belief. The researchers commented that they had assumed that there would be 'between-school differences' in the number of children believing in life after death due to two of the schools having a faith foundation. It was found that more children in the two faith schools did believe in life after death compared with the county school but this 'did not reach statistical significance'. Based on clinical experience using Piaget's stage theory, one of the researchers proposed the hypothesis that children 'up to about 8 years would have some belief in some form of existence after death' (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996, Piaget, 1929). The children 'would find it impossible to argue that there is no afterlife since to do so would be engaging in abstract thought' (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996). The research did not prove this hypothesis. Why would not having a belief in life after death be perceived as 'engaging in abstract thought' whereas to express a belief in life after death was seen as unable to engage in abstract thought?

In terms of the location of life after death, Frangoulis et al found that:

Most children who affirmed that there is an afterlife talked of heaven, with 25% of the total spontaneously mentioning hell. In many cases there were links between the two places. (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996)

Some children's responses were quoted describing, for example, heaven and hell and what they might be like and how one might get to heaven. The researchers commented that 'children facing death not infrequently ask how they will get to heaven' (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996). Two of the researchers were professional psychologists based at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London which presumably reflected the interest to this question and its wording.

The researchers considered that:

It was daunting to note that for many of these children heaven is not necessarily a fun place; it may be boring or even frightening. (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996)

This is deduced from their findings to be '36% of 56%' of the total sample of children who perceived heaven to be different from the earth. But these percentages obscure the actual numbers which are 21 out of 58 that makes the statement to be of limited value.

The researchers also commented on what they categorized as 'the irrevocability of death' as 49% of children said that 'there is no return'. The assumption is that this was in response to the closed question asking: 'Can they come to life again?' (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996). There is a potential issue with this question concerning what is meant by 'come to life again' depending on one's thoughts and beliefs about the concept of life after death, and especially, if one upholds the teaching of a religion to which one belongs. For a Christian, for example, there is the notion of 'coming to life again in heaven' whereas for a Hindu 'coming to life again' would more likely mean reincarnation. Hence returning to earth in the form of 'bodily flesh' (Section 2.3; 2.6). Would the word the 'irreversibility' be more appropriate than 'irrevocability'?

One of the researchers focused some of her interviewing on the possibility of communicating with the dead through dreams and found that some children hold this view.

Frangoulis et al concluded that although:

It would be easy to see the origin of the idea of floating up to heaven in the received idea that heaven is 'up there somewhere'. It would be easy to read into children's ideas about ghosts and others coming back and say that those who put forward this view are denying the finality of death, or that they do not really comprehend the notion. In our view it is better to let the words speak for themselves and not to try to read into them.

Were the researchers introducing an element of added bias into their conceptual framework with these comments? It would seem agreeable, however, to aim to let the children's words speak for themselves. They went on to finally conclude:

The clinical implications for people working with bereaved children or those who are themselves facing death, their siblings and their parents are evident: we should not assume that 'Gone to heaven' is an answer in itself. It may raise many problems which could need some time to unravel.
(Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996)

What about those who work professionally with children in other capacities especially teaching, being faced with these issues and dilemmas too? Therefore, what is the place and role of education in exploring and developing the concepts of *death* and *life after death*? These issues are discussed further in Chapter 7.

4.4.2 Children of 8-14 years of age concepts of life after death

Eleanor Nesbitt, conducted her research from a Religious Education perspective and took an ethnographic approach. Her research concerning children's concepts of life after death was drawn from two phases of the 'Religious Education and Community Project' which was directed by Robert Jackson at the University of Warwick (Jackson, 1997, Nesbitt, 1993).

Nesbitt conducted structured interviews with 24 non-Christian Punjabi children and 50 Christian children from Coventry, in the West Midlands. 'Children were defined as non-Christian or Christian by their involvement in particular places of worship' (Nesbitt, 1993). The former group's 'private and public worship' is 'variously described as Hindu or Sikh' (Nesbitt, 1993). Nesbitt does not record any of the questions she used during her interviews with the children.

Nesbitt's findings included that '71 out of 74' (96%) of the children spoke of 'continuity after death'. 'They did so in terms of 'me', 'you', 'people', 'they', 'their spirit' or 'their soul'' (Nesbitt, 1993). There were only two children in the sample, both of whom were Christians, who spoke of the finality of death.

From her findings, she deduced that the children in both groups had a 'strong sense of justice or of reward and punishment' (Nesbitt, 1993). For the majority, '40 out of 50', (80%) Christian children this took the form of heaven and hell, and was connected to a person's conduct before death, whereas a small majority, '13 out of 24', (54%) Hindu/Sikh children referred to reincarnation.

In the responses from both groups 'the terms 'heaven', 'hell', 'God', 'good', 'up' and 'down' recur' (Nesbitt, 1993). Some of the Christian children saw entry to heaven as dependent not only, 'or even at all, on how good a person's conduct has been before death, but on whether they have confessed the Christian faith and prayed for forgiveness' (Nesbitt, 1993). Nesbitt seemed to interpret this as 'the minority view of heaven as exclusively for Christian believers' (Nesbitt, 1993). She noted that there was a parallel view among the Hindu/Sikh group of children. Some of the Hindu/Sikh children referred to heaven and hell but not in as much detail as the Christians (Section 2.6; 2.7). 'Belief in heaven and hell does not generally displace belief in reincarnation or vice versa' (Nesbitt, 1993). Nesbitt commented how some Christians appeared to be reluctant to believe in hell and that the descriptions of heaven and hell 'seem to have changed little over the centuries of Christian belief' (Nesbitt, 1993).

Although there were members of both groups who expressed a belief in reincarnation, Nesbitt found that for the Hindu/Sikh group of children, there was a greater sense of morality associated with reincarnation in terms of one's conduct in this life having a bearing on one's form in the next, 'more detail, more reference to rebirth in non-human forms' was also given (Nesbitt, 1993). These children would be encouraged to believe in reincarnation by their families and community. From those children who positively considered reincarnation, '10 out of 50' (20%) were Christian and some of them incorporated it with their concepts of heaven and hell. Some children, 'all from staunchly Christian homes, mentioned rejecting reincarnation on specifically Christian grounds' (Nesbitt, 1993).

The fact that many Christian children do not mention the possibility of reincarnation and that others regard it as untenable illustrates the persistence of doctrinal exclusionism in Christian theology. The acceptance by some Christian children of reincarnation may mark a growing acceptance among church goers of reincarnation. This may be a result of growing up in a multi-faith society, having Punjabi or Gujarati friends and having an RE syllabus that has been responsive to this demographic change. (Nesbitt, 1993)

Why would Christian theology, and thereby its doctrine, include reincarnation as part of the Christian understanding and teaching on the place of *death* and *life after death*? (Section 2.3).

Nesbitt also made reference to where some of the children attribute their knowledge of life after death. The Hindu/Sikh children mentioned, for example, 'school, my RE teacher, an Indian film of the gods, my sister, an advertisement for Kit Kat and a picture in a book of Bible stories'. The Christian children mentioned 'a source of belief' which was unlike the Hindu/Sikh children, for example, church, Sunday school, the Bible and parents.

What they accept or reject depends largely upon the concepts transmitted deliberately (for many of group B) [Christians] or less consciously (for group A) [Hindu/Sikhs] in the family, community and place of worship. (Nesbitt, 1993)

It is unclear upon what evidence Nesbitt drew this generalized conclusion. What about the place Religious Education may have in developing children's concepts of *death* and the possibility of *life after death*? (Chapters 6; 7).

4.4.3 Children's concepts of life after death through death education

'Death education' in schools and 'death studies' in universities originated in the USA and appears to have gathered momentum due, in particular, to the research of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross during the 1960s. As previously mentioned, she conducted much of her research exploring death and dying on adult World War II survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. She wrote her findings in the well-known, 'On Death and Dying' (Kubler-Ross, 1970).

Other countries, for example, Australia, have death education and death studies included in their education system (Crawford & Rossiter, 1996, Glassock & Rowling, 1992, Rowling, 1996, Rowling, 2003). It is highly probable that this type of study is

available in these countries because Religious Education is not taught in all their State schools, but only in their faith schools. Reference is made to the issue of death education when discussing the place of Religious Education in developing children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* in Chapter 7.

Sian Higgins is an advocator of death education in the UK. Higgins, a primary school teacher in Wales where she was also Religious Education specialist, conducted research with a class of 36 children who were 9-10 years of age and in Year 5 of their primary schooling (Section 3.2.2.2). Her research took place over ten weeks in the autumn term 1997 following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. The purpose was to justify the teaching of 'death education at primary school level' and to find out if children are 'capable of discussing the afterlife and thus of thinking abstractly' (Higgins, 1999).

During the period of ten weeks, Higgins used whole class discussions and smaller group discussions as an opportunity for finding out if the children would share their opinions about *death* and *life after death*. It seems as though she used 'introductory sessions' to explore children's 'conception of death' before going to their 'conception of the afterlife' (Higgins, 1999). It would appear that she used action research to conduct her research (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, Edwards & Talbot, 1994, McNiff, 1993, McNiff *et al.*, 1996, Mertens, 1998). These sessions included:

The discussion about feelings of loss (of an object and then a person); talking about funerals (this was particularly relevant as Princess Diana had died only weeks before); examining the words of hymns and the funeral order of service; discussing vocabulary that was used to explain death and loss; reading a story to the class about a person who was dying (*Emma Says Goodbye* by Carol Nystrom, 1990) and discussing whether death is the end or is there something more. (Higgins, 1999)

Higgins was keen to express that this series of lessons provided 'ample opportunity and vocabulary for animated discussion' before explaining that:

Those who expressed a belief in the afterlife and who wished to be part of the research were asked to draw a picture or symbols that represented their belief. This was then used as the focus for the taped discussions of children, in small groups. (Higgins, 1999)

Does this mean that only some of the 36 children went on to discuss the concept of life after death? How would this relate to Higgins' apparent view that every child in a primary school should have the opportunity to explore the concepts of *death* and *life*

after death? Or does Higgins make a distinction between who should investigate these two concepts and think that only children who profess 'belief' in life after death should discuss their ideas? If so, what should the rest of the class be doing and studying meanwhile? Higgins seemed to model aspects of her research on Frangoulis et al's research methodology by only having those children who 'expressed a belief in the afterlife' taking part in that aspect of the research and then asking them to draw a picture which 'represented their belief' (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996; Section 4.4.1). What was the language Higgins used to establish whether or not a child had a belief in life after death? This question was previously raised about the research of Frangoulis et al (Section 4.4.1). Did she use the phrase afterlife or life after death? Would this have made any difference to how the children responded, and consequently, the ensuing findings and discussion? Higgins did, however, give the children the choice of drawing a picture or symbols. As questioned previously: What exactly were the children asked to represent pictorially? What would be the purpose of drawing, for example, an image of heaven and hell? When she worked with the children in small groups, did she ask each group the same series of questions? (Section 4.4.1). This information is unclear from her paper.

Higgins, however, concluded from the discussions with the children that they were 'capable of discussing an abstract concept.' She also noted in her findings that 'traditional pictures of heaven are evident' which represent a 'physical place, similar to life on earth but without its problems'. The children made reference to 'angels; gates; clouds; people you know' as well as describing heaven as 'paradise' (Higgins, 1999). Does this suggest that Higgins, like Frangoulis et al, seem to consider life after death solely in terms of a location? (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996; Section 4.4.1).

Higgins was conscious that, unlike a proportion of the children in Frangoulis et al's research, the children she had researched had 'overall' a positive view of life after death (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996; Section 4.4.1). She questioned whether this difference was due to the fact that the children in her research had 'more opportunity to discuss the afterlife within the context of death education'; and whether death education had helped 'to clarify children's conception of the afterlife and in so doing reduce the fear associated with it' (Higgins, 1999).

Higgins concluded that her research demonstrated that 'by the end of Key Stage 2, children are capable of thinking abstractly and discussing the variety of beliefs relating

to the afterlife' (Higgins, 1999; Section 3.2.2.2). She did not, however, establish how the variety of children's beliefs maybe categorized, nor did she make reference or link to any faith community to which the children may have belonged.

Higgins advocated 'death education' as the forum for exploring concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children whether they are of primary or secondary school age. No clear description of death education is provided. Is it to be within Religious Education, or alongside it, or instead of it? Higgins commented that death education is 'a common component of Religious Education and Personal and Social Education at secondary level', and later, referred to 'the RE element of death education'. This was without expounding it, except to note that 'as a RE specialist, the researcher chose to focus her research on the examination of children's understanding of what happens after death (if anything)' rather than also including concepts of death (Higgins, 1999). Higgins did not write about her findings on children's concepts of *death*, even though she was aware of them, but concentrated on their concepts of *life after death*. She seemed to be somewhat confused about whether this was a theological issue and/or an ultimate question. Ultimate questions can be theological but whether 'what happens after death?' is a theological issue depends on the context for the discussion.

There are links between Higgins' research and the research in this thesis where the focus is on teachers conducting research exploring the concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children in the primary school (Chapters 1; 5; 6; 7). Thus, providing a forum for children to express their views and develop conceptually, as well as demonstrating that children have the ability to discuss these concepts (Clark, 1991, Clark, 1998).

4.4.4 Goldman and children's religious thinking

How children think, especially about 'religious' or 'spiritual' matters, is something psychologists, psychiatrists, theologians and Religious Education specialists have debated for decades. Some of these people have had a substantial influence not only on fellow academics' thinking and research, but also on the widely held assumptions of many of the general public in the Western world. Some of the ideas, in turn, have influenced Government policy on education and similarly, the teaching community has been encouraged to incorporate them into their practice. Ronald Goldman is one such person and his work in relation to children's 'religious thinking' is reviewed. It is important to recognize the marked influence Goldman's research into pupils' religious

thinking had during the early 1960's and up to the present time. It affected, for instance, the style and content of Religious Education being taught and advocated widely in the Locally Agreed Syllabi throughout England and Wales as demonstrated in Chapter 3 (Plowden, 1967; Section 3.5).

The 1960s was a period when there was a marked interest in the effectiveness of education in schools throughout the UK. The effectiveness of Religious Education was also questioned. A substantial part of the debate centred on the different approaches to the teaching of Religious Education and how effective they were in enabling pupils to better understand Christianity. England was considered to be a Christian country in which the wide-ranging culture and democracy was based and had evolved, and also had an established church. Consequently, Christianity was the only religion which was then taught in schools. As has already been mentioned, from the time of the 1944 Education Act until ERA, Religious Education was the only compulsory subject for pupils (Chapter 3). A multi-faith approach to Religious Education was perceived to be neither appropriate nor necessary at that time. Christianity tended to be taught from either a confessional or neo-confessional standpoint. The former explicitly taught pupils the merits of Christianity by exploring its beliefs and practices, and actively encouraged them to personally accept the faith. The neo-confessional way placed emphasis on the pupils' mental and emotional capabilities to understand Christianity along with the hope that they would accept the basics of the Christian faith for themselves. Much rote learning formed the basis for both these ways of teaching Christianity.

It was against this background that the psychologist, Ronald Goldman, carried out his doctoral research in Religious Education at the University of Reading. His findings were published in 1964 in 'Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence' (Goldman, 1964). 'Readiness for Religion: A Basis for Developmental Religious Education' followed in 1965 (Goldman, 1965b). He made the claim that his research 'stemmed from a much longer period of concern for the effectiveness of Religious Education' (Goldman, 1964: xi). Despite this statement Goldman did not explain nor expand on what exactly he meant by the phrase 'effectiveness of Religious Education.'

In the preface of his first book, Goldman stated:

To know what a child is able to grasp intellectually is a surer foundation for education than to know only what adults feel the child ought to grasp.
(Goldman, 1964: xi)

He said, too, in commenting about his research programme:

We are concerned, in this research, with testing children's concepts and logic in relation to religious stories and experiences which are formed by the total influence impinging upon the child's life, not merely the results of teaching by school and Church. (Goldman, 1964: 39)

He wanted his research to provide empirical evidence for these opinions and intrinsically:

To see whether Piaget's three stages could be applied to the realm of religious thinking. (Goldman, 1964: 51)

Goldman had high regard for the work of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget who conducted and published his most influential research on child psychology between 1923 and 1929. This included: 'Judgement and Reasoning in the Child' in 1926 and 'The Child's Conception of the World' in 1929. Goldman was very aware that Religious Education was a subject not researched by Piaget and so he thought that there was an opportunity for research to be carried out in this field. As an admirer of Piaget's work, Goldman used his clinical interview method for the questioning of pupils in his research.

Piaget asserted a sequence of three stages of cognitive development in a child. These are:

- an intuitive stage
- a concrete operational stage and lastly
- a formal or abstract operational stage
(Piaget, 1929)

Goldman's research methodology took the form of an initial pilot study which involved interviewing 60 pupils either individually or in small groups, at the ages of six, nine, thirteen and sixteen. They were given the opportunity to discuss five simple pictures and eight biblical stories.

The pictures were devised to act as a projective device. Each picture had four parallel copies so that the one appropriate to the size and sex of the child interviewed could be used. (Goldman, 1964: 36)

Goldman expected the pupils in his survey to 'project' or in other words, place themselves, in the pictures which they were asked to analyse and discuss. The type of pen and ink drawings which the pupils were encouraged to speak about and then respond to by answering a series of standard questions were:

- a child entering a church with a man and woman
- a child looking at an altar
- a child looking at a mutilated Bible

The biblical stories used in discussion from the Old Testament were:

- Moses at the burning bush
- the crossing of the Red Sea
- the call of the child Samuel
- King Ahab and Naboth's vineyard

Similarly, there were these stories from the New Testament:

- Jesus in the temple as a boy
- the healing of blind Bartimaeus
- the temptations of Jesus
- Jesus' resurrection appearance on the road to Emmaus

A second pilot study was undertaken involving a total of 27 pupils randomly selected from two infant, three junior and three secondary schools. These pupils were judged by their class teachers to be either 'below average, average or above average in school performance' (Goldman, 1964: 37).

At this stage in his research, Goldman noted that:

The pictures tended to reveal the following concepts. Concepts of the Church, describing its nature, its purpose and the motivation of attendees; concepts of prayer, involving prayer content, the purpose of praying, failure in prayer and God's presence in prayer; concepts of the Bible, its uniqueness, its nature and its origins.

An examination of responses to the eight Bible stories showed that six major groups of concepts were involved. These were concepts of God, His nature, power and holiness; concepts of individual man's relationship with God, his guilt, fears, trust, expectation, the demands of divine love and justice, and how the divine communicates with man; concepts of group man in relation to God, group salvation and destiny, judgment on groups of men, the demands of divine love and justice; concepts of Jesus, his humanity, his power, his relationship with God; concepts of miracle, God's power over nature, divine intervention and appearance; concepts of biblical authority, the interpreting of the Bible, its authority and relevance. (Goldman, 1964: 37 & 38)

From the pilot studies Goldman decided to try out 'a picture and story interview procedure' using three pictures and three biblical passages on a small group of 20 children ranging from 6 to 16 years of age who were tested for intelligence. Their mental ability, however, varied and so did their religious background. After final revision of the procedure a sample of 200 pupils from State schools were given the same three pictures and Bible stories. The pupils were aged from 6 to 16 years of age and were those who attended Religious Education lessons and belonged to the 'Church of England', one of the 'Free Churches, Gospel sect' such as 'Pentecostal, Adventist and Salvationist' churches or were 'nothing'. Goldman classed as 'nothing' those pupils or their parents who, at the time of the research, did not frequent either church or Sunday school, as well as those who had not attended for over a year (Goldman, 1964: 42). But:

Children of parents who were Roman Catholics, Jews, negroes or of foreign extraction, even if naturalised and their children born in this country, were excluded as a source of possible bias to the sample. Similarly, all children whose parents withdrew their children from school assembly and religious instruction for various reasons were excluded. (Goldman, 1964: 40)

The pictures which Goldman finally chose to show each of the 200 pupils for analysis were of a family entering a church, a child praying alone and a child looking at a mutilated Bible. The pupils heard the stories from the Old Testament of Moses at the burning bush, the crossing of the Red Sea and then from the New Testament, the temptations of Jesus, before being asked a number of standard questions which corresponded to the passages.

At the beginning of each test the researcher was required to fill in whether the pupil was a boy or girl, along with their name, type of school, name of school, form and stream, C.A. (chronological age) at time of test, estimated M.A. (mental age) at time of test, estimated I.Q. (intelligence quotient), estimate of ability — type of intelligence test

with its date and score, and school attainments (Goldman, 1964: 247). Goldman also used this information to analyse his results.

The whole of Goldman's research methodology was based upon the Piagetian model (Piaget, 1929).

Since much of the data to be evaluated was similar in nature to the problems used by Piaget the clinical-interview used frequently by Piaget served as a model, and a technique was developed to apply to individual pupils. (Goldman, 1964: 36)

Goldman concluded from his research that pupils' thinking about religion closely corresponded to Piaget's analysis of cognitive development through its three stages (see earlier) (Piaget, 1929).

When applied to thinking about religion, in the Bible stories chosen, this threefold sequence is very evident. It is noticeable when the pupils are arranged in order of chronological age, more noticeable when they are arranged in order of mental age and very marked when the pupil order follows the total score order. (Goldman, 1964: 62)

Goldman went on to state that:

We can therefore say with confidence that there is a sequence or pattern through which children appear to pass, at varying speeds, which closely corresponds, in religious thinking, to an intuitive stage, a concrete operational stage and a formal or abstract operational stage. The presence of intermediate stages is also evident but they are not clearly definable since they overlap the main sections. (Goldman, 1964: 62)

It was on this questionably limited basis that Goldman claimed that, 'very little biblical material is suitable before Secondary schooling' (Goldman, 1964: 225). Indeed:

It is an observation based upon the demonstrable fact that the Bible itself, although not the ideas and persons of which it speaks, must be introduced in a systematic manner later in the child's development than has been previously been practised. (Piaget, 1929: 227-228)

Goldman concluded that there was a need for a more child-centred approach to Religious Education. The way to achieve this was particularly through the expressive arts like art, dance, drama and music and he advocated that this style of Religious Education would then replace biblical teaching for primary school age children.

In trying to assess the value of Goldman's work for Religious Education and teachers, it is important to acknowledge that he was foremost among researchers in the 1960s in wanting to provide quantitative data on the religious thinking of people in their childhood to adolescence. He was seen to take a scientific approach in his research by carrying out pilot studies. The findings from these he used to modify his research technique for his subsequent main study. This was perceived as a major new approach and more 'scientific' in influencing educational research methodology at that time.

He also commendably demonstrated an interest in Religious Education and confirmed his belief that it should remain a compulsory part of the school curriculum. This would seem most significant as Religious Education can be an area of the curriculum which is frequently overlooked, undervalued and not always taken seriously by those directly and indirectly involved in education. There were and remain those who have argued against its presence as a compulsory part of the curriculum.

His findings have been accepted and implemented by the education community not only in the UK but also in other parts of the world including, the USA, Scandinavia and Australia (Goldman, 1965a, Kincaid, 1991). Theorists have commented on Goldman's:

Outstanding contributions to Religious Education by drawing the teacher's attention to the psychological and sociological difficulties of pupils in understanding the language and thought forms of religion.
(Sealey, 1985: 45-46)

In the UK his analysis has had a huge impact on the Locally Agreed Syllabi for Religious Education as discussed earlier (Plowden, 1967; Section 3.5). In addition, the consequent inhibition and possible resistance to exploring concepts such as God, *death* and *life after death* with other than secondary school age children, and therefore, not with primary school age children. Within a relatively short period of time, there was a shift from exploring biblical text to an emphasis on 'life themes' with primary school children such as 'In Our Community — People Who Help Us'. Goldman emphasized in his conclusion that 'life themes' were part of a child-centred approach to Religious Education. From the mid 1960's 'life theme' topics became very popular as a direct effect of his findings and Goldman produced the necessary resources that could be used in schools and which were generally well received.

In the 'Introduction' to each 'life theme' Goldman announced that:

The *Readiness for Religion* series is designed to be used by children in a new approach to religious education. ... This series is discussed and seen in the setting of children's growing needs ... (Goldman, 1967: 5)

Goldman was the editor of the series of books for Religious Education covering the 'life themes' with the titles: 'Light', 'About Myself', 'Symbols', and 'What is the Bible?' (Goldman, 1967).

Another effect of Goldman's work has been the use of the creative arts to explain, explore and express religious teaching with children in the primary school. Some teachers have found a combination of exploring life themes and the use of the creative arts in Religious Education more conducive. This is because at a personal level, it is potentially a less challenging and demanding, more relaxed and informal or even, less threatening way of teaching many aspects of Religious Education.

In assessing the research conducted by Goldman on pupils' religious thinking, there appear to be a number of significant weaknesses which should be examined and commented upon.

Goldman never questioned Piaget's three stage cognitive development of children which are generalized categories arbitrarily linked to age (Piaget, 1929). Since the 1960's in educational and research spheres of child psychology, Piaget's stage development work has been seriously questioned and refuted as being outmoded (Petrovich, 1988). Olivera Petrovich also interestingly noted that:

Goldman's book was given much attention in educational and theological circles following its publication. It is of interest, however, that the book was never discussed in psychological journals. This is somewhat paradoxical for the work is decidedly psychological in its conception, method and aims. (Petrovich, 1988)

It is surprising and of possible concern that Goldman's findings are still highly rated by some in the education community and may reflect the seemingly limited interaction and exchange which should take place between academic disciplines. His conclusions continue to be reflected in the Locally Agreed Syllabi for Religious Education by the way that serious and meaningful use of biblical text, as well as of other sacred texts, is not advocated as being important for an understanding of doctrines and practices. Having the confidence and being able to grapple with and grasp these

things would aid children in their comprehension of the use of biblical language as a communicator of concepts such as God, *death* and *life after death*, justice, forgiveness, and love.

Goldman rigidly maintained a very narrow view of primary school age children's conceptual ability, that is of those aged 5 to 11 years. He was partly able to make these observations because of using Piaget's stage development technique in his research and then to analyse the data (Piaget, 1929).

It is clear that because the forms of thought used by children are childish and immature, children's religious ideas and their concepts will also be childish and immature. We should not expect anything other than this. What is disturbing is that the childish immaturities continue so long into adolescence. (Goldman, 1964: 67)

It may seem somewhat unfortunate that Goldman's position was accepted with little reservation in the influential Plowden Report 1967 (Plowden, 1967; Section 3.5).

It is of concern to find little evidence of subsequent research which re-examines or challenges Goldman's findings and his influence on Religious Education. Olivera Petrovich and Elizabeth Ashton have questioned his understanding of religion (Ashton, 1993, Ashton, 1996, Ashton, 1997a, Ashton, 1997b, Ashton, 2000, Petrovich, 1988).

Goldman defined religion as:

A personal search for faith, not a body of information to be learned, although it is true that some information may help us to understand religion more sensibly. (Goldman, 1965b: xi)

This shows how Goldman placed emphasis on the emotional side in defining religion rather than the cognitive side. He, however, wanted to find out through his research, the thinking side to religious belief and practice and to stress the need for the intellectual side to be developed in Religious Education. There is a clear mismatch here if religion is perceived to be about holding together the paradox of the sense of the numinous with an understanding of revealed facts, alongside an individual's lifestyle.

Petrovich noted how Goldman did not define the term 'thinking' which underpins his research. She analyses what he could have meant by it and how he could have used it in the context of his research (Petrovich, 1988). The fact that Goldman himself did not define his terms somewhat weakens or at best confuses and limits his findings. Ashton notes that:

A concern central to Goldman's researches was his belief in the limitations imposed on children's thinking because of their apparent inability to interpret language in any other way than the literal. (Ashton, 1996: 211)

She goes on to emphasize that:

Goldman's assertions concerning pre-adolescent children's literalism are dependent on his view that the Bible is essentially a poetic, literary work. However, much the same could be said about traditional fairy tales, although here the literal truth, or otherwise, of the narratives does not seem to be important in the search for meaning. (Ashton, 1996: 213)

Elsewhere Ashton argues strongly that:

To introduce children to any literature which is rich in layers of potential meaning is to introduce food on which the intellect can thrive. To fail to provide material which is rich in this way is to contribute to intellectual malnutrition and arrested intellectual and emotional development. (Ashton, 1997b)

The fact that Goldman restricted who was eligible for his research by stating that the pupils had to be either Protestant or 'nothing' means that his findings could be somewhat skewed and unfair on children's ability to analyse the pictures and biblical passages he presented to them and to understand concepts, irrespective of apparent personally held beliefs.

Goldman can also be criticised for drawing his wide-ranging conclusions based on the restrictive analysis of only three pictures and the nature of what they represent, and three biblical passages. The two selected Old Testament passages are not easily comprehensible, especially by children. It seems at variance with the underlying principles of well-planned and structured research. The biblical stories which Goldman used were all of the spectacular or miraculous nature. It was inappropriate to base his judgement of children's religious thinking and their ability from the biblical passages which may have been unfamiliar to the pupils in the study. In addition, the nuances and subtleties of how to interpret and understand biblical passages were probably outside the experience of many.

A major problem with the pronounced emphasis given to 'life themes' in Religious Education, as a direct consequence of Goldman's research, is that their links with Religious Education usually seem to be tenuous. This has tended to lead to the probable trivialising and misunderstanding of Religious Education in the minds of some teachers, some parents and members of the general public. The life themes, devised by Goldman, also seem to markedly under-estimate a child's intellectual ability to be prepared to grapple with, and then know, understand and reflect on the beliefs and practices of faith communities which are central to Religious Education.

Nevertheless, Goldman's PhD based publications continued to generate discussion of children's religious thinking as evidenced by Hilliard, F. H. (1965), Dr John Peatling of the USA (1977), James Fowler also of the USA (1981), Dr Kenneth Hyde, a former staff inspector for Religious Education in London, in 1984, among others (Fowler, 1981, Hilliard, 1965, Hyde, 1984, Peatling, 1977).

4.5 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

From a review of the literature, those researchers who had conducted surveys of relevance to this research tended to only interview children. Several of these researchers, for example, Lansdown and Benjamin, Frangoulis et al, and Higgins, used story as a stimulus for the interviewees (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996, Higgins, 1999, Lansdown & Benjamin, 1985). Goldman used pictures and story (Goldman, 1964, Goldman, 1965b). It appears that few researchers used a questionnaire for their research with children except, for example, Clark and Ng who distributed questionnaires for their doctoral research (Clark, 1996, Ng, 1998). The results for those who used interviews as the instrument of their research methodology tended to rely on a much smaller sample size compared with those who used a questionnaire. In some cases, inappropriate use of percentages and questionable statistics for these small cohorts were analysed and reported. If the participants came from two or more age groups, the distribution was not always reported and if it was, then it was unevenly distributed. The same was noted for the distribution of gender. Where the researchers carried out their research in UK schools, the range of the type of schools was limited to no more than three and consequently did not reflect the spectrum of availability, especially concerning primary school education (Chapter 3). Invariably the research was apparently restricted to one location. Nesbitt focused her research on children who only belonged to specific faith groups (Nesbitt, 1993). Goldman excluded children from his research if they belonged to certain faith groups and denominations. Some children were excluded from research consequent to a particular belief response, for example, Frangoulis et al, and Higgins. The literature revealed a marked reliance on the Piagetian model of approach to research and data analysis (Piaget, 1929).

Although the subject of the research reported by Frangoulis et al, Nesbitt, Higgins, and others has addressed some difficult and challenging topics, the justification for some of the research findings reported by them would seem limited in a number of areas. It also became clear from the preceding analysis that researchers have paid only minimal attention to environmental factors such as where children live, and in a limited way to their identification with a faith community. This led, therefore, to the researcher focusing her attention on such issues.

Of note was the evidence that some of the research examined revealed that children have concepts of *death* whereas other studies demonstrated their concepts of *life after death* while no studies included both concepts. They all showed that children were capable of discussing them and this therefore provided a basis for the decision to carry out an empirical investigation where children would be asked to express their concepts. Where concepts of death were explored these focused on the generally accepted three or four components of the concept. As part of their research, Frangoulis et al, and Higgins asked the participants to draw their concept of life after death. Usually, concepts of life after death centred on the idea that it would be in the form a location that is heaven and hell and how the deceased would travel there. Some reference in the findings was made to reincarnation, especially in Nesbitt's research.

This researcher's recognition of the experience reported and their shortcomings contributed to her determination to devise a more creditable research programme, notably the *death and life after death children's concepts study* — and in particular, the main research study questionnaire (Figure 1.1; Chapter 5). This included utilising sufficient numbers of primary school age children — sufficient to justify appropriate analytical evaluation, statistical where appropriate, in the selected different age categories, from a range of types of primary schools. It would also mean allowing for the exploration of the developmental nature which could be achieved through working with two age groups of children. The schools would be in two potentially contrasting locations too. One location would be a multi-faith and multi-cultural region and the other a more mono-faith and mono-cultural region. These will be considered in the analysis of environmental factors.

Therefore, the review of the literature concerning:

1. Understanding *death* and *life after death* in the six major world religions with reference to those for whom death marks the end of existence, and the issues and concerns of death as a taboo (Chapter 2)
2. Religious Education syllabi *death* and *life after death* content comparison study (Chapter 3)
3. Children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Chapter 4)

have all contributed to the formulation of the research project focus on exploring the following questions on the concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Figure 1.1):

1. What are primary school age children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*?
2. What is the place of the concepts in the teaching of Religious Education?

It is from this basis that the methodology was developed to investigate:

- What concepts of *death* and *life after death* do primary school age children have and express?
- If and to what extent are children's concepts associated with demographic factors such as age and gender?
- If and to what extent are children's concepts associated with environmental factors such as belonging to a faith community and living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region?

Consequently:

- How might these research findings impact on Religious Education syllabi in different environments?

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH METHODS

5.1 OUTLINE OF CHAPTER

The research programme presented in this thesis consists of three distinct studies (Figure 1.1; Appendix 8). Studies 1 and 2 are pre-cursors to the main research in 3.

1. The National Religious Education Festival study
2. Religious Education syllabi *death* and *life after death* content comparison study which was reported in Chapter 3
3. *Death* and *life after death* children's concepts study

The research process and methodology employed for these three studies is presented separately. Relevant findings and implications from the first two Studies are noted for the *death* and *life after death children's concepts study* and especially for the main research study questionnaire.

5.2 THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FESTIVAL STUDY

5.2.1 Introduction

The 'National Religious Education Festival' (*Festival*) was a one-off, week-long event in October 1997, prior to the main research. The *Festival* was organized by the Professional Council for Religious Education (PCfRE) (Blaylock, 2001a, Blaylock, 2001b, Fageant & Blaylock, 1998, PCfRE, 1997). Over one and a quarter million pupils from approximately 14,000 primary and secondary schools across the UK along with people from about 9,000 different faith community groups were invited to participate in the 1997 *Festival*. Pupils from primary and secondary schools, throughout the UK, were asked to complete a questionnaire exploring their awareness and understanding of different aspects of Religious Education (Appendix 4). Part of the study explored children's and teenagers' views on *death* and *life after death*.

The PCfRE is the subject teacher association for Religious Education professionals in primary and secondary schools and higher education across the UK. The Christian Education Movement (CEM) is an ecumenical charity which works throughout the UK and aims:

- To support Religious Education in schools
- To increase awareness of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of the curriculum
- To articulate Christian perspectives on education (Blaylock, 2001a, Blaylock, 2001b)

The PCfRE and CEM work closely together and share the same headquarters, formerly in Derby and since 2001 in Birmingham. Producing the *Festival* questionnaire is an example of their collaborative work (Fageant & Blaylock, 1998; Appendix 4).

As a consequence of registering for the higher degree of doctor of philosophy, I was invited by Lat Blaylock, an Executive Officer of the PCfRE, to be part of a research team investigating the children's responses to the *Festival* questionnaire. The project was called the 'Faith in the Future Project'. The multi-disciplinary team members selected by Lat Blaylock for their expertise included:

- a member of the Centre for Advanced Study of Religion, University of Cambridge
- a lecturer in Religious Education at King's College, London who is a member of the editorial team of 'RE Today'
- a free-lance Religious Education consultant; the Resources Officer for the National Society for Promoting Religious Education and tutor at the London Institute of Education
- the Resources Officer at the British and Foreign Schools Society (BFSS) National Religious Education Centre, University of Brunel
- the National Primary Schools Religious Education Advisor and the Director for RE Today Professional Services
- a fellow Farmington Millennium Award Holder
- several teachers of Religious Education

Of note: The additional experience I gained as prime investigator on the section of the *Festival* questionnaire exploring children's views on *death* and *life after death*, contributed to the planning of the *death* and *life after death concepts study* — Pilot Studies Nos.1 and 2 which preceded the main research study questionnaire in this thesis (Section 5.3; Figure 1.1; Appendix 8). The evaluation of the responses to the *Festival* primary school age questionnaire, enabled a critical examination of the PCfRE's research techniques for questioning children about aspects of Religious Education, and in particular, the concepts of *death* and *life after death*.

The first part of this chapter explains the aim and objectives of the *Festival*. The research which focused on children's ideas about *death* and *life after death* is considered and the issue of question design and content is also addressed.

5.2.1.1 Aim of the National Religious Education Festival

- The aim of the *Festival* was to celebrate quality Religious Education throughout the country. (PCfRE, 1997)

The organizing committee considered that, in order to try to meet the aim, a consensus was needed about what constitutes 'quality Religious Education'. The PCfRE defined that quality Religious Education required the following three elements:

- Shared experience
- The riches of religion
- A personal enquiry

5.2.1.2 Quality Religious Education

The three elements listed in Section 5.2.1.1 were outlined further by the PCfRE. **Shared experience** was defined as giving rise to some fundamental questions of human nature:

- What does it mean to be human?
- Why are we here?
- What happens when we die?
- The experiences of love, joy, community, pain, loss and evil raise questions which quality Religious Education addresses.

The riches of religion:

- Living belief systems, as found in Christianity and other principal religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism offer some answers to the questions of life.
- Quality Religious Education gives children and young people access to these answers.

A personal enquiry:

- Experience and tradition shape us all.
- Quality Religious Education enables young people to become more aware of the values by which they live and take their own search further in the light of their encounter with religious teachings and traditions.

The PCfRE considered that quality Religious Education should combine these three elements together with Religious Education that is:

- engaging and active in teaching and learning;
- developing varied skills of understanding, expression and reflection;
- matched with pupils' needs and offering a coherent programme;
- adding a coherent programme of religious learning that clarifies rather than confuses.
(PCfRE, 1997)

Of particular note is the fact that the PCfRE include the use of 'fundamental questions' in their description of 'shared experience'. As discussed earlier, they are also referred to as 'ultimate questions' and form an integral part of Religious Education teaching (Section 3.4; Chapter 7). The concepts of *death* and *life after death* can be explored through the use of ultimate questions which is central to the research in this thesis and is discussed in depth in Chapter 7.

5.2.2 Aim of the National Religious Education Festival Study

- The aim was to produce a resource for teachers of primary and secondary school Religious Education using the data from the *Festival* questionnaire.

The PCfRE anticipated that the resource would provide curriculum development materials which could assist them in improving the quality of Religious Education (Blaylock *et al.*, 2001, Jepson & Draycott, 2001; Appendix 9; 10). These materials should therefore incorporate the three elements discussed earlier (Section 5.2.1.2; Blaylock, 2000).

5.2.3 Aim of the Festival questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire was that:

The focus of each question, and the thrust of the whole questionnaire, was to make space for children and young people to respond to some of the ultimate questions which Religious Education commonly considers in the light of their own experience and learning. (Blaylock, 2001a, Blaylock, 2001b: 2)

5.2.4 Questionnaire design, content and validity

For the design and content of the *Festival* questionnaire to be creditable they must have reliability and validity²⁸ (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, Edwards & Talbot, 1994, Fitz-Gibbon, (1987), Kerlinger, 1986, Luck *et al.*, 2000, Mertens, 1998, Oppenheim, 1992). The association of these components is discussed as follows:

The *Festival* committee, in consultation with PCfRE Executive Committee members and members of the staff team of CEM developed two versions of a questionnaire (Appendix 4).

²⁸ A measure of the validity of research data is the extent to which it can be agreed that the research instrument has been effective in capturing what it intends to capture and reliability is essentially concerned with the consistency of the research process (Edwards & Talbot, 1994: 161; 159).

The two versions of the questionnaire were for each of the school age groups selected to respond to the questionnaire. One version of the questionnaire was for pupils in primary schools who were 7 to 11 years of age and thereby in Key Stage 2 (Section 3.2.2). The committee considered that a questionnaire was inappropriate for children who were younger than seven years of age and hence in Key Stage 1 (Section 3.2.2.). The other version of the questionnaire was for any pupil in secondary school, including sixth form, and therefore between the ages of 11 to 18.

The two questionnaires were similar and covered four A4 pages (Appendix 4; 5). The questionnaires differed only in the style some questions were worded, the question sequence, and in the number being asked. The secondary school pupils were asked to respond to twelve questions and the primary school pupils were presented with ten questions.

Regarding the slight differences in question style, an example of this was in the first question which explored children's opinions about religions giving people guidelines for living (Fageant & Blaylock, 1998; Appendix 4):

Primary school age questionnaire, question 1:

Religions try to show people the best way to live.
Suppose a king or queen sent out messengers to find out the best way to live,
and they asked you.
What could you tell them?

Secondary school age questionnaire, question 1:

Religions try to show people the best way to live.
When you think about it carefully, what would you say is the best way to
live?

One of the extra questions on the secondary school age questionnaire presented a statement commenting that some people do not believe in God, but 'in the value of humanity' and then asked them for their thoughts about the value of people. The other additional question explored the notion that 'many religions ask people to try and learn life's lessons from their experience' and consequently asked what their experiences of life so far had taught them.

The topics of the other questions, which were on both versions of the questionnaire, explored children's views on:

- religions giving people guidelines for living
- awareness of the presence of God
- thoughts about *death* and *life after death*
- what they liked about Religious Education
- religions bringing peace and harmony and also conflict
- thoughts and beliefs about what God is like
- the subject of prayer
- religions teaching their followers about freedom, truth, justice, love and forgiveness
- religions giving their followers a vision of a perfect world and children's dreams and hopes for the future in their lifetime

The questionnaires were, therefore, constructed to focus on different aspects of the content of Religious Education including the teaching of the subject, understanding of some of the common topics and issues for discussion in lessons, and an exploration of key concepts.

For each question, there was a statement relating to the topic of the question, followed by the question itself. The same design format was adopted for each questionnaire, and for some questions the statement was presented in the form of a quotation. Each statement acted as a stimulus for the children on the topic in question. All questions were of an open-ended design.

The final section on both questionnaires asked for demographic details and the option to disclose the respondent's religion and name.

5.2.5 Subject sample

For analysis of the questionnaire the project organizers considered that about twenty questionnaires from each school would be sufficiently representative of that school and the entire 7 to 18 year old school population (Section 5.2.9). The intention was to have a total of 600 questionnaires from the age range of respondents as follows:

- 7 year olds 65 questionnaires
- 8 year olds 150 questionnaires
- 9 year olds 150 questionnaires
- 10 year olds 170 questionnaires
- 11 year olds 65 questionnaires

5.2.6 Questionnaire distribution

The *Festival* questionnaire was posted from the PCfRE headquarters in Derby to every school in the UK in the six weeks from the beginning of September 1997 before the week of the *Festival* in October (6th to 10th). The staff contact person for receipt of the questionnaire was either a headteacher at each school, or Religious Education co-ordinator in primary schools, or head of Religious Education in secondary schools.

The *Festival* organizers wrote a standard letter to the headteacher/Religious Education co-ordinator/head of Religious Education at each school encouraging them to use the questionnaire as one aspect of the *Festival* and requesting them to photocopy it for each pupil.

The *Festival* organizers encouraged and anticipated that the questionnaire would be answered during the week of the *Festival* itself rather than in the intervening period preceding the *Festival*, once having received the questionnaire, or after the *Festival*, prior to the completed questionnaires being returned before the deadline. The teachers were given a limit of seven weeks after the *Festival* in which to return the completed questionnaires. It was requested that the completed questionnaires were returned to a PO Box address in London by the end of November 1997.

The questionnaires were coded for identification purposes on receipt of the completed questionnaires from each participating school. The questionnaire returns

were later stored at the BFSS National Religious Education Centre at the University of Brunel, where they remain.

5.2.7 Information to school children

When the questionnaire was posted to the primary and secondary schools the standard letter enclosed gave detailed information for the appropriate staff contact person to read (Section 5.2.6). The information included an explanation of background to the *Festival*, its purpose and proposed directions for staff who would be supervising the pupils at the time of completion of the questionnaire. The following information was also presented at the beginning of the questionnaire for the teachers administering it (Appendix 5):

To the teacher: This questionnaire is part of CEM and PCfRE's initiative for the National Religious Education Festival. Teachers are invited to make as many copies as they like and use them with pupils of any appropriate age. We think about 45 minutes is needed to introduce and administer the questionnaire. Children will benefit from discussion of the questions. PCfRE will use the results of the questionnaire to compile a booklet of the nation's children's views on faith. You might use the feedback for example for display of an article in a school magazine. Our aim in this is to help schools celebrate what's good in RE and to help pupils articulate their own beliefs, values, hopes and commitments. All schools who send in questionnaires will be entered in a draw for a free gift of a book or a music CD. **Thank you for your involvement.**

Alongside the explanation for the teachers was the following information for the children under the heading, 'The Pupils Speak':

To the pupil: This questionnaire gives you a chance to write about some of the things that matter most to you.

Please write with detail and thoughtfulness. You may give your name if you wish, but you don't have to.

Thanks for joining in this part of the Religious Education Festival: you never know, but what you say could end up in a book.

Following the thanks at the end of the questionnaire, the children were reminded that their responses may be quoted in a book.

As an incentive to complete the questionnaire, each school which responded was entered into a free prize draw for a book or music CD.

5.2.8 Validation process

The *Festival* Committee worked in consultation with PCfRE Executive Committee members and members of the staff team of the CEM to ensure that the design and content of the questionnaire were appropriate for pupils in the two age groups at primary and secondary school (Section 5.2.4). They drew on their expertise of working professionally with teachers and children in schools and through workshops and consultations across the UK for the task. The questionnaire was designed to take about forty-five minutes to complete.

The accompanying letter sent out to each school in the UK encouraging the participation in the *Festival* and completion of the questionnaire was standardized.

Comment: It would seem that the mechanism which was put in place to try and ensure that the completion of the questionnaire was standardized, was that teachers were encouraged to provide the opportunity for their pupils to respond to it during the actual week of the *Festival*. This was instead of in the period before the *Festival* when the school had received the questionnaire or afterwards prior to the school being expected to return the completed questionnaires to the *Festival* organizers. It appears that no other mechanisms were put in place to try and ensure that the completion of the questionnaire was standardized as the guiding purpose was to enable pupils to explore some aspects of Religious Education by responding to the series of questions.

5.2.9 Analysis of death and life after death question

For the section of the questionnaire for which I was responsible, the children were presented with a statement describing different viewpoints about *death* and the possibility of *life after death*. This was followed by an open-ended question inviting them to share their ideas. The primary school age questionnaire for 7 to 11 year old children asked for a response to the following statement about *death* and *life after death*:

‘When we die, we lie in the grave, and I’m afraid that’s the end of us.’

‘I think dying is like being born. You leave the place you know, but you go to a wonderful place you don’t know.’

What are your thoughts about death, and life after death?

(Fageant & Blaylock, 1998; Appendix 4; 5)

The only difference in the wording between the primary and secondary school age versions of the questionnaire was that on the primary school age questionnaire, the question asks about '*death and life after death*' whereas on the secondary school age questionnaire, the question refers to '*death and the afterlife*'.

The co-ordinators of the project organized the sample of questionnaires which the project team was to analyse. Opportunistic sampling²⁹ was used to select the sample of questionnaires (Blaylock, 2000, Mertens, 1998). This gave an average of about eighteen questionnaires per school (Section 5.2.5).

The experience and analysis of any shortcomings which were gained from the input to the *Festival study* contributed to the overall design and planned response levels of the *death and life after death concepts study* and in particular, of the main research study questionnaire (Section 5.2.5, 5.3; Figure 1.1; Appendix 8).

5.2.10 Findings

Over one and a quarter million pupils from approximately 14,000 primary and secondary schools across UK along with people from about 9,000 different faith community groups participated in the 1997 *Festival*. From these schools, the organizers received a total of 16,500 completed questionnaires. The responses were for both the primary school age and secondary school age versions of the questionnaire (Appendix 4; 5).

²⁹ When working within the interpretative/constructivist paradigm, researchers seldom establish the final definition and selection of sample members prior to the beginning of the study. When opportunities present themselves to the researcher during the course of the study, the researcher should make a decision on the spot as to the relevance of the activity or individual in terms of the emerging theory. Thus, opportunistic sampling involves decisions made regarding sampling during the course of the study (Mertens, 1998: 264).

5.2.11 Manipulation of data

My analysis of the question asking for children's views on *death* and *life after death* involved categorizing the children's responses to the primary school age version of the *Festival* questionnaire (Question 3 — Appendix 4; 5). Their feedback was analysed in order to find any recognizable patterns in the responses. A coding frame was devised based on content analysis (Edwards & Talbot, 1994, Luck *et al.*, 2000, Oppenheim, 1992). Several categories emerged and were identified in the children's thinking about these concepts. Responses could mostly be related to the following eight categories:

1. Death and dying — the finality of death
2. Life after death
3. Heaven or paradise
4. Heaven and hell
5. Reincarnation
6. Dying, death, and life after death
7. Uncertainty or doubt about life after death
8. Concerns or worries about dying, death and/or life after death

A limited selection of clearly expressed children's responses was short listed from the primary school age version of the *Festival* questionnaire demonstrating their concepts of *death* and *life after death*. The children were between 7 and 11 years of age. Some children stated to which religion they were associated in response to the optional question asking for that information. All the responses presented were anonymous with only the questionnaire code being given. There is, therefore, no indication of the children's age, gender, religion or type of primary school attended.

The following examples, from a total of 600 responses selected, give an indication of the wide ranging responses within each category which the questionnaire produced from Question 3 (Section 5.2.5). The children's responses have corrected spelling and basic punctuation but choice of words is unchanged.

1. Death and dying — the finality of death

These children's responses focus on the process of dying and the finality that death brings:

I think that when you die you lose everything you had.

[100]

My thoughts are that our life is over when you're dead and you lie there in just a skeleton.

[38]

2. Life after death

There were children who clearly expressed a belief in the existence of life after death without making any specific or direct reference to heaven and hell:

I think on the clouds are houses that people live in when they are dead.

[71]

I think when you die you go in a place where you can fly.

[115]

I think you go to a place where you go to a place where you haven't been and you meet up with other people in who have died that year and you do what you want and live a happy life together.

[140]

3. Heaven or paradise

Many children described their concept of heaven or paradise. Frequently the children expressed it in a positive manner while referring to aspects of faith and/or using religious language:

You die and end a wonderful life but you go in to heaven and live fore ever there and you are with Jesus and God.

[8]

I think that when we die we live up in heaven and watch over people that we know and try and keep people safe. But I don't think about death much.

[29]

Your spirit goes to heaven.

[98]

I think you go to heaven after you die. Yes I think all of us go up to heaven I don't think there is a hell.

[122]

4. Heaven and hell

For many children whether a person goes to heaven or hell after death is inextricably bound up with a concept of justice for life after death as a result of the way the earthly life was lived:

I think that when you die you stand before God and all your good and bad things are weighed if you have more good you go to heaven. If you have more bad you go to hell.

[108]

I think there is life after death and strongly believe in God's kingdom heaven. I also believe there is a place that people when they have done something extremely bad and where they go they will feel discomfort.

[216]

5. Reincarnation

Reincarnation was a common concept expressed by a large number of children. The details of the nature and form of reincarnation varied.

I think that when you die you be another person but you start life all over again.

[73]

I think dying means that you die and just go away but I believe that you come back as something else but don't remember being human.

[75]

I think dying is reincarnation and that people should not be afraid of it.

[215]

6. Dying, death and life after death

Many children commented on different aspects of dying, death and life after death, and made links between the end of the earthly life and the possibility of a future life after death:

I don't want to leave where I'm now but it will be nice to see a different place where I haven't been.

[15]

I think I will be buried. I will go to a really nice place when I die and will see my great grandma who was really nice.

[59]

7. Uncertainty or doubt about life after death

Some children were uninhibited about their doubts and uncertainties concerning life after death:

I have never thought about this before. But I don't think you have an afterlife.

[24]

I do think there is life after death. But sometimes I think is that it when you die you can't think or you can't do anything. I really do hope there is life after death.

[209]

8. Concerns or worries about dying, death and/or life after death

A number of children revealed their fears and worries about the process of dying and the possible consequences of them for the dying person:

I am a bit scared about dying because I think everyone will just forget when my funeral has finished.

[46]

Death scare me a lot more than anything else in the world and I think that's because I have no idea what will happen when I die. No one knows people make things up like they go to heaven or they are born again to reassure their selves. But I won't know until I die.

[53]

This analysis was then used as the basis for my contribution for the new Religious Education curriculum resource (Blaylock *et al.*, 2001, Jepson & Draycott, 2001; Appendix 9; 10).

5.2.12 Discussion

The record of the evaluation on children's views on *death* and *life after death* noted:

It is important to note that the vast majority of children responded to the question, many with quite full responses. Those children who did leave the question unanswered, in the main, left other questions blank too. In their response, many children tended to either focus on the aspect of death or life after death. There were some children who commented on both but they were in the minority. (Jepson & Draycott, 2001: 22)

Why were some children inclined to focus on death or life after death rather than both concepts in their responses? Was the statement at the beginning of the question a help or a hindrance for the children in their deliberating of these concepts? From the

evaluation, the nature and style of the open-ended question together with the preceding statement tended to polarise the children's responses by their either concentrating on aspects of death, or life after death, rather than commenting on both. Yet for some children the statement may have been a catalyst for stimulating ideas about the issues being raised, whereas for others it may have drawn them too much in a certain direction. For some children the statement would have contributed to providing them with the confidence to respond to the questions. However, some children may have felt compelled to stay within the parameters of the ideas presented in the statement. These issues were carefully considered in respect to the design and content of a new questionnaire exploring children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* which would form the main research study (Section 5.3).

Of particular note was the use of language and expression by children to the question on the *Festival* questionnaire about their ideas of *death* and *life after death* which was distinct evidence that they are willing and able to convey their opinions on these concepts (Section 5.2.11). This was important in the light of the extent and influence of the death taboo and aspects of some earlier research (Section 2.10; Chapters 4; 7).

There were other aspects of the *Festival* questionnaire which needed careful evaluation prior to the design and content of a new questionnaire. In assessing the *Festival* questionnaire, I identified, considered and assessed the following possible limitations in discussion with my supervisors.

1. All the questions were open-ended in design: Are there advantages in having a mixture of open and closed questions?
2. A statement introducing the focus of the topic of the question preceded each question: A help or a hindrance and could the children's responses be biased to some degree?
3. More than one question was asked within three of the questions: A design weakness, potentially confusing and making analysis difficult?
4. Standard introductory information was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire: Was this read, was it too long and would it encourage the children?

5. One copy only of the questionnaire was mailed to all primary and secondary schools in the UK. Consequently, each school was expected to photocopy the questionnaire to enable all pupils to participate: Is this a reasonable expectation and how may it affect the response rate?
6. The same questionnaire was produced for all children of primary school age range from 7 to 11 years: Was this appropriate?
7. The language of the questionnaire: Were any language barriers created?
8. The topics explored by the questionnaire: How may the responses have been affected where the topic had previously been explored through their Religious Education programme and was this of any importance?
9. Verbal information and instruction given to children prior to completion of the questionnaire: What was the content and consistency?
10. The incentive of a prize draw for a book or music CD for the schools to return the completed questionnaires: Is this appropriate?
11. The time allocated for the children to complete the questionnaire. How flexible was the time allocation allowed? Is this an issue?
12. The scope of procedural possibilities in the data collection: How standardized was the data collection? Were some children given prior preparation time either through class or group discussion or were some children given the questionnaire as homework?

In conclusion: To what extent could the *Festival* questionnaire be adapted to address the research questions of the main research study and/or what alternative research strategy would be necessary in considering the points listed? These limitations are addressed in Section 5.3.3.8.

Of note: Before implementing any changes, it was decided that it may be possible to make a fairer judgement of these issues from distributing the *Festival* questionnaire to some children as part of Pilot Study No.1 of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* (Section 5.3.3; Figure 1.1; Appendix 8).

5.3 DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH CHILDREN'S CONCEPTS STUDY

5.3.1 Introduction

The second and major part of the chapter focuses on the *death and life after death, children's concepts study* and includes the main research study questionnaire (Appendix 8).

There are three stages to this research:

- Pilot Study No.1: comparing the *Festival* questionnaire with a modified design of the questionnaire
- Pilot Study No.2: conducting semi-structured interviews
- Main research study: distributing the new finalized questionnaire

All three stages of this study targeted children in two age groups — 7-8 year olds in Year 3 and 10-11 year olds in Year 6.

5.3.2 Aims

5.3.2.1 Overall aim

- To identify and analyse what are primary school age children's concepts of *death and life after death*.

5.3.2.1.1 Subsidiary aims

It is from this basis that the methodology was developed and designed to investigate the subsidiary aims:

- To investigate whether primary school age children are willing and able to discuss the concepts of *death and life after death*.
- To investigate how primary school age children communicate and record the concepts of *death and life after death*.
- To investigate whether factors such as age, faith, gender and location influence the concepts of *death and life after death*.

5.3.3 Pilot Study No.1

Pilot Study No.1 involved trialing the *Festival* questionnaire with children in two age groups in a primary school in Birmingham (Section 5.2). The younger children were 7-8 years of age (Year 3) and the older ones were 10-11 years of age (Year 6).

It was necessary to apply for approval to distribute the primary school age version of the questionnaire by the PCfRE and this was granted.

5.3.3.1 Aims

- To be able to observe the suitability of an open-ended questionnaire presented to primary school age children and assess its strengths and weaknesses.
- To investigate whether primary school age children are willing and able to discuss the concepts of *death* and *life after death* as a consequence of my distributing the *Festival* questionnaire.
- To investigate how primary school age children communicate and record the concepts of *death* and *life after death* as a consequence of my distributing the *Festival* questionnaire.

Any information gleaned from the Pilot Study would be analysed and considered for the next stages of the research project exploring children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Section 5.3.4; 5.3.5)

5.3.3.2 Questionnaire design, content and validity

For the design and content of both the *Festival* questionnaire and modified version to be creditable they must have reliability and validity (Section 5.2.4). The association of these components is discussed as follows:

As previously explained, there were ten questions on the primary school age version of the *Festival* questionnaire (Section 5.2.4; Appendix 4; 5). All questions were of an open-ended design. In the first phase of the Pilot Study, the *Festival* questionnaire was distributed to Year 6 children in a primary school in Birmingham.

The second phase was to distribute a modified version of the *Festival* questionnaire to children in Years 3 and 6 which I redesigned in the following ways (Appendix 6):

- The printed instruction to the questionnaire was rephrased and shortened
- The question order was changed
- The demographic questions were rephrased
- Some of the formatting style was amended

The decision to shorten and rephrase the opening instruction on the questionnaire was to minimize the amount the children would need to read before embarking on answering the questions while simultaneously encouraging them to respond as well as they felt able.

The questions which explored similar and connecting themes were grouped together at the beginning of the questionnaire in sequence, for example, the questions which focused on the concepts of God (Appendix 6). The question enquiring about children's views about *death* and *life after death* followed on and then came the questions which explored how religions give people guidelines for living.

The thinking behind re-ordering the sequence of questions on the *Festival* questionnaire reflected previous research showing that there is a tendency for children and adults alike, to spend more time and effort on the first few questions compared with later ones in a questionnaire (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, Mertens, 1998, Oppenheim, 1992, Thomson, 1975). When a respondent gets to the later questions, a declining interest and/or lack of concentration may set in, especially if all the questions are open-ended in design.

The decision to change the order and wording of the personal information requested was that based on previous experience. Primary school children expect to write their name before giving other details about themselves. It was thought that it would be easier and quicker for the children, particularly probably those who were less able, to list the requested information and to sequence them with grouping the 'yours' first. I planned to tell the children verbally that giving these details was their choice, rather than stating it on the questionnaire and it would facilitate the questionnaire distribution.

5.3.3.3 Subject sample

One large co-education primary school in a multi-faith, multi-cultural area in an inner-city district of Birmingham was selected. The *Festival* questionnaire was presented to 13 Year 6 children. The modified *Festival* questionnaire was presented to 12 children in Year 3 and 40 children in Year 6. Thus the total pilot sample size at this school was 65 children. Further details of the sample are provided in the results section (Section 5.3.3.7).

5.3.3.4 Data collection process

While the *Festival* questionnaire was distributed to 13 children in a Year 6 class, fifteen children in that class were presented with the modified *Festival* questionnaire (Section 5.3.3.2; Appendix 5; 6). These two questionnaires were distributed randomly. As a consequence of the aims for the Pilot Study and the overall aims for the research project, it was decided to give only the modified *Festival* questionnaire to the other Year 6 class of 25 children and to the 12 Year 3 children who participated in the Study (Table 5.1).

Introducing the questionnaire to the children provided the opportunity to briefly discuss the purpose of the research. It was emphasized that they were being given the opportunity to share their thoughts and beliefs on some of the common topics probably covered in their Religious Education lessons, while exploring some key concepts through their responding to the series of questions. All the children were encouraged to answer every question honestly and thoughtfully as they perceived it, while stressing that there was no right or wrong response as such.

To further the reliability of response, before answering the questions the children were asked to volunteer to read out the questions so that everyone was enabled to be familiar with the wording of the questions. It also provided the opportunity for the children to begin to reflect on what they were being asked to share and to resolve any queries.

The children in Year 3 were issued the questionnaire in small groups. In consultation with the Year 3 class teacher, this seemed and was found to be a more meaningful, appropriate and satisfactory way of working with 7-8 year old children as they would most probably be able to concentrate better and for longer periods of time

compared with their being in a whole class setting. It would be also easier for them to clarify any queries and to encourage each one of them to attempt to respond to the questions to the best of their ability, but without influence or collusion. Two groups of children in Year 3 were given the modified order version of the questionnaire.

5.3.3.5 Validation process

A large primary school was selected in a multi-faith, multi-cultural, inner-city part of Birmingham for its wide mix of children from the major faith communities which reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the UK population (Chapter 2). In addition, this school was selected because of its ethos of openness and willingness to explore a wide range of issues with children, and its welcoming attitude to visitors to work with the children and staff. The school had this reputation with fellow education professionals and it was recorded in its Ofsted Report (Dolley, 1997). A large primary school would be preferable for the sample size for the Pilot Study.

Modified *Festival* questionnaire — consequential to the evaluation of the original *Festival* questionnaire, the modified version as outlined in Section 5.3.3.2 was planned to pilot alongside the original version. This would enable the trialing of some new ideas and planned techniques for questioning children on concepts which are part of Religious Education.

There was to be no time limit for the children to complete the questionnaire. This would help in assessing how long it takes children to respond to a series of open-ended, thought-provoking questions.

For consistent procedure, I would distribute all the questionnaires to the children and introduce the purpose of the research.

5.3.3.6 Analysis

The collation of data, analysis and evaluation of Pilot Study No.1 contributed to the plan and formulation of Pilot Study No.2 and in particular, of the main research study questionnaire (Section 5.3.4; 5.3.5; Figure 1.1; Appendix 8).

5.3.3.7 Findings

A total of 65 responses to the *Festival* questionnaire was collected for analysis during April 2000 from a school in Birmingham — 53 from Year 6 and 12 from Year 3 children.

As shown in Table 5.1, of the 28 children in Year 6 Class 1, 13 children were given the *Festival* questionnaire and 15 the modified version. In the parallel Year 6 class all 25 children were given the modified questionnaire.

The Year 3 children were given the questionnaire in small groups whereas the Year 6 children were in a whole class setting. There were eight children in the first group from Year 3. Their class teacher informed me that these children were all sufficiently confident and competent at expressing themselves on paper. Their responses confirmed this. In the second group there were four children whom their class teacher felt were slightly less able with their writing skills compared with those in the first group, but who would be equally willing to share their ideas. Their attitude and responses to the questionnaire demonstrated this.

Table 5.1 Number of respondents to the *Festival* questionnaire from Years 3 and 6 in a Birmingham school

Gender	Modified <i>Festival</i> questionnaire	<i>Festival</i> questionnaire	Modified <i>Festival</i> questionnaire	Modified <i>Festival</i> questionnaire
	Year 3 Age 7-8	Year 6 Age 10-11 Class 1	Year 6 Age 10-11 Class 1	Year 6 Age 10-11 Class 2
Boy	8	5	10	15
Girl	4	8	5	10
Total Respondents	12	13	15	25

5.3.3.8 Discussion

The children readily engaged with the range of issues the questionnaire raised and were positive in their responses. They seemed to enjoy having the chance to express their views and beliefs on the different aspects of Religious Education which appeared throughout the questionnaire. This helped to confirm that children are willing and able to express their ideas on concepts which are closely associated with Religious Education and within the format of a questionnaire.

All the Year 3 children seemed to enjoy the experience of filling in a questionnaire and were very eager to express their thoughts in response to the issues raised. They also liked the idea that they were responding to exactly the same questions as the older Year 6 children. The younger children were also keen to have the opportunity to share verbally their ideas both with their peers and an adult. It was impressive to observe the way in which the Year 3 children stayed on task and coped with the wording of the questions with the minimum of explanation or help, especially as all nine questions were open-ended.

The process showed that both the younger and older children were capable of responding to the questionnaire with very little adult assistance. The process of Pilot Study No.1 helped to provide evidence and confirmation that it is possible and appropriate to design the same questionnaire which is suitable for two age groups of children in their primary schooling.

The way children in both the younger and older age groups responded to the question asking for their views on *death* and *life after death*, sufficiently confirmed the plan to focus on these concepts in more detail, and to explore them in more depth than in the *Festival* questionnaire. This would be trialed initially through a series of semi-structured interviews which would form Pilot Study No.2 and then, consequently, by means of the design and content of a new questionnaire — for the main research study (Section 5.3.4; 5.3.5; Appendix 8).

There were several issues which needed to be considered in designing the content of a new questionnaire derived from evaluating the *Festival* questionnaire (Section 5.2.12):

1. All the questions were open-ended in design: Are there advantages in having a mixture of open and closed questions?

Closed responses are known to be easier and quicker to analyse because categories of response, often requiring for example, boxes to be ticked by the respondents, are set up in the design and content stage of the questionnaire (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, Creswell, 1994, Edwards & Talbot, 1994, Luck *et al.*, 2000, Oppenheim, 1992). They are also often used when resources are limited because they require less subject knowledge and expertise compared with what is required in the deciphering of responses to open-ended questions. In the *Festival* study they may have helped avoid unnecessary time being spent by researchers trying to decipher any illegible handwriting. In this research, the possibility of illegible handwriting was attempted to be minimized by standardizing the instructions during the introduction. The children were encouraged to write as clearly as possible and it was reinforced that their responses would be read in their absence, therefore, it would be a shame to put all their efforts in jeopardy through illegibility. While the children were writing responses, the opportunity was taken to interact with them by asking for clarification of some words — some text was added in pencil. Experience confirmed that children's responses to a series of open-ended questions would be more legible on lined paper.

2. A statement introducing the focus of the topic of the question preceded each question: A help or a hindrance and could the children's responses be biased to some degree?

Each statement was there to act as a stimulus for the children in their exploration of the particular issue which each question consequently raised. From the assessment of Pilot Study No.1, there was a purpose for each question having a preceding statement, especially for a questionnaire which explored a variety of Religious Education topics. Through the evaluation of analysing the *Festival* questionnaire, preceding statements were found to have an influence on the way the children respond to the subsequent questions.

3. More than one question was asked within three of the questions: A design weakness, potentially confusing and making analysis difficult?

There was great variation as to whether the children included any reference to both parts of the question in their response. Some children answered the parts separately; some incorporated both parts within their response; and others ignored one or other part. It seemed as though if both parts were necessary to the research then it should be clearly indicated where and in what format the respondent should reply. It may be necessary in order to lessen confusion to label the different parts of the question or to have them as separate questions.

4. Standard introductory information was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire: Was this read, was it too long and would it encourage the children?

This was indicative of a different methodological approach. It was evident that information provided for children explaining the nature and purpose of a questionnaire could be minimal when a questionnaire was distributed in person by the researcher. This would facilitate consistency, although some written instructions on a questionnaire of sufficient clarity are needed.

5. One copy only of the questionnaire was mailed to all primary and secondary schools in the UK. Consequently, each school was expected to photocopy the questionnaire to enable all pupils to participate: Is this a reasonable expectation and how may it affect the response rate?

From the Pilot Study, it became clear that directly distributing a questionnaire to children has various advantages. Some of these have been discussed elsewhere (Section 5.2.12). To maximize the response rate of questionnaires, the direct distribution of the questionnaire by the researcher would be more effective than a postal questionnaire. There would also be the reliable assurance of data collection at the point of questionnaire completion and the cost of mailing would be avoided. In contrast there would be considerable resource implications of the researcher's time and transport to the participating schools. Schools would also be spared photocopying and related expenses.

6. The same questionnaire was produced for all children of primary school age range from 7 to 11 years: Was this appropriate?

As a consequence of investigating previous research with children and from my analysis of the *Festival* questionnaire it was a reasonable assessment by the questionnaire design team to have used the same questionnaire for 7 to 11 year olds (Chapter 4; Section 5.2.4). The experience of distributing the *Festival* questionnaire provided evidence for this. This has been discussed in more detail earlier in this section.

Most of the questions raised earlier in the limitations list as 7 – 12 in Section 5.2.12 would be minimized through the researcher distributing the questionnaire in person or were deemed irrelevant to the nature of this research project.

In conclusion: To what extent could the *Festival* questionnaire be adapted to address the research questions of the main research study and/or what alternative research strategy would be necessary in considering the points listed?

Of note: As a consequence of distributing the *Festival* questionnaire and a modified version to children in two age groups in Pilot Study No.1, it was possible to better assess and implement the design and content of a new questionnaire. The evidence gathered of children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* from their responses to the questionnaire, was evaluated and used to formulate Pilot Study No.2 and in particular, the main research study questionnaire (Section 5.3.4; 5.3.5; Appendix 8).

5.3.4 Pilot Study No.2

Pilot Study No.2 was to conduct some semi-structured interviews with children in two age groups in a primary school in Birmingham. Children from the same two age groups as Pilot Study No.1 were used for the purpose of this Study. Hence, the younger children were 7-8 years of age (Year 3) and the older ones were 10-11 years of age (Year 6).

Interviewing could allow children the freedom to articulate what they thought and believed about various issues without the constraints of writing and the skills required to put their ideas on paper. Some children might recognize that being interviewed was less demanding when compared with expressing their opinions on paper. Responses to the

Festival primary school age questionnaire suggested that younger children might respond particularly well to being interviewed.

5.3.4.1 Aims

- To investigate whether interview techniques result in children being willing and able to discuss *death* and *life after death* concepts.
- To investigate whether interview techniques result in revealing how children consider and discuss the concepts of *death* and *life after death*.

The purpose of the interviews was to enable me to gather more insight into children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Any information gleaned from the Pilot Study would be analysed and considered for the next stage of the research project exploring children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* — the main research study questionnaire (Section 5.3.5; Appendix 8).

5.3.4.2 Interview design, content and validity

For the design and content of the interviews to be credible they must have reliability and validity (Section 5.2.4). The association of these components is discussed as follows:

It is evident from studying research method techniques that a stimulus is often used to initiate discussion during an interview and this approach was adopted here (Chapter 4).

I had previously used the book, 'When Dinosaurs Die' by the American authors Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown with children in a primary school, and was familiar with how positively they responded to it and found it helped their discussion on the concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Brown & Brown, 1996, Jepson, 1997).

As a consequence, 'When Dinosaurs Die' was used as an introduction for each interview with the children in both Year 3 and Year 6. Dinosaurs, which fascinate most children, are used anthropomorphically by the authors to explore some of the answers to questions which people frequently ask, and the feelings associated with *death* and *life after death*. The book is becoming more widely recognized in the UK and Marilyn Mason, Education Officer at the British Humanist Association, reviewed the book in the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* (Mason, 2000). She enlisted the help of some humanist families in the review process and commented:

Charming busy anthropomorphic pictures of dinosaurs illustrate topics and questions and a range of answers about death ... - excellent stimulus for exploration and discussion. It is also quite acute psychologically, acknowledging that disbelief, anger, fear, and sadness are common feelings when someone dies. 'Why dinosaurs?' was a typical comment from humanist parents, but apart from this, the book was generally liked as 'direct, realistic, healthily frank and fun', 'a wise book to have around' with 'the potential to be very useful.' (Mason, 2000)

After using the book as a stimulus for discussion each child was asked the same series of ultimate questions in order to explore their ideas on these concepts (Section 3.4). The questions would start by exploring the concept of 'being alive' before focusing on aspects of *death* and the possibility of *life after death*. The children would then be given the opportunity to reflect on whether they thought these issues should be discussed and from where they thought they acquired their own ideas. To conclude the interview, each child would be given the chance to say to which religion they considered they belonged as well as to add anything else which they thought was appropriate to share. Questions had been written on file cards to ensure consistency and act as a prompt, where necessary. After each child had given their first name and age, the questions to be asked were:

1. What does the word *alive* mean to you?
2. Why do you think someone *dies*?
3. What do you think *happens* when someone dies?
4. What does *dead* mean, do you think?
5. Do you think anything *happens* or *comes after* death? (If so), would you like to share your thoughts and beliefs, please?
6. Do you think we should *talk* about these things? Why is that?
7. Where would you say that you got your *ideas* from about *death* and the possibility of *life after death*?
8. Would you say that you *belong* to a *religion* or a *faith community*? (If so), which one, please?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share or add to what you have already said?

During the course of an interview, other questions would be asked in direct response to what a child said and for clarification of the point they were making. Each interview would conclude with the child being thanked for sharing what they had with me.

The plan was to conduct both small group and individual semi-structured interviews with the children in both Year 3 and Year 6. The individual interviews were designed to last about twenty minutes each and the small group interviews about thirty minutes each.

5.3.4.3 Subject sample

A series of these semi-structured interviews was conducted in a large, multi-faith, multi-cultural primary school in an inner-city district in Birmingham with the approval of the headteacher, Religious Education co-ordinator and appropriate class teachers. The children were from the same school which was used for Pilot Study No.1 (Section 5.3.3).

Parallel to Pilot Study No.1, boys and girls in two age groups were the subject for this stage of the research project (Section 5.3.3). The younger children were similarly in Year 3 selected by their class teacher and the older ones were in Year 6 who I randomly selected. Further details of the sample are provided in the results section (Section 5.3.4.7).

5.3.4.4 Data collection process

The Year 3 children were interviewed before those in Year 6. The Year 3 small group interview took place first, followed by the individual interviews. Then with the Year 6 children, the individual interviews were conducted prior to the small group interview. The Year 3 group interview acted as a pilot interview for the subsequent one-to-one interviews with those in Years 3 and 6.

The same preliminary procedures were standardized prior to the interviews as previously described in Section 5.3.3.4. The book 'When Dinosaurs Die' was then perused with the children as an introduction for each interview (Brown & Brown, 1996). This preliminary process preceding the interviews was off-tape.

At the beginning of each tape-recorded interview I asked the children to give their first name and age, and then immediately did a sound check, which helped in putting them at their ease. After each interview had concluded, I made a point of reiterating my thanks to them and also gave them the opportunity to share any more thoughts which the interview may have raised.

5.3.4.5 Validation process

The large primary school used for Pilot Study No.1 was used for this study (Section 5.3.3.5). As stated previously, the selected school is in a multi-faith, multi-cultural, inner-city part of Birmingham with a wide mix of children from the major faith communities which reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the UK population (Chapter 2). Both the children and staff were most welcoming, and were very helpful and co-operative during Pilot Study No.1. A large primary school was preferable for the sample size for the Pilot Study.

The interview plan provided the opportunity to address some new ideas and put planned techniques into practice, and consequently, assess how the children responded to them. This paralleled the process used by Clive and Jane Erricker in their research.

The process involves finding the right words or metaphors to express complex and deeply felt issues, and the verbalisation facilitates the children's self-understanding. (Erricker & Erricker, 2000: 150)

The research plan paralleled that in Pilot Study No.1 (Section 5.3.3). There was to be no time limit for the children to complete the interview which would help in assessing how long it takes children to respond to a series of open-ended, thought-provoking questions.

I would conduct all the semi-structured interviews with the Year 3 and Year 6 children which would help to ensure a consistent approach to the procedure. The same introduction explaining the purpose of the research and my opportunity to respond to any specific needs of a particular child contributed to the consistency.

All the children would be encouraged to respond honestly and thoughtfully to the series of ultimate questions they were being asked. It would be stressed that their personal thoughts and beliefs were important and of value. The small group interviews offered the opportunity to intercede, if appropriate, to find out if the other children agreed with a point which was made and whether or not the same belief was shared.

5.3.4.6 Analysis

The collection of taped interviews was listened to several times before each was transcribed verbatim. Then the transcripts were re-read several times. To assist with analysis, the computer programme 'NVivo 1.2' was used to help with evaluating some of the common themes and key words (Fraser, 2000, Richards, 2000).

Of note: Against the consolidated background of the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study*, the evaluated data from the interviews together with that from the *National Religious Education Festival study* and Pilot Study No.1 were used in finalizing the development and planning of the main research study questionnaire (Section 5.2; 5.3.3; 5.3.5; Appendix 8).

5.3.4.7 Findings

Fourteen of the fifteen interviews focused on the exploration of the concepts of *death and life after death* with children in the two age groups. The first interview which was the Year 3 group semi-structured interview, concentrated on the concepts of God.

There was a total of 13 individual interviews — four with the younger children, nine with the older children, and a group interview with each of the two age cohorts as detailed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Number of interview participants from Years 3 and 6 in a Birmingham school

Age	Boys in group	Girls in group	Group interviews	Boys individually interviewed	Girls individually interviewed	Individual interviews
Year 3 Age 7-8	3	1	1	3	1	4
Year 6 Age 10-11	0	5	1	3	6	9
Total Participants	3	6	2	6	7	13

As the same school in Birmingham was used for both Pilot Studies Nos.1 and 2 and these occurred during the same academic year, there were several children who, as a matter of record only, participated in both Studies as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Number of respondents to the *Festival* questionnaire and interviewees from Years 3 and 6 in a Birmingham school

<i>Festival</i> questionnaire & interviews	Year 3 Age 7-8	Year 6 Age 10-11	Total Respondents
Questionnaire & individual interview	3	5	8
Questionnaire & group interview	3	2	5
Questionnaire, individual & group interview	1	3	4
Questionnaire only	0	1	1

5.3.4.8 Discussion

All the children interviewed had previously responded to the *Festival* questionnaire. It would be hard to analyse what, if any, effect this had on the children's responses during their interview. The period between the *Festival* questionnaire and the interviews varied between the two age groups, including a school holiday. When interviewed, the children did remember the researcher having been previously in their school to distribute that questionnaire which may have contributed to their willingness to be interviewed. However, the researcher was sufficiently distant from the children for them to be honest with their thoughts and beliefs rather than possibly feeling that they should respond in a particular way. The children showed that they were comfortable at sharing some personal experiences, including those of bereavement.

All the children appeared to be both enthusiastic and excited at the thought of their discussion being taped for both the group and individual interviews. During the group interviews, it was notable to observe how the children shared their own ideas and then questioned each other on theirs as a result of the group dynamics. In this context Maykut succinctly has made the point:

The questions are open-ended and designed to reveal what is important to understand about the phenomenon under study.
(Maykut & Morehouse, 1994: 81)

The children in the two age groups were asked the same sequence of ultimate questions. Each child responded thoughtfully to the questions asked in their interview.

The younger children were able to respond to the same questions as the older ones. Children from both age groups frequently drew on their own lifetime experiences to share their insights, knowledge and understanding as well as their beliefs and practices.

The semi-structured interviews demonstrated that children of different age groups are willing and able of reflecting on the concepts of *death* and *life after death* from their own independent perspective. As a consequence of the children from the two age groups being willing and able to respond to the same questions, it was decided to use the same questionnaire in the main research study.

Use of the book, 'When Dinosaurs Die' as an introduction and stimulus for discussion of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* worked really well (Brown & Brown, 1996) (Section 5.3.4.2). The children were given the opportunity to browse the book, before being asked the series of tape recorded questions. The feedback received was that they found it a relaxing, assuring and a confidence boosting lead into focusing on the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. The book proved to be a helpful reference to begin each interview.

Some of the older children were familiar with the book as it had been used by their class teacher as part of their Religious Education curriculum when they were in Year 3 and it was available in the school library. The younger children were unfamiliar with the book.

Of note: The evidence gathered from the interviews provided valuable feedback in confirming the validity and potential reliability of the type, style and sequence of questions to ask children of both age groups for use in the design and content of the third and final stage of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* — the main research study questionnaire (Section 5.3.5; Appendix 8).

Of particular note: There are several clear and attractive reasons for using interviews as the instrument of methodology for data collection, including:

- Participants' meanings and interpretations can be probed and explored to elicit a clearer and fuller response
- The tone and use of language and expression is heard and can then be probed and explored further
- 100 per cent response rate maybe possible
- Participants usually enjoy being interviewed
- Authenticated data can be obtained for analysis
- If participants struggle with any literacy limitations, they maybe more confident and apt at responding to interviews compared with other research methods

Other advantages can be identified when comparison is made with a postal questionnaire such as avoiding the limitations of a covering letter and uncertainty of postal responses.

There are several disadvantages to interviewing which could apply, including:

- The difficulty of ensuring consistency of questioning
- Risk of interviewer bias
- Interviews are time-consuming and potentially costly
- Analysing the data can be seemingly endless and particularly difficult to categorize
- Arranging the interviews can be difficult
- Probing may go too far and become an intrusion for the participants
- Interview technique needs to be rehearsed
- The information maybe more easily recorded from a questionnaire

(Cohen *et al.*, 2000, Edwards & Talbot, 1994, Luck *et al.*, 2000, Mertens, 1998, Oppenheim, 1992).

However, it was felt that the potential advantages of interviewing as summarized could be equally achieved by the distribution of a written questionnaire to the two selected age groups of children by drawing on the experience and analysis of both Pilot Studies Nos.1 and 2. Furthermore it was sufficiently evident that the same questionnaire could be used for both age groups. The questionnaire plan and design would aim to encompass any major advantages associated with interviews and avoid the identified disadvantages (Section 5.3.5.2; 5.3.5.5). In addition, the experience gained and the analysis which took place as a result of conducting the *National Religious Education Festival study* would be taken into consideration for the design and content, and data collection of a questionnaire.

The planned sequence and timing of the *National Religious Education Festival study*, the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study*, and the *death and life after death children's concepts study* and their place and integration is summarized as a table in Appendix 8 and the flowchart Figure 1.1.

5.3.5 Main research study: Questionnaire

Following the process of:

- Distributing the *Festival* primary school age questionnaire and the modified version to children in Year 3 and Year 6 in Pilot Study No.1 (Section 5.3.3)
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with children in Year 3 and Year 6 in Pilot Study No.2 (Section 5.3.3.7)

it became clear that in order to develop the research exploring the concepts of *death* and *life after death*, it was necessary to plan and devise a new questionnaire for children in the two different age groups. This questionnaire would enable a more extensive examination at much greater depth of children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Appendix 7). By distributing the new questionnaire to children in several primary schools, involving several hundred children in each age group, sufficient data would be gathered for meaningful analysis and some valid statistical comparisons and discussion.

5.3.5.1 Aim

- The overall aim of the main research study was to examine, collate and evaluate what are primary school age children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*.

5.3.5.1.1 Subsidiary aims

- To investigate whether primary school age children are willing and able to discuss the concepts of *death* and *life after death* by distributing a new questionnaire.
- To investigate how primary school age children discuss and record the concepts of *death* and *life after death* by distributing a new questionnaire.
- To investigate whether factors such as age, faith, gender and location influence the concepts of *death* and *life after death*.

Distributing the new questionnaire to children in a range of primary schools and thereby gathering a large amount of data would enhance the aims of the main research study.

5.3.5.2 Questionnaire design, content and validity

For the design and content of the main research study questionnaire to be creditable they must have reliability and validity (Section 5.2.4). The association of these components is discussed as follows:

The design of a new questionnaire for children would need to be suitable for distribution in a number of different types of primary school. The primary schools would differ in terms of their foundation and to some degree this would be reflected in their ethos (Chapter 3). The various types of school selected would largely represent the primary schooling available in England.

I planned to design a questionnaire equally appropriate for two age groups of children. Children in the younger age group would be 7-8 years of age and in Year 3 of their primary schooling. Children in the older age group would be 10-11 years of age and in Year 6 of their primary schooling. These would be the same age groups as were used in Pilot Studies Nos.1 and 2 (Section 5.3.3; 5.3.3.7). The questionnaire design and content were planned to draw from the evaluation of working with children in the two age groups during the earlier stages of the research project helped by my professional teaching experience.

It seemed highly important to make the questionnaire as child-friendly as possible. Considerable attention was given to ensuring that every aspect of the questionnaire, from the wording and type of the questions to the layout and presentation of the questionnaire, reflected the needs and interests of children. An attractive and helpful questionnaire with a clear meaningful purpose, would contribute to encouraging and maximizing the response from children.

Careful consideration was given to encapsulate all sections of the questionnaire into boxes so that the children would be able to see that there was an obvious framework and limit to a particular question topic. Positive, clear and concise instructions were placed at the start of the questionnaire:

Figure 5.1 Opening instructions of the questionnaire (From Appendix 7)

Please try to answer these questions the best you can.
Some of the important words are written in **bold**.
Where there is more than one box, tick which is right for you.
It is important that you try to share what **you think and believe**.

Please write your name here, if you wish:

1. Are you a boy or a girl ?

A conscious effort was made to minimize, within reason, the amount the children would need to read before embarking on answering the questions while simultaneously encouraging them to respond as well as they felt able with their views (Figure 5.1). It was planned to verbally reinforce these instructions during the administration of the questionnaire and for me to distribute the questionnaire.

Having the space for the children to write their name, if they wished to do so, was at the beginning of the questionnaire because they invariably have been taught to do this on their class work and would normally expect that that was required of them (Figure 5.1).

The font used throughout the questionnaire was 'Comic Sans MS' as it is a style which prints letters in the same format as those which are handwritten (Figure 5.1). This would be particularly helpful for children who are less able or confident with reading, especially with recognizing the letter 'a' in many other fonts. Lines were provided for the children on which to write and aid their responses. Of equal importance, it was also helpful to facilitate the subsequent reading and deciphering of their ideas.

In addition to the boxes which created a series of sections throughout the questionnaire, each item and page was numbered. There was a total of five A4 pages (Appendix 7). To distinguish between the two age groups, the Year 3 questionnaire for the younger children was printed on pale orange paper while that for the older Year 6 children was printed on pale green paper.

Exactly the same questions and tasks were given to both the age groups. It was important to limit the number of questions, to make them unambiguous and simple enough to be understood by both the children in the younger and older age group of Year 3 and Year 6 respectively.

The range and sequence of questions were of the type children ask when exploring a variety of issues. The tasks with which the children were presented were designed to be like the ones they would often experience in their primary schooling. Hence the children were presented with:

- Annotated drawings showing the life stages or life cycle of the butterfly
- Questions which were open-ended in design
- Questions which required the children to tick boxes corresponding to their responses
- The opportunity for the children to draw in response to the last question
- Concluding on a positive note with 'My happy memory'
- Being thanked for sharing their thoughts

The questionnaire was divided into several sections. The design being that each section would naturally follow on from the previous one. The questionnaire begins with exploring, 'Stages of Life' illustrated by the stages of life of the butterfly and human beings (Althea, 1980, Carle, 1974).

The questions then explore children's thinking about the 'End of Life' with the focus being on *death* and *life after death*. Children were encouraged to reflect on their own personal experiences with either human beings or pets.

The next section explores, 'Saying Goodbye and Remembering' incorporating the extent, or otherwise, of children's understanding of the funeral rite of passage (Chapter 2). There are some questions inviting children to recall whether they have previously explored these issues and to demonstrate an awareness of what and who may have influenced their thinking. The children were given the opportunity to record who they find helpful to talk with on many of these issues and to grade how helpful they have been using the Likert scale (Likert, 1932).

Before completing the questionnaire the children are asked whether or not they belong to a faith community and if they do, to share something of what that belonging means, for example, by their attendance at the relevant place of worship. It was considered that the data from these questions could help to identify if the children's responses to the questions about *death* and *life after death* appeared to reflect in any way their faith communities' doctrines and practices.

Of particular note: The questionnaire ends with children being asked to write about or draw, first of all, a sad and then a happy memory. This was deliberately included in order to conclude on an upbeat, happy and positive note rather than be unduly sombre. It was also intended to help to allay some adult concerns about the possibility of children being distressed by the topic. It was also likely to prove to be most revealing and informative and proved to be so.

Some examples of ultimate questions, which were considered to be most pertinent to primary school age children, were developed to be incorporated into the questionnaire for this research project (Appendix 7; Chapters 3; 6; 7). Namely:

1. What does being alive mean to you? (Question 4)
2. Why do you think a person dies? (Question 6)
3. What does the word death mean to you? (Question 7)
4. What do you think happens when someone dies? (Question 8)
5. What feelings might people have when a pet or someone they love dies? (Question 9)
6. What do you think comes after death? (Question 10)
7. Do you think there is life after death? (Question 11)
8. If your answer is yes or maybe, write down what life after death means to you. (Question 12)
9. How might you say goodbye to a pet or a person who has dies? (Question 13)
10. How might you remember a pet or someone you have loved who has died? (Question 14)

Of particular note: The points raised concerning the possible advantages and disadvantages of interviewing were addressed. The questionnaire design, content and validity were to progress the identified advantages of interviewing while avoiding all pertinent disadvantages (Section 5.3.4.8).

5.3.5.3 Subject sample

It was planned to take the questionnaire into primary schools in two different geographical locations to reflect the different types of areas in England. This was also so that any key cultural differences between the areas might be taken into consideration, if possible, when analysing the children's responses. I chose a large city in the West Midlands and a smaller city and its region in the North-East of England for this research as they reflect both religious and cultural differences. Ultimately the sample of schools was suitably varied. The city of Birmingham in the West Midlands is multi-faith, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic whereas the city of Durham in the North-East is predominantly mono-faith, mono-cultural and mono-ethnic.

The aim was to distribute the questionnaire to boys and girls in the two age groups of 7-8 years of age (Year 3) and 10-11 years of age (Year 6). The aim was to achieve responses from at least 700 children, approximately equally distributed between the two locations and reflecting approximately equal numbers of boys and girls to obtain sufficient numbers in each group for statistical analysis. A representative range of State primary schools was selected — county, and voluntary aided and voluntary controlled faith schools (Chapter 3). Further details of the final sample are provided in the results section (Section 6.2).

5.3.5.4 Access and data collection process

Each of the chosen schools was approached by an initial telephone call to the headteacher to arrange a meeting to discuss the research project and find out whether it would be possible to work with the children in their school. Where agreeable, arrangements were then made to go in person to explain the research project face to face with the headteacher and relevant staff, in particular the Religious Education co-ordinator and the teachers of the classes to be involved.

All headteachers who approved the research plan and distribution of the main research study questionnaire were satisfied with any relevant ethical issues.

Several schools, in both Birmingham and Durham, declined to co-operate, even after visiting and discussing the issues, for reasons discussed in Chapter 7.

During the introduction to the children, there was a brief discussion about the purpose of research and that the focus of this particular investigation was through a questionnaire exploring some aspects of Religious Education. It was emphasized that they were being given the opportunity to share their thoughts and beliefs on some of the common topics probably covered in their Religious Education lessons while exploring some key concepts through their responding to the series of questions. All the children were encouraged to answer every question honestly and thoughtfully, as they perceived it while stressing that there was no right or wrong response as such.

5.3.5.5 Validation process

5.3.5.5.1 Piloting the questionnaire

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to, accepted and approved by Professor Mike Byram and Dr Elizabeth Ashton — my supervisors, and to all members of the academic staff at the School of Education, University of Durham for advice and feedback. Several helpful comments were received and consequent amendments were made at this stage to the questionnaire. My supervisors expressed a preference for the open-ended questions and an emphasis on the qualitative data which would provide greater insight into responses.

The questionnaire was piloted initially with two younger (7-8 year olds) and two older (10-11 year olds) children to aid with finalizing the text and to give some confirmatory indication as to how long it may take children to complete. Then a class teacher in Durham piloted the questionnaire collectively with her Year 6 class of 30 children and this produced some very helpful feedback for some final amendments.

5.3.5.5.2 Main research study distribution of the questionnaire

A combination of the different types of primary schools in the two different geographical areas would ensure social diversity among the children. The range of schools chosen was meant to ensure that the children would come from a wide range of both different social and religious backgrounds.

It was important to take the questionnaire into a range of State primary schools because there is considerable diversity of primary schooling available in England. Dearing stated that 25% of all primary schools in England are Church of England and have a Christian foundation (Dearing, 2001). The foundation and ethos of schools which can range from active to passive, may have a bearing on children's thinking and experiences during their primary school education. I decided that all the types of schools chosen should be State schools as they have to conform to the Government's regulations on the teaching of Religious Education. The schools in the sample reflect the range of primary school foundations found across the primary school sector in England. Therefore, there were faith schools represented through the Church of England, Roman Catholic and Jewish schools as well as county schools.

As stated previously, I planned to distribute all the questionnaires to the children and present the same introduction explaining the purpose of the research. I would also be in a position to respond in a consistent way to any specific needs of a particular group of children.

All the children would be encouraged to respond honestly and thoughtfully to the questions on the questionnaire with the emphasis being that their personal thoughts and beliefs were important and of value, rather than this being collaborative work where children may have to compromise.

5.3.5.6 *Data entry and analysis*

Subsequently, I read and annotated all 763 completed questionnaires several times in order to analyse and evaluate the emerging themes and recurring concepts. This assisted me in forming some distinct categories to aid analysis of each question in turn throughout the questionnaire. Several coding frames were created based on content analysis for each question. For the open-ended questions it was necessary to devise more sophisticated coding schemes (Edwards & Talbot, 1994, Luck *et al.*, 2000, Oppenheim, 1992). The categories were refined during the course of the analysis process and given a corresponding code. Part of the analysis process involved consultation with supervisors, Religious Education and theology specialists. Every question on each questionnaire was coded and the codes put in the 'SPSS 10.0' computer programme to assist with both quantitative and qualitative analysis where appropriate (Pallant, 2003; Chapter 6).

I typed and categorized every response which each child made to all the questions and placed them under the most appropriate corresponding category. There were 11,445 open-ended responses. This was done to assess the nuances and subtleties of each child's expression of response which would then be used for qualitative analysis.

5.3.5.7 Manipulation of data

Every response to each open-ended question was categorized in a way which was fair to what the question was asking, while revealing each child's willingness and ability to explore different aspects of the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Each response from every child was analysed for its own value and expression as well as emphasis, but was not viewed in isolation or seen as mutually exclusive to that child's other responses. The sequence of questions was designed to inter-relate. Some children's response to a particular question could have been categorized under more than one heading. A decision had to be made into which single category the response should go. Part of the decision-making process was seeing where the child was placing the focus and emphasis of their response. Another part of the categorization process was then to validate for consistency the approach with other children's responses in both the selected age groups and locations.

The 'other/do not know' category is a miscellaneous collection of those responses which do not relate to any of the key categories for that particular question. Some of these responses were somewhat random or show that the child did not quite follow what was being asked by a specific question. There was no child in any school who consistently misunderstood what was being asked of them throughout the questionnaire. The 'do not know' element is where children have expressed that they were 'unsure' how to respond to a particular question.

Very few children in either location failed to respond to a specific question and there were questions to which every child gave a response, some examples of which can be seen in the tables and figures in Chapter 6.

5.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

The research process and methodology employed for the three distinct studies forming the research project has been presented separately.

1. The National Religious Education Festival study
2. Religious Education syllabi *death* and *life after death* content comparison study (Chapter 3)
3. *Death* and *life after death* children's concepts study

In conclusion: The chosen structure of the research plan was to enable the experience gained from the *National Religious Education Festival study*, *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study*, and Pilot Studies Nos.1 and 2 to be optimized in the finalized format of the main research study questionnaire for the *death and life after death children's concepts study*. This is shown graphically in the flowchart Figure 1.1. Issues of reliability and validity were considered to be of paramount importance throughout.

The planned sequence and timing of the several research studies and their integration is summarized as a table in Appendix 8. The summary table also records the actual participant numbers (total 763) which follow those provisionally estimated in the design of the overall research plan.

CHAPTER SIX

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA AND ANALYSIS

6.1 OUTLINE OF CHAPTER

The results of the key part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* — the main research study questionnaire (Figure 1.1; Section 5.4; Appendix 8), are presented in this chapter. The analysis addresses the research questions (Section 1.3; 4.5).

Four null hypotheses are postulated and the patterns of association between each of four independent variables — age, faith, gender and location, and the dependent variables of children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* are examined (Section 6.2.5). Each hypothesis is tested through a quantitative test of association between the variables using a test of significance. Each results area is complemented by analysis of the qualitative data to explore trends and exceptions where appropriate. A range of examples of the children's responses are used to illustrate the findings and are evaluated.

6.2 MAIN RESEARCH STUDY: QUESTIONNAIRE

6.2.1 Introduction

The evaluation and experience of the *Festival study* and the *content comparison study*, and then Pilot Studies Nos.1 and 2 of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* contributed towards the design, content and quality of the main research study questionnaire (Figure 1.1; Section 3.3; 5.2; 5.3; 5.4; Appendix 8).

The questionnaire exploring children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* was distributed to the two target age groups in two selected locations in primary schools which represented the different types of State school available (Section 3.2). A total of eleven schools in the two locations of Birmingham and Durham finally participated in the research (Table 6.1; Table 6.2; Section 5.4.5; Appendix 7).

6.2.2 Primary schools in Birmingham

Five primary schools in Birmingham participated in the Study as detailed in Table 6.1 which includes the number of children in each of the two age groups who responded to the questionnaire and the type of school they attended. This was explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2; 3.3.4).

Table 6.1 Ages and sample sizes of participants from schools in Birmingham

School Type	Status	School	Year 3 Age 7-8	Year 6 Age 10-11	Total Participants
Primary	County	GB	62	72	134
Primary	County	RB	58	77	135
Church of England Primary	Voluntary Controlled	MB	36	37	73
Roman Catholic Primary	Voluntary Aided	CB	17	21	38
Jewish Primary ³⁰	Voluntary Aided	DB	0	26	26
Total Participants			173	233	406

³⁰ Rabbi with education responsibility only approved Year 6 participation (Section 7.2).

6.2.3 Primary schools in Durham

Children from six primary schools in Durham participated in the Study as detailed in Table 6.2 which includes the numbers in each of the two age groups who responded to the questionnaire and the type of school they attended. This was explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2; 3.3.4).

Table 6.2 Ages and sample sizes of participants from schools in Durham

School Type	Status	School	Year 3 Age 7-8	Year 6 Age 10-11	Total Participants
Primary	County	FD	22	41	63
Primary	County	GD	25	26	51
Church of England Junior	Voluntary Aided	BCD	59	56	115
Church of England Primary	Voluntary Aided	HD	24	19	43
Church of England Primary	Voluntary Controlled	SD	29	29	58
Roman Catholic Primary	Voluntary Aided	JD	12	15	27
Total Participants			171	186	357

6.2.4 Response rate

The total number of questionnaires distributed and returned was 763 — 406 from children in Birmingham and 357 from children in Durham. Due to the method of questionnaire distribution and data collection, there was no non-respondent of the whole questionnaire or drop-out from the Study (Section 5.4.5.4). A **100% response rate** was achieved.

6.2.5 Hypotheses

The hypotheses emerged from re-formulating the research questions which arose as a result of the literature survey and evaluation of the three Studies forming the research in the thesis (Section 1.3; 4.5; Chapters 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; Figure 1.1; Appendix 8).

The hypotheses postulated focus on the patterns of association between children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* and several independent variables. The association of four independent variables is examined — age, faith, gender and location.

- Age compares children in the two selected age groups: Year 3 — 7-8 year olds and Year 6 — 10-11 year olds.
- Faith compares the different faith communities, including 'no religion', to which the children indicated they belonged (Question 19, Appendix 7).
- Gender compares the boys with the girls.
- Location explores the comparison between the two selected locations of Birmingham and Durham.

These variables are chosen for these additional principal reasons. Age is selected because of research that has focused on the possibility of children's concepts being affected by their chronological age. This was discussed in Chapter 4. Faith is examined because of the integral relationship between concepts of *death* and *life after death* and the teaching and rituals of faith communities which was explained in Chapter 2. A person's faith can also influence their awareness of these concepts. It is common in social science research to explore the association of gender and various scenarios. It, therefore, seemed apposite to include gender in this research project, even though no specific discussion had been found in the literature about the possible effect of gender on the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Location is also studied as different environments and cultures may offer children diverse perspectives on facets of life. The nature of the two regions in the research project presented the children living there with differing and divergent opportunities to encounter people from different faith communities. Recognizing and exploring the major world religions is implicit in the Religious Education syllabi, including those of the two selected locations of Birmingham and Durham (Arkush, 2003, Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 1994, Joice, 2003, Lemer, 2003, Nichols, 2003, QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c, SCAA, 1994c, Shedden & Bellett, 2000, Standing Conference, 1995a, Standing Conference, 1995b; Section 3.3).

The dependent variables are those which are key when exploring the concepts of *death* and *life after death* and were identified through the categorization of the responses to the main research study questionnaire (Chapter 2; Section 5.4.5). Questions 7, 8, 10 and 11 are considered, therefore, to be the most relevant for analysis³¹. They are open-ended questions with the exception of Question 11 (Appendix 7). The same procedure of analysis is used to examine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. When testing each hypothesis, Question 11 is considered first as it is a closed question directly focusing on the possible existence of life after death.

Although the categories of response to Question 12 parallel those for Question 10, it is not included for analysis because it was a filter question (Oppenheim, 1992), and therefore, the respondents were only invited to respond if they answered Question 11 with 'yes' or 'maybe'. Hence the question was only answered by some children due to the way the questionnaire was designed.

The following null hypotheses are tested for evidence of the patterns of association between variables through a quantitative test of significance:

1. Age: Younger children are as able as older children to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*
2. Faith: Children with no faith-base are as able as those with a faith-base to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*
3. Gender: Boys are as able as girls to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*
4. Location: Children not living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region are as able as those who do to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*

The tests of significance are then complemented by examining patterns in the qualitative data to explore trends and exceptions where appropriate. A range of examples of the children's responses are used to illustrate the findings and are evaluated.

³¹ The process of selection for the most pertinent questions for analysis also came as a result of discussion and approval with supervisors.

The statistical significance is being tested because it is important to test that the results have not occurred by chance. The Pearson chi-square test — commonly referred to as simply the chi-square test, tests whether the distribution of observed and expected counts differ from what would be expected if there was a random distribution. It is used for testing the effects observed in a cross-tabulation (Chatfield, 1983, Luck *et al.*, 2000, Oppenheim, 1992). Thus, for each table of results the chi-square test is carried out and the associated p value³² is presented under each table.

The level of significance is at either a 99% confidence level or 95% confidence level. This is because:

When $p < 0.01$ there is 1% level of significance at 99% confidence level

When $p < 0.05$ there is 5% level of significance at 95% confidence level

Thus, the former p value means for example, that there is certainty to the 1% level of significance that the results are different from what would be expected if the counts were randomly distributed in a table.

For each set of results there is a table showing the observed and expected counts, and the observed count as a percentage within the independent variable. A bar chart showing the percentage of respondents to each category of response is also presented. In the tables and figures, the figures — both the observed and expected counts and the percentages are approximate to the nearest whole number.

In the analysis any ‘no response’ is not included because it is unknown how the respondent would have responded if they had answered the question. This is standard practice in social science analysis (Luck *et al.*, 2000). The ‘other’ and ‘do not know’ categories have been combined for statistical reasons. This is because the researcher needs to be cautious with low numbers especially when conducting statistical tests such as the Pearson chi-square test, as the results are viewed to be more reliable with cells containing an expected count of at least five (Chatfield, 1983, Luck *et al.*, 2000, Oppenheim, 1992, Pallant, 2003).

³² The probability value (p value) of a statistical test is the probability of getting a value of the test statistic as extreme as or more extreme than that observed by chance alone, if the null hypothesis H_0 , is true (Easton & McColl, 2005).

Of particular note: Where qualitative data are used to illustrate the patterns of association between variables, each child's response is verbatim and anonymous. Some key words and phrases in the children's responses appear in **bold** in order to highlight the relevance of that example. After each response there is a code which refers to the age group of the child — Year 3 or Year 6 [3 or 6], the school and location in Birmingham or Durham [xB or yD], and gender — boys [1 to 49]; girls [50 to 100] (Table 6.1; Table 6.2). The faith community to which the children indicated they belonged follows the code in square brackets [] (Appendix 7).

6.2.6 Age hypothesis: Younger children are as able as older children to conceptualize death and life after death

In order to test this null hypothesis quantitatively, the Pearson chi-square test was conducted for a test of association of age on each of the four most relevant and pertinent questions: applied first to the closed Question 11, followed by Questions 7, 8 and 10 (Appendix 7). Qualitative analysis is then used to illustrate the patterns of association in the data as appropriate. For each category of response there will be discussion of the trends followed by the exceptions. There was a total of 344 Year 3 — younger (7-8 year olds) and 419 Year 6 — older (10-11 year olds) respondents to the main research study questionnaire.

The result of the chi-square test for when the children were asked the question: ‘do you think there is life after death?’ (Question 11) gave a *p* value of 0.006. The *p* value indicates that there is a highly significant association at 99% confidence level between the variables but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the two selected age groups and how they conceptualize there being life after death. Therefore, there appears to be an association between age and perceptions of the existence of life after death.

It is noteworthy that the highest category of response was ‘yes’ with half (51%; 175/344) of all Year 3 children indicating that they thought there is life after death compared with a slight decline to 45% (190/419) of all Year 6. The observed count for Year 3 was higher by ten than the expected count. The observed count for Year 6 was lower by ten compared with the expected count (Table 6.3). A few more of the older — Year 6 children would, therefore, be expected to answer ‘yes’ if they followed the same pattern as Year 3.

Another key point is that about a quarter (26%; 111/419) of children in Year 6 ‘do not know’ if there is life after death which was more than those in Year 3 (16%; 56/344). The observed count for the Year 6s was somewhat higher by 19 than the expected count for this category of response and the observed count for the Year 3s was clearly less by 19 (Table 6.3). The results demonstrate that more children in the older age group were uncertain about the existence of life after death compared with those who were younger who seem to be less unsure.

In summary, the quantitative analysis revealed that the null hypothesis was not confirmed as there appeared to be an association between age and the conceptualized existence of life after death.

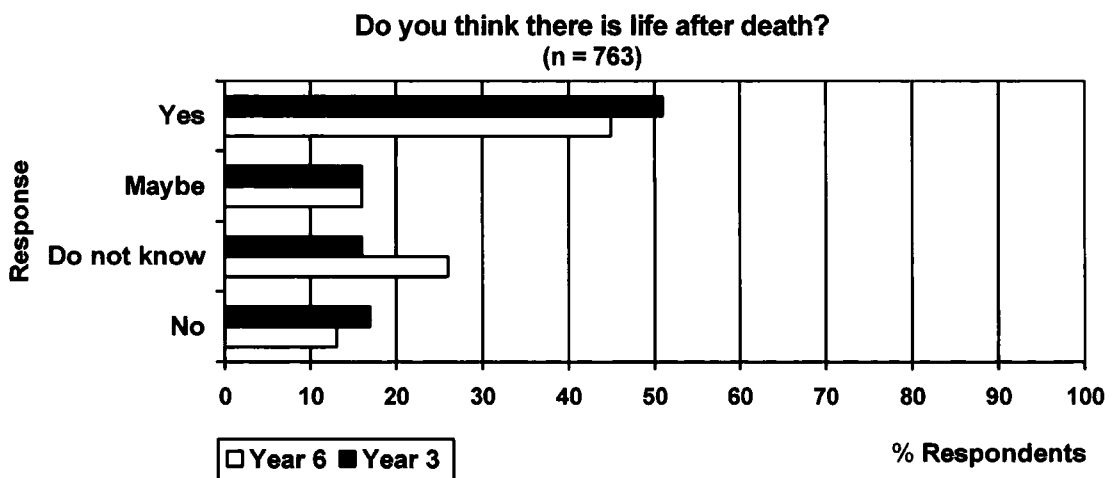
Table 6.3 Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 11

Do you think there is life after death? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)				
Response	Count	Age		Total Respondents
		Year 3 (7-8)	Year 6 (10-11)	
Yes	Observed count	175	190	365
	Expected count	165	200	365
	% Observed	51%	45%	48%
Maybe	Observed count	55	65	120
	Expected count	54	66	120
	% Observed	16%	16%	16%
Do not know	Observed count	56	111	167
	Expected count	75	92	167
	% Observed	16%	26%	22%
No	Observed count	58	53	111
	Expected count	50	61	111
	% Observed	17%	13%	15%
Total Respondents	Observed count	344	419	763
	Expected count	344	419	763
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 12.538; df = 3; *p* value = 0.006 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.1 Graph showing comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 11



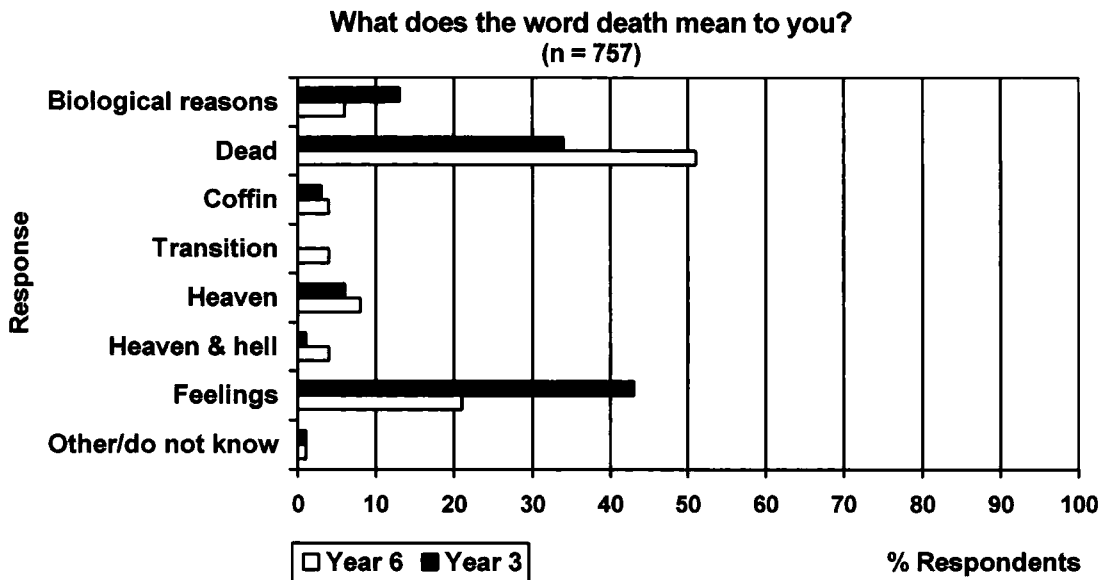
**Table 6.4 Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories —
Question 7**

What does the word death mean to you? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)				
Response	Count	Age		Total Respondents
		Year 3 (7-8)	Year 6 (10-11)	
Biological reasons	Observed count	44	25	69
	Expected count	31	38	69
	% Observed	13%	6%	9%
Dead	Observed count	115	213	328
	Expected count	149	179	328
	% Observed	34%	51%	43%
Coffin	Observed count	11	18	29
	Expected count	13	16	29
	% Observed	3%	4%	4%
Transition	Observed count	1	16	17
	Expected count	8	9	17
	% Observed	0%	4%	2%
Heaven	Observed count	19	34	53
	Expected count	24	29	53
	% Observed	6%	8%	7%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	4	17	21
	Expected count	10	12	21
	% Observed	1%	4%	3%
Feelings	Observed count	146	87	233
	Expected count	106	127	233
	% Observed	43%	21%	31%
Other/ Do not know	Observed count	3	4	7
	Expected count	3	4	7
	% Observed	1%	1%	1%
Total Respondents	Observed count	343	414	757
	Expected count	343	414	757
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 70.776; df = 7; p value = 0.000 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.2 Graph showing comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 7



The chi-square test result for when the children were asked the open question: ‘what does the word death mean to you?’ (Question 7) gave a *p* value of 0.000. The *p* value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the two age groups and how ‘death’ was defined. Therefore, there appears to be an association between age and concepts of the definition of death.

One of the prevalent categories of response from both age groups was ‘dead’. Half (51%; 213/414) of the Year 6 children reported this compared with a third (34%; 115/343) of Year 3s. There was a noticeably higher count by 34 for the observed count compared with the expected count for Year 6. For Year 3, the observed count was much less by 34 than the expected count (Table 6.4). For children in both age groups the word ‘dead’ and other closely associated words formed the chief response in defining ‘death’.

As can be seen in Table 6.4 and Figure 6.2, 'dead' was one of the predominant categories of response for both the younger and the older children. Examining the patterns in the qualitative data reveal, however, the common key themes on which both age groups focused when defining death as being like dying, the end of life and being gone forever. The responses are presented as pairs from the two selected age groups — firstly the Year 3s and then below the Year 6s. From both age groups of children there are almost identical formulations and use of the same or very similar expressions as highlighted below.

Someone is dead.

3RB55 [Year 3; Sikh]

A person is dead.

6GB71 [Year 6; Hindu]

Death means when **something has died.**

3RB56 [Year 3; Hindu/Sikh]

Death means to me when **somebody has died.**

6RB69 [Year 6; Sikh]

You stop living.

3RB27 [Year 3; Muslim]

It means you are **going to stop living.**

6RB16 [Year 6; Christian]

In the next example the phrases used are different — 'no more life' as opposed to 'never live again', but the formulation is essentially the same in describing the finality of death.

The word death means to me **no more life**, carrying on, we are gonna die.

3RB22 [Year 3; Sikh]

The word death means to me when you die and **never live again.**

6GB86 [Year 6; Muslim]

The following examples reveal Year 3 and Year 6 children using the same wording in response to the meaning of death.

When someone dies.

3RB18 [Year 3; Muslim], 3MB63 [Year 3; Muslim], 6RB9 [Year 6; Muslim]

The end of your life.

3RB57 [Year 3; Muslim], 6RB37 [Year 6; Christian]

Some children responded with what may be considered to be a more insightful and in some cases more abstract understanding of death. In the main, these responses were from the older children, but there were some from the younger ones, too, as the following examples demonstrate. In the first two cases the principal concept is from the point of view of the dying person 'leaving'. Here a sense of death as a transition or part

of an ontological process is offered. The children in the next two responses, in addition, incorporated the notion of the bereaved.

Time to **leave earth**.

3BCD53 [Year 3; Christian]

It means when you end your life, and **leave everything behind**.

6BCD52 [Year 6; no religion]

I think the word death means that someone has died and **you will not see them again**.

3SD52 [Year 3; Christian]

The word death means to me that someone has passed away and is **never going to come back**. When someone close to me dies I pretend they've gone on holiday and is **never to return**.

6RB63 [Year 6; Sikh]

The likelihood is that another key influence in the quantitative analysis has been the 'feelings' category where double the proportion of Year 3 children, 43% (146/343) expressed this definition compared with Year 6, 21% (87/414). The observed count was greatly increased by 40 than the calculated expected count for Year 3 and the observed count was distinctly less by 40 than the expected count for Year 6 (Table 6.4). These children connected some of the common emotions with the word 'death'.

In the responses, the data reveal children identified feelings associated with their own future death, the general sadness as well as the heartfelt emotion or even horror that death may engender. The stronger feelings are demonstrated in the second pair of responses. Some of the younger children were able to match the ability of the older ones in the way they conveyed the meaning of death.

It is a **sad** word. It sounds like someone has died this minute.

3RB70 [Year 3; Hindu]

Death is very **sad** and there are a lot of **sad** feelings. Death is not nice.

6GB67 [Year 6; Hindu]

The word death might give me **nightmares**.

3CB8 [Year 3; Christian]

The word death means a **fear** when I think of that word I just get **scared**.

6DB52 [Year 6; Muslim]

In summary, quantitative analysis demonstrated that the null hypothesis was not confirmed. The results determined that there appeared to be a statistical association between age and how the meaning of death was perceived by children. However, it is of equal worth to note that there were exceptions and that the qualitative data from the 757 responses illustrate that some younger children were able to conceptualize in the same way or even in a more complex way than the main cohort of the older children. This was demonstrated through the similar use of language and expression as the examples of children's responses describing the meaning of death epitomized.

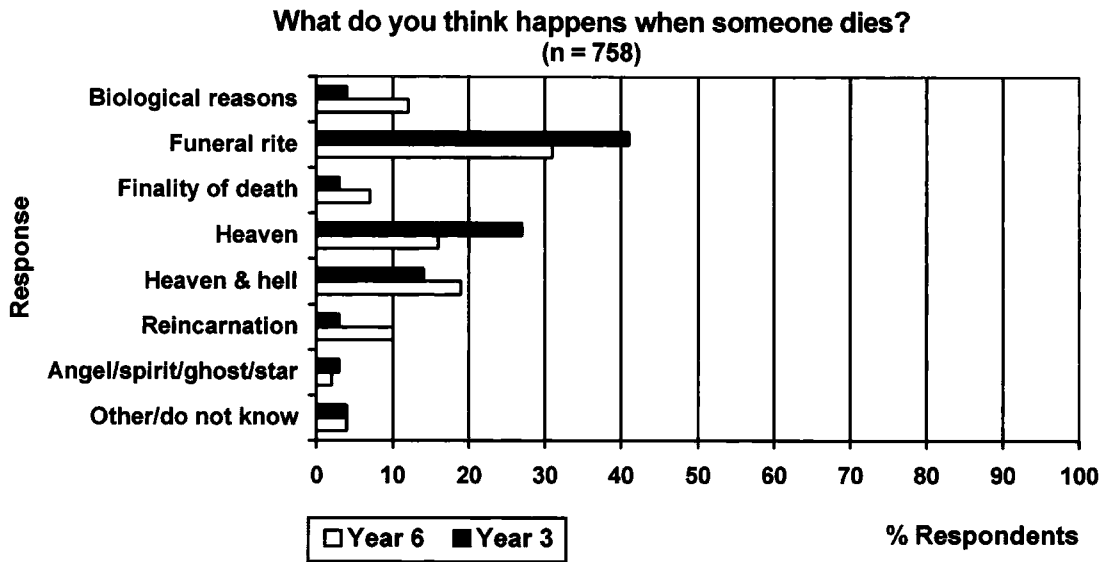
**Table 6.5 Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories —
Question 8**

What do you think happens when someone dies? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)				
Response	Count	Age		Total Respondents
		Year 3 (7-8)	Year 6 (10-11)	
Biological reasons	Observed count	15	50	65
	Expected count	29	36	65
	% Observed	4%	12%	9%
Funeral rite	Observed count	140	127	267
	Expected count	121	146	267
	% Observed	41%	31%	35%
Finality of death	Observed count	12	28	40
	Expected count	18	22	40
	% Observed	3%	7%	5%
Heaven	Observed count	91	66	157
	Expected count	71	86	157
	% Observed	27%	16%	21%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	49	78	127
	Expected count	58	70	127
	% Observed	14%	19%	17%
Reincarnation	Observed count	10	41	51
	Expected count	23	28	51
	% Observed	3%	10%	7%
Angel/spirit/ ghost/star	Observed count	11	10	21
	Expected count	10	12	21
	% Observed	3%	2%	3%
Other/ do not know	Observed count	15	15	30
	Expected count	14	16	30
	% Observed	4%	4%	4%
Total Respondents	Observed count	343	415	758
	Expected count	343	415	758
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 48.976; df = 7; *p* value = 0.000 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.3 Graph showing comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 8



In response to the open question: ‘what do you think happens when someone dies?’ (Question 8) the chi-square test result gave a p value of 0.000. The p value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the younger and older children and how they perceive what happens when someone dies. Therefore, there appears to be an association between age and concepts of what happens when someone dies.

The theme which predominated for both age groups in the children’s responses was ‘funeral rite’. Of the younger children, 41% (140/343) expressed aspects of a ‘funeral rite’ compared with nearly a third (31%; 127/415) of those who were older. The observed count was revealed to be 19 counts higher than the expected count for the younger age group which shows that these children associated aspects of a funeral rite as the key concept for what happens when someone dies. The observed count was 19 less than the expected value for the Year 6s (Table 6.5).

Exploring the patterns in the qualitative data from the 758 respondents show, however, that many children from Year 3 were as able as Year 6 to describe some of the emotional aspects of the 'funeral rite'. The paired examples — firstly the Year 3s and then below the Year 6s, illustrate the similar use of language and expression of the concepts as highlighted.

Their moms or dads make a **funeral** and their mom and dad **cry**.

3RB68 [Year 3; Hindu]

Their family gets **upset** and there's a **funeral**.

6MB64 [Year 6; Christian]

They have a **funeral** and they might be **heartbroken**.

3RB61 [Year 3; no religion]

When someone dies there is a **funeral** and their family is in **despair**.

6GB5 [Year 6; Muslim]

There were many children from both the selected age groups who reported other aspects of the 'funeral rite' such as burial and cremation.

They are **buried in a coffin** in the ground or you can **burn the body**.

3GB67 [Year 3; Sikh]

People's flesh rot, **buried, cremated**.

6GB28 [Year 6; Christian]

Aspects connected with philosophical ideas and expressions of faith were the next main categories of response, especially 'heaven', 'heaven and hell' and 'reincarnation'. Over a quarter (27%; 91/343) of younger children related 'heaven' to what they thought happens when someone dies which was a higher proportion compared with the older ones (16%; 66/415). Again, the observed count for the Year 3s was higher with an increase by 20 on the expected count. For Year 6, the observed count was 20 less than the expected count (Table 6.5).

What the children wrote under the category of response of 'heaven' also demonstrates the ability of some of those who were younger favourably with those who were older. The patterns in the data show that some of the responses were short and concise while others were more detailed. These children reported the deceased going to heaven.

People who are alive are sad, lonely, they bury them, scared. The **dead people go to heaven**.

3GB72 [Year 3; Buddhist]

Everyone go to heaven.

6MB4 [Year 6; Christian]

They **just lie there**. **Go to heaven**.

3HD54 [Year 3; Christian]

The blood stops pumping round your body therefore your heart stops then **when you are dead you go to heaven**.

6BCD64 [Year 6; Christian]

Some of both Years 3 and 6 described a person's spirit or soul leaving the body at the point of death and then going to heaven, including the idea of movement and transition.

They **loose their spirit** and it will **drift up in to heaven**.

3FD61 [Year 3; Christian]

Their **spirits (soul) flies out** of their **body**. They **rise to heaven**.

6GB56 [Year 6; Christian]

Some of the younger and older children focused on the notion that when someone dies their spirit or soul would end up resting or living in heaven.

They **rest their souls in heaven**.

3MB1 [Year 3; Christian]

Sleep (dream that never ends). **Spirit will live in heaven**.

6RB74 [Year 6; Christian]

There were those children from both age groups who indicated that the deceased would be with God in heaven. Some of them also included a descriptive comment about the state of existence or the nature of heaven.

Everybody might get sad and then they cry. The person who has died goes **up to God**.

3GB9 [Year 3; Muslim]

Goes **up to God and RIP**.

6GB24 [Year 6; Hindu]

They go to a **nice place** to see **God in heaven**.

3JD51 [Year 3; Christian]

They live **in heaven with God** in a **nice and peaceful life**.

6SD54 [Year 6; Christian]

In the survey data, the percentage of children focusing on 'heaven and hell' was 14% (49/343) of Year 3s compared with 19% (78/415) of Year 6s. The difference between the observed and expected counts was less, with nine fewer for the Year 3s and an increase of eight counts for the Year 6s (Table 6.5).

The patterns in the qualitative data under 'heaven and hell' reveal that some of the younger and older children wrote lucidly of an implied judgement after death. The outcome of this would result in the deceased — often identified as 'spirit' or 'soul',

ending up in heaven or hell. Some children made it clear that God was the judge and consequently would decide who was viewed to be 'good' and go to heaven, and who was 'bad' and go to hell. Similarly, heaven and hell were described spatially such as 'go up into heaven' and 'down into hell; 'go to God or the devil'. For one Year 6 child 'good' and 'bad' equated with one having been 'truthful' or 'lied' respectively. Age was no barrier to perceiving heaven as preferable to hell.

I think that their spirit will rise to heaven or horrible hell.

3HD51 [Year 3; Christian]

I think their good spirits go up into heaven and bad spirits down into hell.

6GD57 [Year 6; Christian]

They go to God or the devil. That depends if they are good or bad. God sorts that out.

3CB4 [Year 3; Christian]

They go to **heaven** if they have been **truthful** and to the **devil** if they have **lied**. **God decides** which you have been truthful or lied.

6FD52 [Year 6; no religion]

I think that when someone dies if they have been good they climb up a few steps to heaven. If they have been bad they have to go down steps to hell.

3SD63 [Year 3; Christian]

When someone dies, if they've led a **good life, they go to heaven**, if they've been **bad, they're thrown into hell**.

6FD62 [Year 6; Christian]

The quantitative data shows that 'reincarnation' was the response given by three times more of the older children (10%; 41/415) compared with the younger ones (3%; 10/343). The observed count was 13 more than the expected count for the Year 6 age group. The observed count was 13 less than the expected count for the Year 3 age group (Table 6.5).

The patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'reincarnation' reflect the general trends. Thus there were some notable differences in the detail and descriptions about the concept of reincarnation by the older children. It was only some children in Year 6 who used the theological term 'reincarnation' as the following examples illustrate.

I think people are reincarnated.

6SD61 [Year 6; Christian]

They get **reincarnated**.

6FD18 [Year 6; no religion]

Similarly, it was some Year 6 children who explained that the deceased could return as either an animal or human being as a result of the process of reincarnation. There were no such descriptions from the Year 3 children.

I think people die and **reincarnate** as **someone/something else**.
6GB67 [Year 6; Hindu]
When somebody dies I think they **become** a **different creature**.
6GB20 [Year 6; Sikh]
They **turn** into **animals** and when an animal dies it turns into a **human**.
6HD12 [no religion]

Furthermore, there were some Year 6s who focused on the deceased becoming a human being due to reincarnation, whereas the Year 3 children did not do this.

I think they **transform** into an egg to become a **person**.
6RB61 [Year 6; Sikh]
They **come alive** but as the opposite **male/female**.
6GB64 [Year 6; no religion]
They are **re-born** as **somebody else** but they can't remember their last life.
6GD15 [Christian]

Further investigation of the patterns in the data revealed that some older children had a sophisticated understanding of reincarnation involving the possible transformation from one state to another (Chapter 2). Their responses show that the deceased would go to heaven or hell or be reincarnated by returning to earth. This is known as 'vertical reincarnation' (Hick, 1976). There was no such evidence from the younger children.

They move on. They either go to **heaven or hell or live again**.
6GB77 [Year 6; Hindu]
They go to **heaven or hell or come back to life as another form of life**.
6MB66 [Year 6; Christian]

Similarly, it was only some of the older children who described the possibility of when someone dies of their staying in heaven or being reincarnated.

You go to **heaven** and become a nothing or you **start life again** a different person, different family and friends.
6SD3 [Year 6; Christian]
They live in **heaven or in somebody else's spirit**.
6MB61 [Year 6; Christian]

However, the patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'reincarnation' also reveal exceptions to the general trends as there are many similarities in the use of language and expression between the two selected age groups.

In summary, the quantitative analysis demonstrated that the null hypothesis was not confirmed. The results determined that there appeared to be a statistical association between age and concepts of what happens when someone dies. Exploration of the qualitative data from the 758 responses showed that the general trends were revealed in the category of response of 'reincarnation'. Thus the subtle differences between the age groups were revealed only through the nuances of some of the responses and the focus of some subject matter describing reincarnation. However, it is important to note that on investigating the key themes in the qualitative data it was seen that some younger children were as able as older children to conceptualize these concepts. The examples from both age groups, describing what the children thought happens when someone dies, illustrated this through the use of language and expression. Some younger children were able to perceive in the same way or even in a more complex way than the main cohort of the older children as previously found.

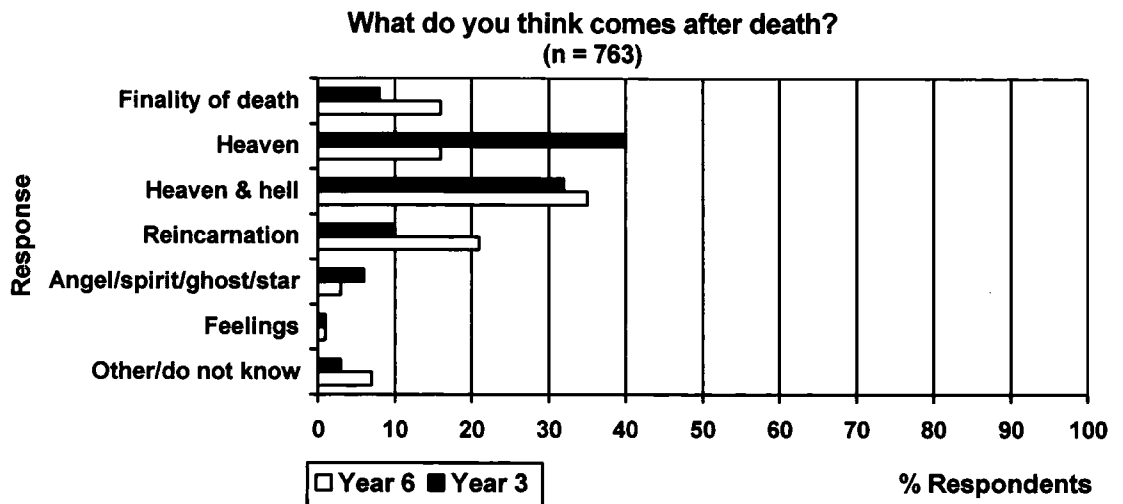
**Table 6.6 Comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories —
Question 10**

What do you think comes after death? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)				
Response	Count	Age		Total Respondents
		Year 3 (7-8)	Year 6 (10-11)	
Finality of death	Observed count	27	66	93
	Expected count	42	51	93
	% Observed	8%	16%	12%
Heaven	Observed count	138	68	206
	Expected count	93	113	206
	% Observed	40%	16%	27%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	109	147	256
	Expected count	115	141	256
	% Observed	32%	35%	34%
Reincarnation	Observed count	36	89	125
	Expected count	56	69	125
	% Observed	10%	21%	16%
Angel/spirit/ ghost/star	Observed count	20	14	34
	Expected count	15	19	34
	% Observed	6%	3%	4%
Feelings	Observed count	2	4	6
	Expected count	3	3	6
	% Observed	1%	1%	1%
Other/ do not know	Observed count	12	31	43
	Expected count	19	24	43
	% Observed	3%	7%	6%
Total Respondents	Observed count	344	419	763
	Expected count	344	419	763
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 71.695; df = 6; p value = 0.000 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.4 Graph showing comparison of Years 3 and 6 reporting different categories — Question 10



The chi-square test result gave a *p* value of 0.000 for the open question: ‘what do you think comes after death?’ (Question 10). The *p* value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between both age groups and how what may come after death is conceptualized. Therefore, there appears to be an association between age and concepts of what comes after death.

From analysis, the vast majority of children’s responses to what they thought comes after death were connected with philosophical ideas and awareness of a faith perspective; some of which were personal expressions of faith. The predominant category of response for both the younger and older children was ‘heaven and hell’. About a third of Year 3 children (32%; 109/344) and Year 6 children (35%; 147/419) reported this. The difference between the observed and expected counts was slight with an increased observed count by six for Year 6 over the expected count and a decreased observed count by six for Year 3 compared with the expected count (Table 6.6). This means that the results were close to what would be expected in a random distribution.

As can be seen in Table 6.6 and Figure 6.4, 'heaven and hell' was the predominant category of response from both age groups of children. Each of the themes within this category in the qualitative data expounds, however, the capability of some of the younger children in comparison with the older ones as their responses illustrate through the use of language and expression. The responses are presented as pairs from the selected age groups — firstly the Year 3s and then below the Year 6s. Many children from the two age groups expressed the notion that heaven and hell comes after death.

You **go to heaven or hell** where you come alive again.

3GB15 [Year 3; Christian]

Some people might even **go to hell or heaven**. There are two choices.

6RB27 [Year 6; Hindu]

There were some children who connected aspects of the funeral rite with the deceased's spirit being sent by God to either heaven or hell as the result of a judgement process.

First you have to put them in the **grave** and dig and put them underground. Then your **spirit** goes to God. If people have been bad and done dumb things they go to hell. Good people who help people and don't make people upset go to God in heaven. **God chooses** where people go.

3RB14 [Year 3; Muslim]

After death you get **buried**. After death life in heaven comes. This is for the people who have been good. The people who haven't been good go to hell. The **judge** of this is **God**.

6DB2 [Year 6; Muslim]

You are **buried**. **God will choose** if you go to hell or stay with him in heaven. Your **spirit** goes to God.

3CB5 [Year 3; Christian]

The **spirit** rises to Heaven which I think is a nice place, the body gets **buried or cremated** (person may go to hell if **God decides**).

6BCD26 [Year 6; Christian]

The function of God as judge is a key theme which is highlighted, and often in some detail, by children from both Years 3 and 6 alike.

They go to God in heaven and **stay with God**. Some people who have been naughty in the past go to hell. **God sorts** this out.

3RB16 [Year 3; Christian/Muslim]

I would think you would go to heaven or hell but I've never experienced that before. Good people will go to heaven, bad people will go to hell. **God watches** over people so see if they're good or bad so **he decides**.

6FD51 [Year 6; Christian]

Some people go to heaven. These are special people. Other people stay where they got buried. **God brings** the special people up in heaven.

3RB11 [Year 3; Christian]

More life in heaven. Not everyone will go there some people will go to hell. Good people will go to heaven and prisoners and bad people will go to hell. **God decides** who goes where.

6BCD70 [Year 6; Christian]

A common feature of the younger and older children is the destination of 'good' people spending life after death in heaven whereas those who are deemed 'bad' would end up in hell. These children appear to see a clear link between morality and judgement.

There is an afterlife in **heaven** for the **good** people. The **bad** people go to **hell**.

3FD5 [Year 3; Christian]

Afterlife in **heaven or hell depending on how good you are**.

6FD2 [Year 6; Christian]

Going to go up in **heaven** — **good** people who do nice things or the **other place** underground — **thieves, burglars, murderers**.

3FD58 [Year 3; no religion]

People go to **heaven** — **not everyone**. People who are **nasty** stay down **underground**.

6FD11 [Year 6; Christian]

Another key influence in the quantitative analysis has been the category of 'heaven'. More than twice the proportion of younger children, 40% (138/344) related aspects of 'heaven' in response to Question 10 compared with 16% (68/419) of older children. For both age groups the difference between the observed and the expected counts was much more noticeable. The observed count for the Year 3s was 45 higher than the expected value and the observed count was 45 less than the expected count (Table 6.6).

The patterns in the qualitative data from the 763 respondents demonstrate once again that many of the younger children match in ability the perceptions of the older children as they describe the concept of heaven. Some children focused on the state of the spirit or soul going to heaven while others centred on the nature of heaven. For some children of both age groups the nature of heaven explicitly means that everybody will go there after death whereas for others it means those who believe in God.

Your **soul goes up** to heaven.

3JD6 [Year 3; Christian]

Your **soul goes up** to heaven — everybody goes there and I think it's like paradise.

6BCD28 [Year 6; Christian]

They get buried and their **spirit** go to God in heaven. God decides this.

3CB52 [Year 3; Muslim]

I think death is the end of the body. Their **spirit** goes to heaven. God decides.

6RB54 [Year 6; Sikh]

Heaven. It is the nicest place in the world. **Everybody** will go to heaven.

3CB10 [Year 3; Christian]

Life (in heaven **for all**.)

6DB9 [Year 6; Muslim]

Everybody will go to heaven and come back to life in heaven who **believes in God**.

3HD50 [Year 3; Christian]

Going to heaven for the people who **believe in God**.

6SD2 [Year 6; Christian]

For some children in both age groups the nature of heaven is explicitly related to it being where Jesus is.

Go to heaven. **Jesus is in heaven**. We will all go to heaven but not at the same time.

3HD58 [Year 3; Christian]

Heaven people die and go there. **Jesus is in heaven** with loads of people.

6JD5 [Year 6; Christian]

For some children in both age groups the nature of heaven is expressed explicitly as, for example, a peaceful, fun and enjoyable place.

Go to heaven and **enjoy themselves**.

3BCD73 [Year 3; Christian]

Going to heaven where I think it is **peaceful and fun**.

6BCD21 [Year 6; Christian]

In the survey data, double the percentage of Year 6 children (21%; 89/419) focused on 'reincarnation' compared with the Year 3s (10%; 36/344). For both groups there was a marked difference between the observed and expected values. The observed count for the Year 6s was 20 higher than the expected count and the observed count for the Year 3s was 20 lower than the expected count (Table 6.6).

The patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'reincarnation' reflect the general trends. Thus there were some marked differences in the detail and descriptions about the concept of reincarnation between the younger and older children. It was some Year 3s who expressed reincarnation in terms of the deceased's spirit or soul being continually recycled and consequently reincarnated, whereas there was no such example from Year 6.

A new baby is born in the world. The person who dies stays in their coffin. God takes their spirits to heaven gives their **spirits** to someone else on earth in a **new baby**.

3RB5 [Year 3; Sikh]

New life, come back as a **baby**. Your **spirit** does this.

3BCD59 [Year 3; Christian]

Similarly, the data reveal some Year 6 children explained that reincarnation involves a process of the deceased's life being replaced through the birth of a new baby somewhere in the world.

A new baby is then produced somewhere else in the world.

6RB72 [Year 6; Hindu]

A new thing is born like a **baby**.

6SD9 [Year 6; no religion]

However, the patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'reincarnation' also reveal exceptions to the general trends as there is much similarity between the age groups in the awareness of the concept of reincarnation.

In summary, from the quantitative analysis the null hypothesis that younger children are as able as older children to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*, was not confirmed. There appeared to be an association between age and concepts of what comes after death. Exploration of the qualitative data from the 763 respondents showed that the general trends were revealed in the category of response of 'reincarnation'. Thus there were some trends which were demonstrated through the nuances of expression and focus in the detail describing reincarnation as the examples illustrated. However, it is also important to note that on exploring the key themes in the qualitative data it was seen that many younger children were as able as older children to conceptualize these concepts. The paired examples showed how some children from the two age groups may have the same use of language and expression; others similar use of language and expression; and others may differ in the wording and amount of detail, but the sentiment was parallel when demonstrating their awareness of a concept.

6.2.6.1 Hypothesis discussion and confirmatory conclusions

The quantitative analysis on each of the four questions through testing the statistical significance of the independent variable age, revealed an association between age and the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Therefore, the null hypothesis that younger children are as able as older children to conceptualize *death* and *life after death* was not confirmed.

Qualitative analysis was used to explore and illustrate the themes of the cross-tabulations by quoting examples of the children's responses. Investigation of the qualitative data illustrated the differences between age groups indicated by the quantitative data. Some of the responses to Questions 8 and 10 under the category of response of 'reincarnation' gave evidence of the subtle differences between the younger and older children in their use of language and expression when describing the nuances of reincarnation. It was some Year 6 children, for example, who described the possibility of the deceased going to heaven or hell or returning to earth as a result of reincarnation. There were no such descriptions from the Year 3s (Question 8). Similarly, it was some Year 3 children, for example, who expressed reincarnation in terms of the spirit or soul's continual cycle of reincarnation whereas no Year 6 child responded in that way (Question 10). However, the range of responses under the various other categories of response for the three open-ended questions, showed that

there were exceptions to the findings in the quantitative data as some of the younger children were comparable with older children in their language and expression ability.

When comparing the findings from this research with other relevant studies, it is worth noting the similarities and differences. As discussed previously in Chapter 4, researchers have tended to focus either on children's concepts of either death or life after death rather than both. This may have had impact on how the independent variable of age is understood to be associated with the concepts.

The quantitative findings of this research revealed an association between age and the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Some earlier research has reported similar supportive evidence. Sylvia Anthony reported a developmental sequence to children's understanding of death as a result of her work in the UK asking 128 children between 3 to 13 years of age to define the word 'dead' (Anthony, 1973). The psychologists Richard Lansdown and Gail Benjamin who conducted 83 interviews with 5 to 8 year olds, in England during the mid 1980s, also reported their findings in terms of conceptual development (Lansdown & Benjamin, 1985). More recently, Ng found in his study in schools in Birmingham, UK that there was no statistically significant difference between younger children in Year 6 (n=292) and older children in Year 8 (n=327) and the perceived levels of '*interest in learning about death and dying*' (Ng, 1998). However, this question was limited to assessing the levels of interest.

When defining 'death', the qualitative patterns in the data in the category of response of 'feelings' revealed expressions associated with sadness and fear (Question 7). The children showed awareness that these were heartfelt feelings which contemplating the concept of death and/or being bereaved may engender. Anthony recalled some young children's sorrow and fear at the thought of being separated from loved ones through death (Anthony, 1973). Ng found that nearly one sixth of the children in both Years 6 and 8 '*admitted feeling very frightened when someone talked about death and dying*' (Ng, 1998).

Research which has focused on children's concepts of life after death such as Frangoulis et al with 5 to 8 year olds and Nesbitt with 8 to 14 year olds appeared not to consider the possible association of age with the concepts being explored (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996, Nesbitt, 1993). Although Higgins made reference in her findings that 'by the end of Key Stage 2, children are capable of thinking abstractly and discussing the variety of beliefs relating to the afterlife' she did not directly investigate age and compare these results with those for another age group (Higgins, 1999). She conducted research with a class in Wales of 36, 9-10 year old children in Year 5.

The studies exploring the data collected from the 'National Religious Education Festival' of 1997 demonstrated that primary school age children were as able to discuss concepts of *death* and *life after death* as those of secondary school age (Blaylock, 2001a, Blaylock, 2001b, Blaylock *et al.*, 2001, Fageant & Blaylock, 1998, Jepson & Draycott, 2001; Appendix 4; 9; 10; Section 5.2). The children's use of language and expression was also comparable.

6.2.7 Faith hypothesis: Children with no faith-base are as able as those with a faith-base to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*

In order to evaluate the possible influence of faith-base on children's perceptions of *death* and *life after death*, the faith communities to which the children indicated they belonged were re-categorized and collapsed into three groups in a meaningful manner (Chatfield, 1983, Luck *et al.*, 2000, Oppenheim, 1992, Pallant, 2003; Question 19, Appendix 7) namely:

non-reincarnation; reincarnation; no religion

Those classed as the non-reincarnation group include: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Christian sects, Christian/Muslim, Christian/Jewish, Baha'i. Those classed as the reincarnation group include: Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu/Sikh, Wicca. The no religion group remained as a distinct group. This classification is based on the faith communities' doctrine on *death* and the hope of *life after death* (Chapter 2). This model of categorization also meant that full advantage could be made of including all of the different faith communities to which the children said that they belonged (Question 19, Appendix 7). There was a total of 549 in the non-reincarnation group, 131 in the reincarnation group and 78 in the no religion group of respondents to the main research study questionnaire.

For the purpose of testing the faith hypothesis quantitatively, the Pearson chi-square test was conducted for a test of association of faith-base on each of the four most relevant questions: 11, 7, 8 and 10 — presented in that sequence (Appendix 7). Qualitative analysis of the data is then presented to illustrate the associations where pertinent. For each category of response there will be discussion of the trends followed by the exceptions.

The result of the chi-square test for when the children were asked: 'do you think there is life after death?' (Question 11) gave a *p* value of 0.005. The *p* value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the faith-base groups and how the possibility of life after death is perceived. Therefore, there appears to be an association between faith-base and concepts of the existence of life after death.

The main category of response from the groups was 'yes'. Half of the non-reincarnation (276/549) and reincarnation groups (65/131) indicated that they think there is life after death compared with just over a quarter (28%; 22/78) of the no religion group. The observed count was 13 counts higher for the non-reincarnation group compared with the expected count. The no religion group had an observed count which was 15 counts less than the expected value. The observed count for the reincarnation group was marginally higher by two than what the expected count indicated (Table 6.7). It is noteworthy that such a high proportion of the no religion group thought that there is life after death as it would generally be assumed that they would not respond in this way to such a question. It, therefore, underlines how diverse responses can be and how difficult it is to anticipate how a group may respond to questions.

More than a third (36%; 28/78) of the no religion group responded with 'do not know' to this question compared with less than a quarter (20%) of both of the other two groups. The observed count was higher by 11 than the expected count for the no religion group and it was down by eight and three for the non-reincarnation and reincarnation groups respectively (Table 6.7).

In summary, the pattern of results for these groups reflected the doctrines of the faith communities with which the children were affiliated (Chapter 2). Although there are strong normative strands within faith communities, it is important to be aware that people do not necessarily subscribe to all aspects of a particular faith's doctrine. Indeed, neither is there uniformity in understanding and interpretation of a faith's teaching. Children living in a multi-faith society have contact with and influence each other to a lesser or greater extent as they are aware of different beliefs and practices among their peers (Chapters 1; 2). The quantitative analysis revealed that the null hypothesis was not confirmed as there appeared to be an association between faith-base and the possible existence of life after death.

Table 6.7 Comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 11

Do you think there is life after death? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)					
Response	Count	Faith			Total Respondents
		Non-reincarnation	Reincarnation	No religion	
Yes	Observed count	276	65	22	363
	Expected count	263	63	37	363
	% Observed	50%	50%	28%	48%
Maybe	Observed count	84	23	11	118
	Expected count	86	20	12	118
	% Observed	15%	18%	14%	16%
Do not know	Observed count	112	26	28	166
	Expected count	120	29	17	166
	% Observed	20%	20%	36%	22%
No	Observed count	77	17	17	111
	Expected count	80	19	11	111
	% Observed	14%	13%	22%	15%
Total Respondents	Observed count	549	131	78	758
	Expected count	549	131	78	758
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 18.420; df = 6; *p* value = 0.005 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.5 Graph showing comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 11

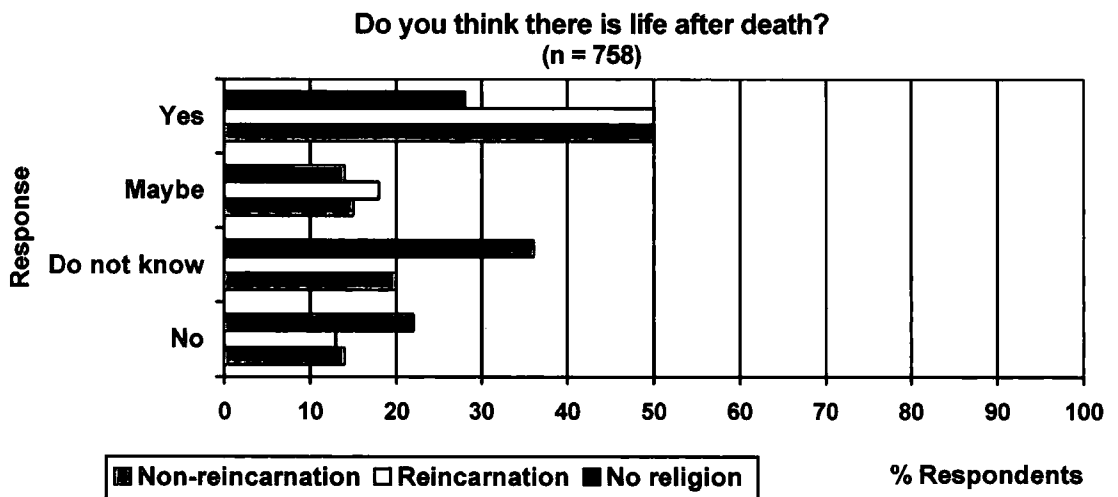


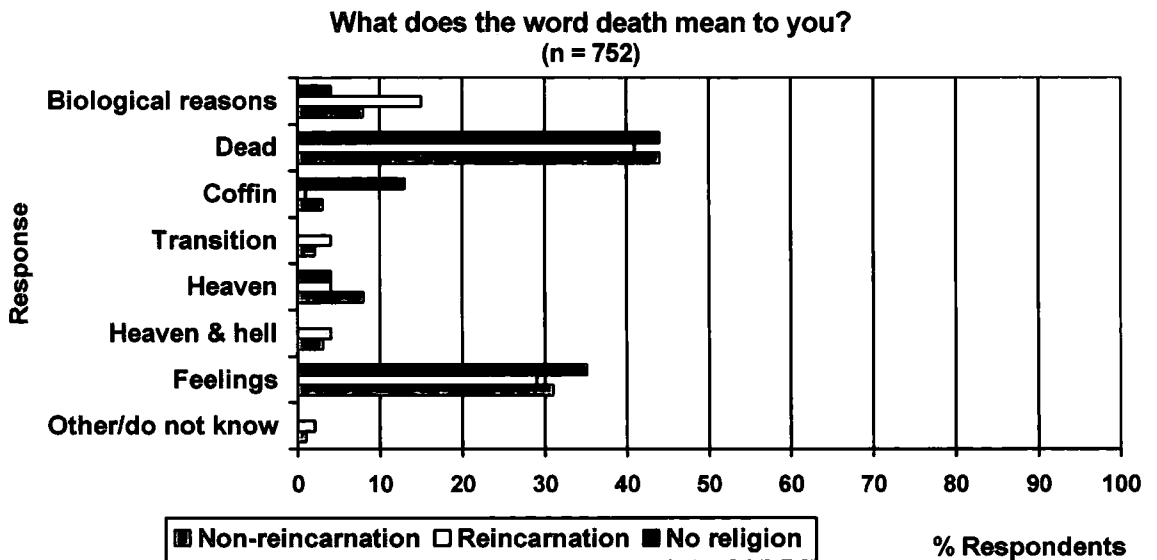
Table 6.8 Comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 7

What does the word death mean to you? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)					
Response	Count	Faith			Total Respondents
		Non-reincarnation	Reincarnation	No religion	
Biological reasons	Observed count	46	20	3	69
	Expected count	50	12	7	69
	% Observed	8%	15%	4%	9%
Dead	Observed count	238	54	34	326
	Expected count	236	57	33	326
	% Observed	44%	41%	44%	43%
Coffin	Observed count	18	1	10	29
	Expected count	21	5	3	29
	% Observed	3%	1%	13%	4%
Transition	Observed count	11	5	0	16
	Expected count	12	3	2	16
	% Observed	2%	4%	0%	2%
Heaven	Observed count	45	5	3	53
	Expected count	38	9	5	53
	% Observed	8%	4%	4%	7%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	16	5	0	21
	Expected count	15	4	2	21
	% Observed	3%	4%	0%	3%
Feelings	Observed count	166	38	27	231
	Expected count	167	40	24	231
	% Observed	31%	29%	35%	31%
Other/ Do not know	Observed count	4	3	0	7
	Expected count	5	1	1	7
	% Observed	1%	2%	0%	1%
Total Respondents	Observed count	544	131	77	752
	Expected count	544	131	77	752
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 42.869; df = 14; *p* value = 0.000 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.6 Graph showing comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 7



The chi-square test result for when the children were asked: 'what does the word death mean to you?' (Question 7) gave a p value of 0.000. The p value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the faith-base groups and how they define 'death'. Therefore, there appears to be an association between faith-base and concepts of the definition of death.

The overwhelming response from all three groups in defining death was to relate it to 'dead'. The proportions were similar with 44% of both the non-reincarnation (238/544) and no religion groups (34/77) reporting this category and 41% of the reincarnation group (54/131). There was very little difference between the observed and expected counts for each group (Table 6.8).

The patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'dead' reflect the general trends. Thus there were some notable differences in the detail and descriptions about the concept of what is perceived when defining death. A child, for example, who defined death in terms of it being purely an 'act of nature', and who indicated that she did not belong to a faith community, would probably correspond with other people's perceptions who are of no religion. In contrast, there were no parallel descriptions from children in the reincarnation and non-reincarnation groups.

An **act of nature**.
6DB4 [no religion]

In the same vein, the metaphor 'passed away' is a common description when defining death. Consequently, it is not surprising that there were children, namely from the reincarnation and non-reincarnation groups, who responded with this. This was not evident in the responses from children in the no religion group.

Death means to me when you have **passed away**.
6RB34 [reincarnation; Sikh]
Death means to me that when someone **passes away**.
6RB4 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Similarly, it was some children from the reincarnation and non-reincarnation groups who specifically referred to believing in God's role in the timing of a person's death. There were no such descriptions in the responses from the no religion group.

When **God** believes **it is time** for someone to die.
6MB12 [reincarnation; Sikh]
When **God** believes **it is time** for some to die.
6MB9 [non-reincarnation; Christian]
When **God** believes **it is time** for someone to die.
6MB2 [non-reincarnation; 7th Adventist]

Examining the patterns in the qualitative data also reveal, however, the common key themes on which all the groups focused when defining death. From some children in each group there were responses which demonstrated a similar use of language and expression, shown in bold in the examples. There was a basic definition of death which was given by children from each of the three groups which associated death with when people die.

It means **when people die**.
6SD1 [no religion]
When people die.
3GB3 [reincarnation; Hindu], 3GB56 [reincarnation; Hindu],
3GB80 [non-reincarnation; Muslim], 3MB18 [non-reincarnation; Christian],
6CB53 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

The following examples of the faith-base groups are characteristic of the children who described the concept of death as entailing the end of a person's life. Some children identified the end of life as the completion of their earthly life. The use of language and expression is similar in all groups.

Nothing left — the **end** of a life

6RB17 [no religion]

Death to me means the **end** of your life (expired like credit cards).

6GB77 [reincarnation; Hindu]

It means your life has **ended** so you need to enjoy it.

6BCD9 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Death is when someone's life **ends**.

6DB53 [non-reincarnation; Jewish]

A solemn thing when people **leave their earthly boundaries**.

6RB62 [no religion]

Death means that someone has **gone away forever** but stays in spirit and memory forever.

6MB57 [reincarnation; Sikh]

It means your life has **ended on earth**.

6RB60 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Some children also linked the timing of death with the purpose of someone's life being fulfilled and completed.

I think your **time** for changing people's lives is **over**.

3SD8 [no religion]

I think the word death means because people are old and they have **been through everything** in life they die.

6RB65 [reincarnation; Buddhist]

I think it means your life is over. You had a certain amount of time to do something good and your **time's up**.

6MB6 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

You have **fulfilled** your **purpose** in life so you die.

6BCD13 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

It means you die, you **weren't supposed** to live **any more**.

6DB60 [non-reincarnation; Jewish]

'Feelings' was the other predominant influence from each group in the quantitative analysis. The ratios were comparable with nearly a third from the groups giving 'feelings' as their category of response — 31% (166/544) non-reincarnation, 29% (38/131) reincarnation, 35% (27/77) no religion. For each group, the difference between the observed and the expected counts was marginal (Table 6.8).

Investigating the patterns in the qualitative data of the 752 responses show a more complex picture. Although some children from each group focused on the mixed and heartfelt feelings surrounding a person's death, further analysis reveals that the responses tend to reflect the children's specific faith-base as highlighted in the examples (Chapter 2). Sadness and happiness are perceived to be relational, and for those who belong to a faith community in their responses there is the added dimension of reference to the deceased being 'in God's hands' and 'heaven'.

Sadness, sometimes happiness.

6FD8 [no religion]

Death means a **sad** time for people but **happy** too because their loved ones are in **God's hands**.

6RB85 [reincarnation; Hindu/Sikh]

It means **sadness and happiness** mixed together, because sadness — they're not there now, happiness — they'll go to **heaven**.

6RB68 [reincarnation; Sikh]

Sadness, happiness because of going to **heaven**.

6RB24 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

These responses from the non-reincarnation group exemplify that death is associated with a faith journey. It is where and how they place value on the relation between life and death. There was no such example from the no religion and reincarnation groups.

The word death does not **mean a lot to me** because I am **not afraid** to die.
6GB56 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

This word **means a lot to me** it can bring tears to my eyes! It signifies **never** seeing life as **meaningless**.

6GB79 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

The patterns in the qualitative data also reveal the commonality between the three groups in their focus on the universal emotions which are associated with death. These examples are typical of children from each group.

Feeling very **sad**.

3FD54 [no religion]

It's a very **sad** thing to me and very upsetting.

6GB81 [reincarnation; Sikh]

The word death means **sadness** to me.

3BCD67 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

In summary, the quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis. The analysis showed that there appeared to be an association between faith-base and how the meaning of death was conceptualized by children. It is pertinent to note what the patterns in the qualitative data from the 752 respondents revealed. Exploration of the qualitative data showed that the general trends were demonstrated in the category of response of 'dead'. Thus the subtle differences between the faith-base groups were demonstrated through the nuances of expression and focus in the subject matter as the examples illustrated. However, the key themes showed that children with no faith-base were as able as those with a faith-base to define death by frequently using similar language and expression.

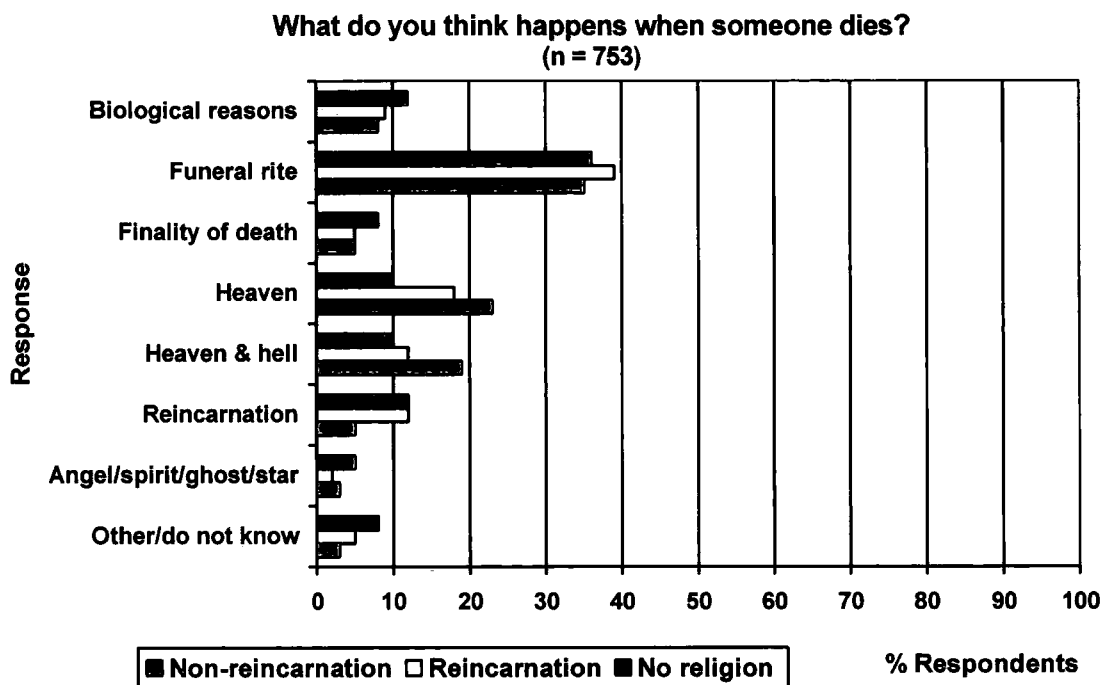
Table 6.9 Comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 8

What do you think happens when someone dies? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)					
Response	Count	Faith			Total Respondents
		Non-reincarnation	Reincarnation	No religion	
Biological reasons	Observed count	45	11	9	65
	Expected count	47	11	7	65
	% Observed	8%	9%	12%	9%
Funeral rite	Observed count	189	50	28	267
	Expected count	194	46	28	267
	% Observed	35%	39%	36%	36%
Finality of death	Observed count	26	7	6	39
	Expected count	28	7	4	39
	% Observed	5%	5%	8%	5%
Heaven	Observed count	124	23	8	155
	Expected count	112	27	16	155
	% Observed	23%	18%	10%	21%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	103	15	8	126
	Expected count	91	22	13	126
	% Observed	19%	12%	10%	17%
Reincarnation	Observed count	27	15	9	51
	Expected count	37	9	5	51
	% Observed	5%	12%	12%	7%
Angel/spirit/ghost/star	Observed count	15	2	4	21
	Expected count	15	4	2	21
	% Observed	3%	2%	5%	3%
Other/ do not know	Observed count	17	6	6	29
	Expected count	21	5	3	29
	% Observed	3%	5%	8%	4%
Total Respondents	Observed count	546	129	78	753
	Expected count	546	129	78	753
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 29.701; df = 14; *p* value = 0.008 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.7 Graph showing comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 8



For the question: ‘what do you think happens when someone dies?’ (Question 8) the chi-square test result gave a *p* value of 0.008. The *p* value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the faith-base groups and how they view what happens when someone dies. Therefore, there appears to be an association between faith-base and concepts of what happens when someone dies.

‘Funeral rite’ is the dominant theme in response to what happens when someone dies which was by at least a third of each group — 35% (189/546) non-reincarnation, 39% (50/129) reincarnation, and 36% (28/78) no religion. There was a slight increase by four in the observed count for the reincarnation group on what was expected, and a marginal decrease by five by the non-reincarnation group on the expected count. The observed and expected counts were the same for the no religion group (Table 6.9).

When the 753 children's responses are explored in a qualitative manner, however, similar patterns in the data are found across the groups. The following examples from each group illustrate the characteristic patterns in the findings from the category of response of 'funeral rite'. The similar use of language and expression is evident. The diversity in the detail reflects the children's awareness of the different faith communities' beliefs and rituals, and society's practices in relation to funerals (Chapter 2). The first group of examples illustrate that some children focused on the fact that a funeral is a ritual which takes place after a person has died.

They have a **funeral**.

6HD11 [no religion]

They make a **funeral** and put them in a coffin. Then they put them under the ground.

3RB55 [reincarnation; Sikh]

They have a **funeral at church** and they get **buried**.

6CB52 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

They have a **funeral** and they stay in their **grave until God comes**.

6MB9 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

These responses are typical of those children from the different groups who reported other aspects of the 'funeral rite' such as burial and cremation.

Their **bodies** don't work anymore so they are **buried or cremated**.

6SD55 [no religion]

They cry and they dig them **underground** or they **burn** them.

3GB4 [reincarnation; Hindu/Sikh]

They could be **cremated, buried** or maybe not found.

6DB53 [non-reincarnation; Jewish]

The rituals which accompany burial and cremation were also communicated. Some of the rituals and beliefs are particular to specific faith communities as highlighted in the examples (Chapter 2). This includes children's knowledge of rituals in other countries, namely India.

They go in a **grave** for thousand, thousands of years.

6BCD56 [no religion]

I think what happens is they take the **body** and **dressed** it to be ready for **burial**.

6RB83 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

What I think happens is they are **washed** and then put into **white or black cloths** then they are **buried**.

6GB86 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

(Buried) rot underground or the ashes get buried in that person's **favourite place (cremated).**

6GD8 [no religion]

A coffin can go **underground**. In **India** they put wood on you and then **fire** you.

3RB30 [reincarnation; Sikh]

They **wash** the **body** first. They put someone in a box, in a **coffin**. Then they bury him **underground**. Then they put the soil back and a **stone on top**. They might **burn** him too. In **India** they can put him in a boat and **burn** him after they have washed him.

3GB16 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

Some children directly related what happens when someone dies to philosophical ideas and awareness of a faith perspective, some of which were personal expressions of faith. In the quantitative analysis, the predominant categories of response in this respect were 'heaven' and 'heaven and hell'. Nearly a quarter (23%; 124/546) of the non-reincarnation group responded with 'heaven' with 18% (23/129) of the reincarnation group and 10% (8/78) of the no religion group. The observed count for the non-reincarnation group was higher by 12 counts compared with the expected value. The observed counts were less than the expected counts for both the other two groups (Table 6.9).

Some children from each group perceived being in 'heaven' as what happens when someone dies. This corresponds with the teaching in the faith communities in the non-reincarnation group and for the faiths in the Indian tradition in the reincarnation group (Chapter 2). Thus the examples cited, from the 753 responses from the qualitative data, demonstrate this. As the no religion group does not conform to a set of doctrine, it is noteworthy to see how a few of their responses parallel the faith communities' beliefs on heaven. It would be inappropriate to assume that those who do not belong to a specific faith community do not have a concept of heaven (Chapters 1; 2).

Go up to heaven.

3FD60 [no religion]

Goes to heaven, and because I am an Indian we burn people.

3GB74 [reincarnation; Hindu]

They **go to another place**. I believe that place is heaven.

6SD11 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Hope they **go to heaven**.

6RB9 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

Some children in all three groups, including the no religion group, described the deceased's spirit or soul going to heaven. The responses illustrate perspectives associated with belonging to a faith community which include: a Christian making reference to prayer; a Mormon relating heaven as a place for being reunited with deceased relatives; a Muslim describing the family burial of the deceased; and references to the role of God in what happens when a person dies.

Your bodily form decomposes and your **spirit** goes to heaven.

6BCD12 [no religion]

I think (scientifically) that bacteria breaks them down, and their **spirit** is taken by **God**.

6RB68 [reincarnation; Sikh]

The **soul** goes up to heaven when the person dies then they get buried then the people **pray**.

3BCD17 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

What I think is that you lie on the ground **God** comes to you. You close your eyes then your **spirit** runs with **God**.

6SD10 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Their **spirit** leaves their body and travels up to heaven with **dead relatives**.

6DB5 [non-reincarnation; Mormon]

Their family put them in the grave and their **God** takes their **soul**.

6GB15 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

Although some children from each group focused on what life would be like in heaven, it was predominantly the Christians in the non-reincarnation group who did. This is unsurprising as it reflects Christian doctrine (Section 2.3). The use of language and expression which the Christian children employ also echoes that faith community's beliefs as the examples illustrate.

Go up to heaven and I believe that the **rest of their life** is just a **sleep**.

3FD54 [no religion]

They go to heaven and be **happy**.

3GB75 [reincarnation; Sikh]

I believe that you **come back to life in** heaven.

3FD59 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

You go to heaven and **see other people who have died**.

6FD61 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

The quantitative analysis showed that more of the non-reincarnation group reported 'heaven and hell' with 19% (103/546) in comparison with 12% (15/129) of the reincarnation and 10% (8/78) of the no religion groups. Similarly, there was a higher observed count for the non-reincarnation group while the reincarnation and no religion groups had lower observed counts than the expected counts indicate (Table 6.9). The pattern of results reflects the doctrines purported by the faith communities and therefore, there appears to be a link between faith-base and children's perceptions of *death and life after death* (Chapter 2).

Although there are strong normative strands within faith communities, it is important to be aware that people do not necessarily subscribe to all aspects of a particular faith's doctrine. Indeed, neither is there uniformity in understanding and interpretation of a faith's teaching. Children living in a multi-faith society have contact with and influence each other to a lesser or greater extent as they are aware of different beliefs and practices among their peers, as previously noted (Chapter 1).

The patterns in the data reveal that it was only children in the non-reincarnation and reincarnation groups who referred to the implied judgement in terms of 'good' people going to heaven and 'bad' people going to hell. These did not include the possibility of God's role as judge as the examples demonstrate.

Some people are cremated in India. People go to the river and put some of the ashes on their face and the rest they scatter on the water to remember. They go to **heaven**. But some people don't go to heaven. They go to **hell** – **bad** people.

3GB70 [reincarnation; Hindu/Sikh]

Well during the living life if they be **good** they go to **heaven** and if they be **bad** they go to **hell**.

6RB67 [non-reincarnation; Christian/Muslim]

A further aspect of judgement which some Christian and Muslim children in the non-reincarnation group depicted was the citing of there being an actual day of judgement at some point in the future for everyone. This is compatible with those faith communities' doctrines (Section 2.3; 2.5). As there are no exceptions, there was no evidence of such descriptions in the no religion and reincarnation groups' responses.

It depends if you are good person or not. **God decides this on judgement day.**

6MB63 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

There is a **day of judgement** of whether you're going to hell or heaven.

6GB70 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

Furthermore, the patterns in the qualitative data reveal that 'heaven and hell' was given as the category of response by some children in each group. It would be inappropriate to assume that those who do not belong to a specific faith community ignore any concept of heaven and hell (Chapter 1; 2). Faith-base is seen to influence the way the children refer to heaven and hell and reflect the corresponding doctrines of the faith communities as the following examples illustrate (Chapter 2). Ideas of the spirit or soul are conveyed and judgement is implicit in order to differentiate between whether the deceased go to heaven or hell.

They go to **hell or heaven.**

3GD7 [no religion]

They **leave their bodies** and **go to their rightful place** that they belong, **heaven or hell.**

6GB59 [reincarnation; Sikh]

Their **soul** goes to **heaven or hell** and their body to the grave.

3RB59 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Some children in each group cited God as having the role of judge of how people's earthly life has been lived. This included a child in the no religion group which is not what maybe anticipated.

They go to **heaven** if they have been **truthful** and to the **devil** if they have **lied**. **God decides** which you have been truthful or lied.

6FD52 [no religion]

Their **spirit** goes up in the sky by God and **God checks** if he needs to go to **hell or heaven**.

6GB13 [reincarnation; Sikh]

I think they go to **heaven** if they have **done good things and pleased God**. If they **haven't** they go to **hell**.

3SD62 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

It is **how they have behaved** on earth and then **God decides** either they go heaven or hell.

6CB60 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

In summary, as a result of the quantitative analysis the null hypothesis was not confirmed. There appeared to be an association between faith-base and how children conceptualize what happens when someone dies. It was of equal worth to examine the patterns in the qualitative data from the 753 responses. The exploration revealed a more complex picture. It showed that the general trends were revealed in the category of response of 'heaven and hell'. Thus the subtle differences between faith-base were demonstrated through the nuances of some of the responses and the focus of some subject matter describing heaven and hell. However, on investigating the key themes in the qualitative data it was seen that there were some similarities in the use of language and expression in the responses from each faith-base group in the descriptions of what the children thought happens when a person dies. The marked diversity in some of the responses was evident in the detail of some of the subject matter which tended to reflect the faith-base of the children and correspond with that particular faith's spectrum of teachings and rituals on the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Some children echoed the beliefs and practices of more than one faith. This was particularly demonstrated in the responses from the no religion group which was unsurprising because as a group they do not adhere to one set of doctrine and practices, but act as a rather differing and divergent group (Chapter 2). As previously commented upon, strong normative strands within faith communities are not unilaterally followed and the understanding and interpretation of a faith's teaching will vary considerably. Children living in a multi-faith society are especially open to influences appertaining to different beliefs and practices among their peers (Chapters 1; 2).

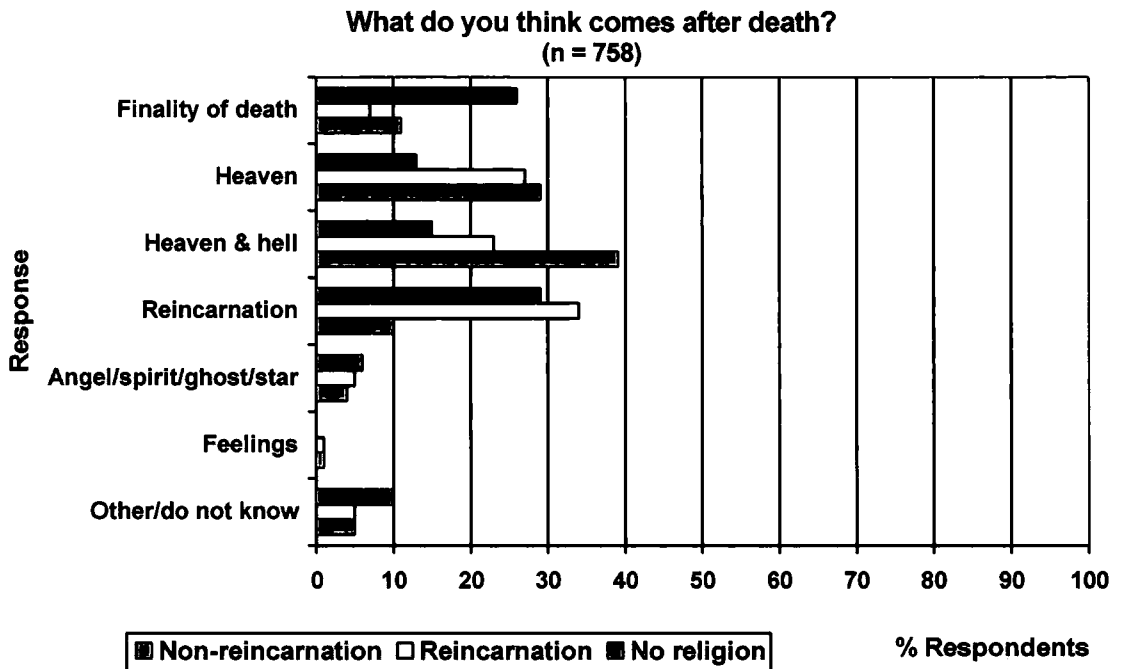
Table 6.10 Comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 10

What do you think comes after death? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)					
Response	Count	Faith			Total Respondents
		Non-reincarnation	Reincarnation	No religion	
Finality of death	Observed count	63	9	20	92
	Expected count	67	16	10	92
	% Observed	11%	7%	26%	12%
Heaven	Observed count	159	35	10	204
	Expected count	148	35	21	204
	% Observed	29%	27%	13%	27%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	214	30	12	256
	Expected count	185	44	26	256
	% Observed	39%	23%	15%	34%
Reincarnation	Observed count	57	44	23	124
	Expected count	90	21	13	124
	% Observed	10%	34%	29%	16%
Angel/spirit/ghost/star	Observed count	23	6	5	34
	Expected count	25	6	4	34
	% Observed	4%	5%	6%	4%
Feelings	Observed count	5	1	0	6
	Expected count	4	1	1	6
	% Observed	1%	1%	0%	1%
Other/ do not know	Observed count	28	6	8	42
	Expected count	30	7	4	42
	% Observed	5%	5%	10%	6%
Total Respondents	Observed count	549	131	78	758
	Expected count	549	131	78	758
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 87.314; df = 12; *p* value = 0.000 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.8 Graph showing comparison of faiths reporting different categories — Question 10



The chi-square test result for the question: ‘what do you think comes after death?’ (Question 10) gave a *p* value of 0.000. The *p* value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the faith groups and how what comes after death is perceived. Therefore, there appears to be an association between faith-base and concepts of what comes after death.

The findings reflect to some degree what would be the anticipated range of responses from members of the non-reincarnation and reincarnation groups compared with the teachings and practices of the faith communities to which they indicated they belong (Chapter 2; Appendix 7). What is less predictable is what the no religion group would report in response to a question concerning what they think comes after death. Thus more than a third (39%; 214/549) from the non-reincarnation group responded with ‘heaven and hell’, about a quarter (23%; 30/131) from the reincarnation group and 15% (12/78) from the no religion group. It would be inappropriate to assume that those who do not belong to a specific faith community do not have a concept of heaven (Chapters 1; 2). There was a noticeable increase in the observed count by 29 compared with the expected count for the non-reincarnation group. Both the reincarnation and no

religion groups reported observed counts 14 counts less than the corresponding expected counts (Table 6.10).

Analysis from a qualitative perspective provides evidence that the category of response of 'heaven and hell' was a key influence for the children in each group as the quoted examples illustrate. The patterns in the qualitative data under this category of response reflect the general trends. Thus there was some evidence which drew distinctions between the three groups. These partly reflect the doctrines of the faith communities which in many ways is unsurprising (Chapter 2). It was only some Christian and Muslim children in the non-reincarnation group, for example, who cited there being an actual day of judgement at some point in the future and that God presides as the 'judge' over who is sent to heaven and hell.

On judgement day the sun turns hot and bright and God with Jesus come. Then God will decide who goes to heaven and Jesus will decide who goes to hell.

3MB17 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Well you are **punished and pleased until judgement day** to reveal where you really belong.

6GB79 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

Similarly, a member of the no religion group recorded the 'grim reaper' to be the judge of whether the deceased ends up in heaven or hell. There was no such reference in any of the non-reincarnation and reincarnation groups' responses.

Eternal life, it means that they start a new life in **heaven or hell**. If they are a **good** person they go to **heaven**. I think the **grim reaper decides** where they go.

6HD10 [no religion]

Furthermore, there were some Christian and Muslim children in the non-reincarnation group who described what life would be like in heaven and hell and made reference to imagery connected with their faith-base as shown in bold.

I think they go up to **heaven** and **serve God**, or go down to hell.

6CB58 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

If you have been good you **meet Peter** the disciple at the **gates of heaven**, if you have been **bad** you go to **hell**.

6HD50 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Heaven — it's **happy and peaceful** or **hell depending** on how you've spent your **time on earth**.

6JD51 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

2nd life comes after death in **heaven** — good people. Some people go to **hell** — **bad**.

3BCD25 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Heaven — **good people with angels**, **hell** — **bad people**.

3HD3 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

After death there is heaven and hell. If you go to **heaven** you **relax** and if you go to **hell** be **beaten by Satan**.

6CB60 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

Some Christians in the non-reincarnation group who responded in detail about the implied judgement of heaven and hell, tended to reflect commonly held views of that particular faith community as highlighted.

God decides if you go **down or up**. An **angel** looks in a **golden book**. It says all the **names that gave their life to God**. They go up to **heaven**.

3BCD77 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Heaven or hell. If you've **sinned then hell**. If you **worshipped God and did good deeds then heaven**.

6FD6 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Heaven and hell — if you **believe in Jesus then** you'd go to **heaven** but if you **haven't then the opposite would happen**.

6FD10 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

You go up to **heaven** if you have **obeyed God** and **hell** if you **haven't**. **God decides**.

6DB55 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Similarly, it was some of the Christians who in addition to notions of judgement, made reference to what life in heaven and hell maybe like and used doctrinal language. Examples of the doctrinal language applied by the children include: 'immortal', 'eternal life', 'God's will'.

We will be **immortal in heaven** — not everyone. The others go to **hell**.
We choose where we go.

3BCD3 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Some people – **good** ones go to **heaven** and **bad** people go to **hell**. This **man** who is made by God, **in heaven at the gates says where you go**. If you are good the gates of heaven open and if you are bad the clouds open and you go down into hell.

3BCD61 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Life in heaven or hell, depending on God's will.

6FD62 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Heaven or hell. If they go to **heaven, eternal life**, if **hell, eternal torture**.
God decides.

6MB50 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

If they have been **good** then they go to **heaven** and if **not** they go to **hell**.
God and Jesus decide this.

6MB10 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Investigating the patterns in the qualitative data of the 758 responses also reveal, however, the common key themes on which the children focused concerning heaven and hell. Often the use of language and expression of ideas is linked to the beliefs and practices associated with the corresponding faith communities such as 'peace in heaven'; 'immortal in heaven'; 'judgement day'; 'God decides' (Chapter 2). The sense of implied judgement is central in each of the responses cited regardless of grouping. Many children in the non-reincarnation and reincarnation groups commented that God has the role of judge whereas only two in the no religion group did.

More life in heaven but not everybody will go there. **Good** people go to **heaven**, **bad** people go to **hell** and **God decides this**.

6BCD65 [no religion]

A **soul** comes out of the body and it goes to heaven. **Good** people go to **heaven** and **bad** people go to **hell**. **God decides this**.

3GB22 [reincarnation; Sikh]

I think **God takes your soul** and you rest in peace in **heaven** — **good or hell** — **bad**. **God decides**.

3MB1 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

A funeral and in my religion you might go to heaven or hell. If you do really **bad things** you might go to **hell**, if you do a **good thing** you might go to **heaven** but it is **decided by God**.

6DB59 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

Over a quarter of the non-reincarnation (29%; 159/549) and reincarnation (27%; 35/131) groups gave a response of 'heaven', in comparison to 13% (10/78) by the no religion group. There was a higher observed count by 11 for the non-reincarnation group above the expected count, and a decrease by 11 for the no religion group compared with the expected count (Table 6.10).

The patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'heaven' reflect the general trends. Thus there were some notable differences in the detail and descriptions about the concept of heaven. The data reveal that a major theme was death bringing decay to the body and release of the deceased's spirit or soul enabling it to go to heaven. Only in the reincarnation and non-reincarnation groups were there some children who mention the spirit going to heaven to be with God.

Leave your human form so your **spirit** can ascend into heaven (for everybody).

6BCD12 [no religion]

I think death is the **end of the body**. Their **spirit** goes to heaven. God decides.

6RB54 [reincarnation; Sikh]

They **rot** away in their grave. Their **spirit** goes to heaven. The spirits can look after people on earth with **God**. They could say hello to the dead person's friends or they could be nasty to them.

6GD58 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

The children in the reincarnation group revealed perceptive awareness of their particular faith-base's rituals and added their personal conviction of everybody going to heaven.

Then they burn. Then the body turns into dust and then they **throw the dust** away. Then you go to **heaven**.

3GB6 [reincarnation; Hindu]

They throw away their skin and keep the ashes and **throw the ashes** in the River Ganges and the body goes to heaven. Everybody goes to **heaven**.

3RB72 [reincarnation; Hindu]

Examining the patterns in the qualitative data also reveal some common key themes on which the children focused about heaven. These included the deceased's spirit or soul going to heaven as these examples illustrate.

The **spirit** rises to heaven.

6SD55 [no religion]

Everybody's souls go to heaven.

3GB74 [reincarnation; Hindu]

Your **soul** goes up to heaven — **everybody** goes there and I think it's like paradise.

6BCD28 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Spirits go to heaven and God forgives **everyone** so everyone goes to heaven.

3HD54 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Some children from each group focused on what life in heaven maybe like, including referring to being in God's presence. All these children, including the no religion member, used religious language and expression.

They get **reborn** in heaven.

3JD4 [no religion]

You — everybody be **born again** in heaven. Some people stay on earth that didn't die.

3RB51 [reincarnation; Hindu/Sikh]

You like have an idea of heaven like **returning home** or **running to your mum and dad**.

6SD10 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Peace and harmony in heaven with God.

6SD54 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

You see God and you **watch all your friends and family**.

3FD63 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

A **second life** where you **meet all of your old friends and family** in heaven once again.

6DB53 [non-reincarnation; Jewish]

The concept of 'reincarnation' was another key influence in the children's responses to what comes after death as the quantitative analysis demonstrates. Unsurprisingly, the group which responded with the highest proportion with aspects of 'reincarnation' was the reincarnation group. More than a third (34%; 44/131) did so. This compared with over a quarter (29%; 23/78) of the no religion group and 10% (57/549) of the non-reincarnation group. There was a noticeable decrease in the observed count by 33 compared with the expected count for the non-reincarnation group, whereas the reincarnation group had an increased observed count of 23. The no religion group reported an observed count 10 higher than the expected count (Table 6.10).

The patterns in the qualitative data under this category of response reflect the general trends. Thus there was some evidence which drew a distinction between the three groups. It was only some children in the reincarnation and non-reincarnation groups who presented the notion of reincarnation as the spirit or soul being returned to earth as either another human being or an animal. This reflects the beliefs of the faith communities concerned which in many ways is unsurprising (Chapter 2). There was no such description from the no religion group.

Be born all over again on earth. Their **soul** goes into another body either a **person or animal**.

3GB21 [reincarnation; Hindu]

Their **spirit** comes back to earth in a **baby or an animal**.

3BCD13 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

The **soul** finds a new body and it can be an **animal or person**. Our **souls choose!**

6DB54 [non-reincarnation; Jewish]

Examining the patterns in the qualitative data also show the common key themes on which the children focused concerning reincarnation. It is worth noting that not only children in the reincarnation group reported this category, but also some members of the non-reincarnation and no religion groups as the patterns in the data reveal. Some children used the theological word 'reincarnation' while others indicated that that was what was meant from the language and expression they used.

Afterlife — **reincarnated**.

6HD53 [no religion]

I think **reincarnation** comes after death.

6GB67 [reincarnation; Hindu]

Reincarnation.

6FD58 [reincarnation; Wicca]

Reincarnation.

6FD7 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

When you are a **different thing** and **come back to earth**.

3JD9 [no religion]

A **new baby** is born in the world. The person who dies stays in their coffin. God takes their spirits to heaven gives their **spirits to someone else on earth** in a new baby.

3RB5 [reincarnation; Sikh]

I think you get **another new life** and it's a bit better than the life that you had before.

3GD12 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

There were responses from each group which described the result of reincarnation in terms of the deceased returning in either human or animal form. Some members of the reincarnation group reflected the corresponding faith communities' doctrines on reincarnation. Some members of the other two groups also demonstrated an insight of reincarnation. A Christian child, for example, refers to God sorting whether one would be reincarnated as a person or animal.

Reincarnation — another life as a different thing depending on your personality. If you were bad you'd be a **spider or something** else small which could be easily killed. If you were good you may come back as a **human or an elephant or something** like that.

3HD9 [no religion]

Your next life back on earth as a **living creature**. It keeps on happening.

6RB75 [reincarnation; Sikh]

You might turn into an **insect or a baby**.

6GB18 [reincarnation; Buddhist]

The afterlife or reincarnation. If you have had a good life then you will come back as a **human**. If not, you will come back as a **lesser form**.

6BCD27 [reincarnation; Hindu]

You have another life as a **person or an animal** on earth. **God sorts** this out.

6MB13 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

There were those from each group who described returning to earth only in human form.

Reincarnation – you **keep your memories** and enter into **another person**.

6FD18 [no religion]

They get buried, or they get burnt. If they have been good they get a next life back on earth as a **different person** in a **different country**. The bad people don't get a next life they stay dead. My **God decides** if I am good or bad.

3GB69 [reincarnation; Sikh]

You come back as a **new baby** but you never remember you were alive before.

3MB20 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Similarly, there were those from each group who described returning to earthly life only as an animal.

Reincarnation. When you come back as an **animal you want** to be and live again.

6FD55 [no religion]

You become an **animal that you loved** when you were alive.

6GB8 [reincarnation; Hindu]

If you die you come alive being an **animal**. My mum says that.

6GB58 [reincarnation; Sikh]

Everyone changes into an **animal**.

6MB3 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

The group which reported the largest proportion of the 'finality of death' was the no religion group with about a quarter (26%; 20/78) whereas 11% (63/549) of the non-reincarnation and 7% (9/131) of the reincarnation groups did. The no religion group reported an observed count 10 higher compared with the expected count. The observed count for the non-reincarnation group was marginally less — by four than the expected count. Similarly, the reincarnation group's observed count was lower (by 7) than the expected count (Table 6.10). This is what the quantitative analysis demonstrated.

Examining the patterns in the qualitative data reveal, however, the common key theme of the concept that death is final, and consequently, there is no life after death. This was the response from some children in each group and not only from the no religion group as could have been anticipated. The phrase which is used by children reporting this category of response is 'death is the end' as the highlighted examples illustrate.

A funeral to bless the body and they get buried in a coffin. **Death is the end.**

6HD6 [no religion]

Nothing. I think they would just go. **Death is the end.**

6RB51 [reincarnation; Hindu]

I **don't** think there is **life after death**.

6GB69 [reincarnation; Buddhist]

You will have a funeral. **Death is the end.**

3MB6 [non-reincarnation; Christian]

Nothing. **Death is the end.**

6DB11 [non-reincarnation; Jewish]

The finality of death is also expressed by the perception that after death the deceased's body decays until only the skeleton remains as these examples from each group reveal.

Rotting. It's the end.

6HD11 [no religion]

After death they **stay** underground **dead**.

3RB30 [reincarnation; Sikh]

Rot and leave your **skeleton**.

6RB57 [non-reincarnation; Christian/Jewish]

When someone dies then all the **muck comes off** and the **bones are left**.

6RB79 [non-reincarnation; Muslim]

In summary, as a result of the quantitative analysis the null hypothesis was not confirmed. There appeared to be an association between faith-base and how children conceptualize what comes after death. It was also important to examine the patterns in the qualitative data of the 758 respondents which revealed a more complex picture. It showed that the general trends were revealed in the category of response of 'heaven and hell'. Thus the subtle differences between faith-base were demonstrated through the nuances of some of the responses and the focus of some subject matter describing heaven and hell. However, on investigating the key themes in the qualitative data, as previously noted, it was seen that there were some similarities in the use of language and expression in the responses from each faith-base group in the descriptions of what the children thought happens when a person dies. The marked diversity in some of the responses was evident in the detail of some of the subject matter which tended to reflect the faith-base of the children and correspond with that particular faith's spectrum of teachings and rituals on the concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Chapter 2). Some children echoed the beliefs and practices of another faith. The most noticeable example was when some children in the non-reincarnation group responded with reincarnation for what they thought follows death. This was particularly noticeable in the responses from the no religion group because as a group they do not adhere to one set of doctrine and practices, but act as a rather differing and divergent group. Although there are strong normative strands within faith communities, it is important to be aware that people do not necessarily subscribe to all aspects of a particular faith's doctrine. Indeed, neither is there uniformity in understanding and interpretation of a faith's teaching. Children living-in-a-multi-faith society have contact with and influence each other to a lesser or greater extent as they are aware of different beliefs and practices among their peers (Chapters 1; 2).

6.2.7.1 Hypothesis discussion and confirmatory conclusions

The quantitative analysis on each of the four questions through testing the statistical significance of the independent variable faith, revealed an association between faith-base and the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Therefore, the null hypothesis that children with no faith-base are as able as those with a faith-base to conceptualize *death* and *life after death* was not confirmed.

Qualitative analysis was used to explore in depth and illustrate the themes of the cross-tabulations by quoting a range of examples of the children's responses. Examination of the qualitative data revealed some subtle differences in the use of language and expression along with the focus of some of the subject matter. There was some evidence for this in all three of the open-ended questions which were analysed as the examples illustrated. However, the range of responses from the children from the faith-base groups showed that there were exceptions to the findings in the quantitative data as they were comparable in the ability that was demonstrated through the similar use of language and expression. As previously commented upon, strong normative strands within faith communities are not unilaterally followed and the understanding and interpretation of a faith's teaching will vary considerably. Children living in a multi-faith society are especially open to influences from varied beliefs and practices among their associates (Chapters 1; 2).

When comparing these findings with other relevant research, it is worth noting the similarities and differences. As discussed previously in Chapter 4, researchers have tended to focus either on children's concepts of either death or life after death rather than both together. This has ignored children's awareness or otherwise of a possible relationship between these concepts. This may have an impact on how the independent variable of faith is understood to be associated with the concepts.

Few researchers seem to have explored the possible association between children's faith-base and the concepts of *death* and *life after death* despite the connection with the teaching and rituals of faith communities which was explained in Chapter 2. The findings of the research of psychologists Frangoulis et al focused on the location of life after death through interviews with 67 children who were 5 to 8 years of age and who 'believed in an afterlife' (Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996). The findings included that 'most children spoke of heaven' and 25% of the 67 children referred to heaven and hell.

Unlike in this research project, they did not report any further findings of the association of faith-base on the analysis of the questions.

Nesbitt conducted interviews for her research with 24 Hindu/Sikh children and 50 Christians who were 8 to 14 years of age (Nesbitt, 1993). Thus her findings were based only on those who belonged to a faith community, either Christian or Hindu/Sikh, unlike this research. Nesbitt's findings included that '71 out of 74' (96%) of the children spoke of 'continuity after death'. There were responses from both groups which had a strong sense of life after death involving reward and punishment with '40 out of 50' (80%) Christians referring to heaven and hell, and '13 out of 24' (54%) Hindu/Sikhs mentioning reincarnation. She reported that only two children in the sample spoke of the finality of death and both were Christians. The more extensive, diverse and in depth findings in this project present a considerably more detailed and complex picture, as has already been discussed.

Some research has focused on different aspects of faith affiliation from that which was directly addressed in my research. Ng, for example, wanted to find out whether children who have 'religious beliefs are more interested in learning about death and dying than those who do not' (Ng, 1998). He found from his research in schools in Birmingham, UK that there was a statistically significant difference between those who have religious beliefs and those who do not and the perceived levels of '*interest* in learning about death and dying' (Ng, 1998).

It would be possible from the data gathered for the 'National Religious Education Festival' of 1997 for analysis to be carried out to test the association of faith-base on the most relevant question concerning the concepts of *death* and *life after death*, that is Question 3 (Blaylock, 2001a, Blaylock, 2001b, Blaylock *et al.*, 2001, Fageant & Blaylock, 1998, Jepson & Draycott, 2001; Appendix 4; 9; 10; Section 5.2). The test of significance could then be complemented by examining patterns in the qualitative data. However, as no such analysis has been done on the findings of the *Festival* research, no comparison is possible with those of this research project.

6.2.8 Gender hypothesis: Boys are as able as girls to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*

In order to examine the null hypothesis that boys are as able as girls to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*, quantitative analysis was carried out through the Pearson chi-square test. A test of association of gender on each of the four pertinent questions: 11, 7, 8 and 10 was conducted and are presented in that order (Appendix 7). The findings are supplemented and explored further by qualitative analysis as appropriate. For each category of response there will be discussion of the trends followed by the exceptions. There was a total response from 374 boys and 389 girls to the main research study questionnaire.

The result of the chi-square test for when the children were asked: 'do you think there is life after death?' (Question 11) gave a p value of 0.053. The p value indicates that there is not a significant association between the variables, but it is borderline and it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is no statistically significant difference between gender and how the possibility of life after death is considered. Therefore, there does not appear to be an association between gender and concepts of the existence of life after death.

Half (50%; 196/389) of the girls gave a response of 'yes' to Question 11 compared with slightly less than half (45%; 169/374) of the boys. This was the category with the most response. The observed count for the girls was higher than the expected count by ten counts. The observed count for the boys was less than the expected count by ten counts (Table 6.11).

In summary, the quantitative analysis revealed that the null hypothesis was confirmed as there appeared to be no association between gender and the possibility of life after death.

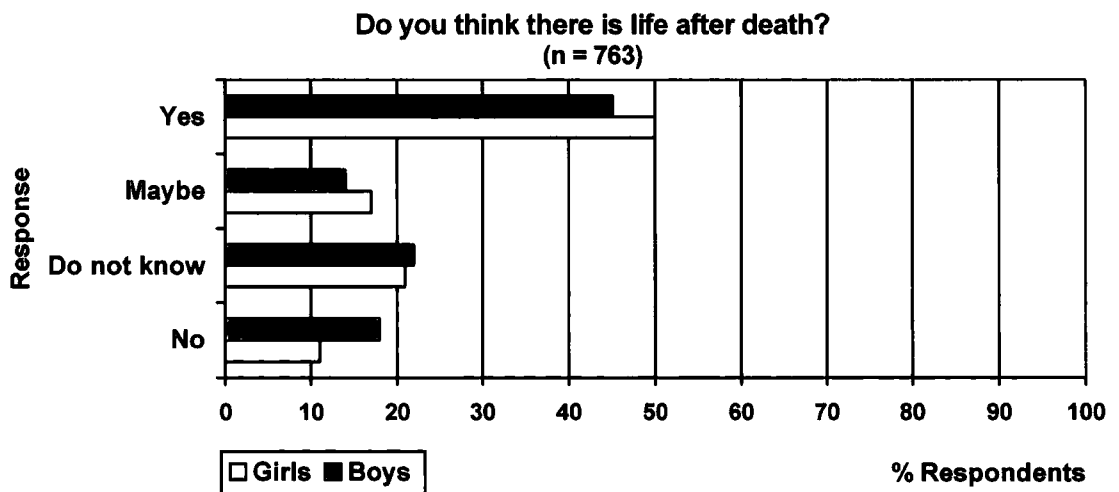
Table 6.11 Comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories — Question 11

Do you think there is life after death? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)				
Response	Count	Gender		Total Respondents
		Boys	Girls	
Yes	Observed count	169	196	365
	Expected count	179	186	365
	% Observed	45%	50%	48%
Maybe	Observed count	54	66	120
	Expected count	59	61	120
	% Observed	14%	17%	16%
Do not know	Observed count	84	83	167
	Expected count	82	85	167
	% Observed	22%	21%	22%
No	Observed count	67	44	111
	Expected count	54	57	111
	% Observed	18%	11%	15%
Total Respondents	Observed count	374	389	763
	Expected count	374	389	763
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 7.677; df = 3; p value = 0.053 so is not significant

Figure 6.9 Graph showing comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories — Question 11



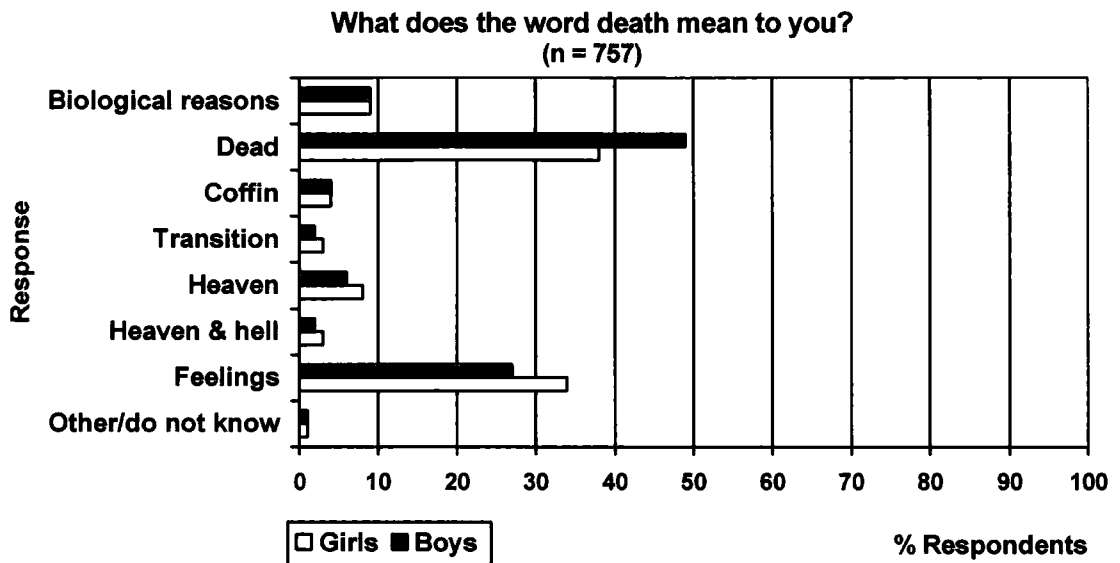
**Table 6.12 Comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories —
Question 7**

What does the word death mean to you? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)				
Response	Count	Gender		Total Respondents
		Boys	Girls	
Biological reasons	Observed count	34	35	69
	Expected count	34	35	69
	% Observed	9%	9%	9%
Dead	Observed count	182	146	328
	Expected count	162	166	328
	% Observed	49%	38%	43%
Coffin	Observed count	15	14	29
	Expected count	14	15	29
	% Observed	4%	4%	4%
Transition	Observed count	7	10	17
	Expected count	8	9	17
	% Observed	2%	3%	2%
Heaven	Observed count	23	30	53
	Expected count	26	27	53
	% Observed	6%	8%	7%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	8	13	21
	Expected count	10	11	21
	% Observed	2%	3%	3%
Feelings	Observed count	101	132	233
	Expected count	115	118	233
	% Observed	27%	34%	31%
Other/ Do not know	Observed count	3	4	7
	Expected count	3	4	7
	% Observed	1%	1%	1%
Total Respondents	Observed count	373	384	757
	Expected count	373	384	757
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 10.754; df = 7; p value = 0.150 so is not significant

Figure 6.10 Graph showing comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories — Question 7



The chi-square test result for when the children were asked: ‘what does the word death mean to you?’ (Question 7) gave a p value of 0.150. The p value indicates that there is not a significant association between the variables. The test of association shows that there is no statistically significant difference between gender and the meaning of ‘death’. Therefore, there does not appear to be an association between gender and concepts of the definition of death.

The predominant category of response from both boys and girls which they gave as the meaning of death was ‘dead’. Nearly half (49%; 182/373) the boys and over a third (38%; 146/384) of the girls reported this. The observed count was higher by 20 than the expected value for the boys, and the observed count was 20 less than its equivalent expected count (Table 6.12).

The vast majority of responses from both the boys and the girls when defining death as 'dead' resulted in comparable patterns in the qualitative data. The following paired gender examples describe death in terms of someone dying and of death marking the end of life — the completion of the earthly life. The responses are presented as pairs from each gender — firstly the boys and then below the girls. From both groups the use of language and expression is similar as highlighted.

When **somebody's died**.
3MB15 [boy; Christian]
It means when a **person has died**.
6GB63 [girl; Sikh]

Death means to me when people's **lives are over**.
6GB10 [boy; Christian]
When you die and aren't on earth any more so you **aren't a part of life**.
6RB70 [girl; Sikh]

Some children used the word 'killed' when defining death rather than just dying or various derivatives of the word death, thereby seemingly including accidental death.

Death means **killed** no longer alive and death is not pleasant whatever the circumstances.
6SD5 [boy; no religion]
When someone dies or is **killed** and everyone misses them.
6RB66 [girl; Sikh]

Some children associated death with the idea that it may occur at anytime in a person's life.

Death means to me that you can **die when you're a baby or when you're a grandparent**.
6GB15 [boy; Muslim]
Death means to me that you can **die anytime**.
6GB70 [girl; Muslim]

Any subtle differences according to gender are revealed, for example, through the following pattern of responses. It was only boys who defined death in terms of the body's physical decay, whereas more girls (n=7) than boys (n=3) likened death to everlasting sleep.

It means having **no flesh** on your body.

6GB4 [boy; Muslim]

It means to me falling **asleep** forever.

3SD60 [girl; Christian]

You die and **rot**.

6FD7 [boy; Christian]

End of life, **sleeping** and never to be woke, painful.

6RB74 [girl; Christian]

The likelihood is that a key influence in the quantitative analysis for both genders has been the 'feelings' category with a third (34%; 132/384) of the girls and more than a quarter (27%; 101/373) of the boys expressing this definition. The observed count was up by 14 for the girls on the expected count, and the observed count was down by 14 for the boys on the expected count (Table 6.12).

The qualitative patterns in the data for the 'feelings' category of response were similar for both gender groups. The imaginative and emotional use of language and expression is evident as the examples show.

Very **terrible**, bad things, a really **painful** headache. I don't like anybody to die.

3CB5 [boy; Christian]

It **scares** me a bit because you know that you will never be around so it's **hard** to believe what it's going to be like when you stop breathing.

6SD51 [girl; no religion]

In summary, analysing the null hypothesis, by testing the statistical significance, showed that it was confirmed. The results demonstrated that there appeared to be no association between gender and how death was defined by boys and girls. It is of importance to note that on exploring the key themes in the qualitative data from the 757 responses, it was also seen that some boys were as able as girls to conceptualize the meaning of death. This was demonstrated through the similar use of language and expression as the examples of children's responses describing the meaning of death epitomized. Differences between the genders, not captured in the quantitative analysis, were revealed through the nuances of some of the responses and the focus of some subject matter under the category of response of 'dead'.

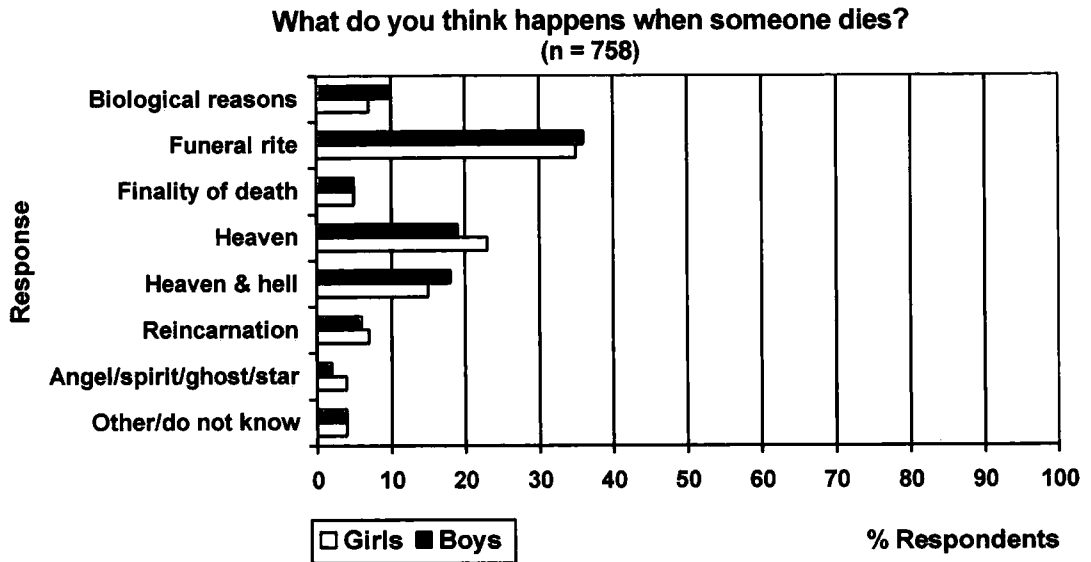
**Table 6.13 Comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories —
Question 8**

What do you think happens when someone dies? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)				
Response	Count	Gender		Total Respondents
		Boys	Girls	
Biological reasons	Observed count	37	28	65
	Expected count	32	33	65
	% Observed	10%	7%	9%
Funeral rite	Observed count	133	134	267
	Expected count	131	136	267
	% Observed	36%	35%	35%
Finality of death	Observed count	19	21	40
	Expected count	20	20	40
	% Observed	5%	5%	5%
Heaven	Observed count	69	88	157
	Expected count	77	80	157
	% Observed	19%	23%	21%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	68	59	127
	Expected count	62	65	127
	% Observed	18%	15%	17%
Reincarnation	Observed count	23	28	51
	Expected count	25	26	51
	% Observed	6%	7%	7%
Angel/spirit/ ghost/star	Observed count	7	14	21
	Expected count	10	11	21
	% Observed	2%	4%	3%
Other/ do not know	Observed count	16	14	30
	Expected count	15	15	30
	% Observed	4%	4%	4%
Total Respondents	Observed count	372	386	758
	Expected count	372	386	758
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 6.988; df = 7; *p* value = 0.430 so is not significant

Figure 6.11 Graph showing comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories — Question 8



In response to: ‘what do you think happens when someone dies?’ (Question 8) the chi-square test result gave a *p* value of 0.430. The *p* value indicates that there is not a significant association between the variables. The test of association shows that there is no statistically significant difference between gender and how boys and girls perceive what happens when someone dies. Therefore, there does not appear to be an association between gender and concepts of what happens when someone dies.

More than a third of both genders gave ‘funeral rite’ as their predominant response — 36% (133/372) boys and 35% (134/386) girls. The difference between the observed and the expected counts was marginal by a factor of two — an increase for the boys and a decrease for the girls (Table 6.13).

Exploring the patterns in the qualitative data from the 758 respondents reveal how boys were as able as girls and vice versa to describe some of the emotional aspects of the ‘funeral rite’. The paired examples illustrate the similar use of language and expression of the concepts as highlighted. Boys and girls described in similar terms the grief which is associated with a person’s death and the accompanying funeral.

People are sad. They have a **funeral** for a sign-of-death.

6HD6 [boy; no religion]

They have a **funeral** where everybody comes to **mourn** to the person who has died.

6FD54 [girl; Christian]

There were children from both gender groups who reported other aspects of the 'funeral rite' such as burial and cremation. Some of them used vivid language to describe what happens when the deceased is buried or cremated.

They faint. The family cry. They get **burnt** or they get **buried**.

3GB10 [boy; Muslim]

They get put in a **graveyard** and they either rot in their coffin or get burnt to ashes and get **cremated**.

6JD50 [girl; Christian]

You become a **skeleton**.

3BCD21 [boy; Christian]

Goes into a coffin, then a **skeleton**.

6SD60 [girl; no religion]

The other key influences in the quantitative analysis seem to be categories which were more of a philosophical and faith awareness nature as the children reported concepts of 'heaven' and 'heaven and hell'. Nearly a quarter (23%; 88/386) of girls responded with 'heaven' compared with 19% (69/372) of boys. The observed count for the girls was higher by a few (8) on the expected count and for the boys the observed count was lower by the same margin (8) on the expected count (Table 6.13).

'Heaven' is seen to be a main influence for both genders when exploring the qualitative data. Reference is made in the responses by boys and girls to the body being buried and the spirit going to heaven.

They get put in a **grave** and their **spirit goes to heaven** then a gravestone gets put in the mud behind your head.

3FD5 [boy; Christian]

Their **spirit goes up to heaven** and your body gets **buried** and rots away.

3BCD68 [girl; Christian]

Some boys and girls wrote that when someone dies they go to be with God and Jesus in heaven.

They **go to be with Jesus and God** in heaven.

3BCD15 [boy; Christian]

They **go up to the house of God**.

6JD55 [girl; Christian]

Some boys and girls stated that the deceased would come alive again in heaven as well as being reunited, especially with loved ones.

They come **back alive** in heaven.
3BCD3 [boy; Christian]
I believe that you **come back to life** in heaven.
3FD59 [girl; Christian]

They get taken to heaven to be **with family**.
6BCD13 [boy; Christian]
You go to heaven and **see other people** who have died.
6FD61 [girl; Christian]

From the survey data, a similar proportion of boys (18%; 68/372) and girls (15%; 59/386) gave 'heaven and hell' as their response to this question. The observed count was six more than the expected count for the boys and six less for the girls (Table 6.13).

The qualitative data for 'heaven and hell' revealed the notion from both boys and girls that judgement is implicit as these examples demonstrate with the similar use of language and expression.

They go up to heaven **or** down to hell.
6FD24 [boy; Christian]
They go to heaven **and** go down to hell.
3FD52 [girl; Christian]

It depends because if you're a **good** person you go to **heaven**. If you're **bad** you go to **hell**.
6DB3 [boy; Muslim]
I think when someone dies if they have been **good** they go to **heaven** and if they have been **bad** they go to **hell**.
3SD52 [girl; Christian]

Some boys and girls cited God as having the role of judge.

You go to hell or heaven. **God decides**. If you're **bad** you go to **hell**. If you're **good** you go to **heaven**.
3BCD20 [boy; Christian]
It is **how they have behaved** on earth and then **God decides** either they go **heaven or hell**.
6CB60 [girl; Muslim]

In summary, as a result of the quantitative analysis the null hypothesis was confirmed. There appeared to be no association between gender and how boys and girls conceptualize what happens when someone dies. It is also important to note that on exploring the key themes from the 758 responses in the qualitative data, it was also seen that some boys were as able as girls to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*. This was demonstrated through the similar use of language and expression as the range of paired examples of children's responses showed.

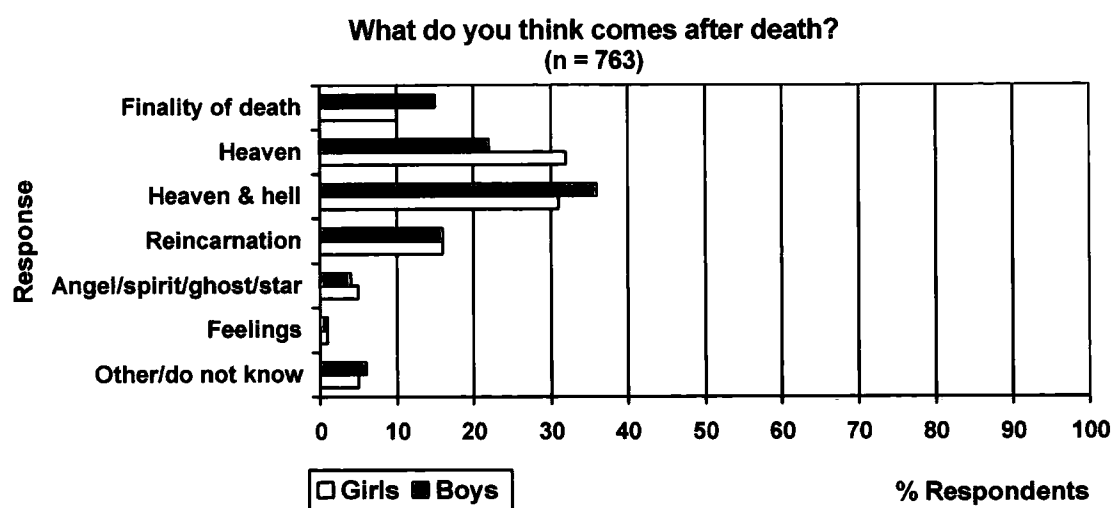
**Table 6.14 Comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories —
Question 10**

What do you think comes after death? (Birmingham and Durham data combined)				
Response	Count	Gender		Total Respondents
		Boys	Girls	
Finality of death	Observed count	55	38	93
	Expected count	46	47	93
	% Observed	15%	10%	12%
Heaven	Observed count	82	124	206
	Expected count	101	105	206
	% Observed	22%	32%	27%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	135	121	256
	Expected count	126	131	256
	% Observed	36%	31%	34%
Reincarnation	Observed count	61	64	125
	Expected count	61	64	125
	% Observed	16%	16%	16%
Angel/spirit/ ghost/star	Observed count	16	18	34
	Expected count	17	17	34
	% Observed	4%	5%	4%
Feelings	Observed count	2	4	6
	Expected count	3	3	6
	% Observed	1%	1%	1%
Other/ do not know	Observed count	23	20	43
	Expected count	21	22	43
	% Observed	6%	5%	6%
Total Respondents	Observed count	374	389	763
	Expected count	374	389	763
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 13.212; df = 6; *p* value = 0.040 so is significant at 95% confidence level

Figure 6.12 Graph showing comparison of boys and girls reporting different categories — Question 10



To the question: 'what do you think comes after death?' (Question 10) the chi-square test result gave a p value of 0.040. The p value indicates that there is a significant association between the variables at 95% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between gender and how what comes after death is conceptualized by them. Therefore, there appears to be an association between gender and concepts of what comes after death.

It is noteworthy that although Questions 8 and 10 are similar, the results are different. There was no statistically significant difference between gender and how boys and girls conceptualize what happens when someone dies (Question 8) whereas there is a statistically significant difference between gender and how what comes after death is perceived (Question 10). When devising the questionnaire, my expectation was that the main category of response for Question 8 would be 'funeral rite' and for Question 10 that 'heaven', 'heaven and hell', and 'reincarnation' would be the main categories of response. The range of responses reflected this, so maybe that has affected the results.

Overall the predominant category for both genders was 'heaven and hell'. More than a third (36%; 135/374) of boys gave this as their response compared with about a third (31%; 121/389) of girls. The observed count for the boys was more (9) than the

expected count and for the girls it was less (10) compared with the expected count (Table 6.14).

The patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'heaven and hell' reflect the general trends. It was some boys who expressed hell in terms of a 'bottomless pit', and 'liars' and 'robbers', for example, being sent there as punishment for their behaviour on earth, whereas there was no evidence of such descriptions in the girls' responses.

Heaven, upstairs with God or the **bottomless pit**, hell.
6RB33 [boy; Christian]

The spirit rises up to heaven. People who have told **lies** and not been honest go to hell. God decides this.

3BCD26 [boy; Christian]

You go to heaven, your soul goes to heaven. Bad people go to hell. **Robbers** go to hell and nice people go to heaven. God decides this.

3BCD14 [boy; Christian]

Some people go to heaven. Others go to hell — **burglars, murderers and mad people**. Heaven comes after death. God decides.

3MB19 [boy; Sikh]

Further exploration of the patterns in the qualitative data from the 763 responses show, however, that many of the boys and girls responded in a similar vein with 'heaven and hell' recording what they thought comes after death. They used similar language and expression of ideas when explaining the implied judgement associated with the concept of the deceased being sent to heaven and hell. Furthermore, members from both groups referred to the judgement being made by God. Some boys and girls also made the association of Satan with hell in contrast to God with heaven. The following examples illustrate the point.

The afterlife because everybody got to go some time. **God decides** who goes to heaven and who goes to hell.

6RB30 [boy; Christian]

A new life in heaven – good people but the bad people go to hell. **God decides** this.

6BCD64 [girl; Christian]

You might go to **Satan** — the naughty people. You might go to **God** — the good people. **God decides** this.

3CB3 [boy; Christian]

Living with **God** in heaven or with **Satan** in hell. **God decides** what happens.

6CB55 [girl; Christian]

Another main category of response from both genders was 'heaven' as can be seen in Table 6.14 and Figure 6.12. A higher proportion of girls, about a third (32%; 124/389) reported 'heaven' compared with nearly a quarter (22%; 82/374) of boys. The difference between the observed and expected counts was more noticeable — for the girls 19 more and for the boys 19 less than the corresponding expected counts (Table 6.14).

The patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'heaven' reflect the general trends. The data reveal some girls having an understanding about the deceased's spirit going to heaven and being with God. In contrast, there was no suggestion of this in the boys' responses.

They rot away in their grave. Their **spirit** goes to heaven. The spirits can look after people on earth **with God**. They could say hello to the dead person's friends or they could be nasty to them.

6GD58 [girl; Christian]

Your **spirit** goes up to the sky to be **with God**. Everybody's spirit goes there.

3GB64 [girl; Christian]

When the patterns in the qualitative data for 'heaven' are explored further, again it is found that there were many parallels in the use of language and expression of concepts by both the boys and girls.

Heaven — **everyone** goes to heaven.

3MB18 [boy; Christian]

Heaven comes after death. **Everybody** goes to heaven.

3RB68 [girl; Hindu]

They put the person in the graveyard. After that I'm **going to** heaven.

3GB7 [boy; Muslim]

Bury or cremated. Some people **go to** heaven.

3GB81 [girl; Christian]

You are **born again** in heaven. **Everybody** goes to heaven.

6RB8 [boy; Sikh]

You — **everybody** be **born again** in heaven. Some people stay on earth that didn't die.

3RB51 [girl; Hindu/Sikh]

In summary, the quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis. Therefore, there appeared to be an association between gender and how boys and girls perceive what comes after death. It is important too, to note what the patterns in the qualitative data of the 763 responses revealed. There were some notable nuances of expression and focus in the subject matter describing 'hell' and 'heaven', and thus, there were some differences according to gender as the examples illustrated. However, the key themes showed the similarity in the use of language and expression by both the boys and girls.

6.2.8.1 Hypothesis discussion and confirmatory conclusions

Statistical significance testing was conducted on each of the four questions whereby the patterns of association of the independent variable of gender were investigated. The findings revealed that there was no association between gender and the existence of life after death (Question 11); the definition of death (Question 7) and what happens when someone dies (Question 8). However, the quantitative analysis showed that there was an association between gender and what comes after death within Question 10. Therefore, the null hypothesis that boys are as able as girls to conceptualize *death* and *life after death* is confirmed, except with the question exploring what the children thought comes after death.

Exploration of the patterns in the qualitative data revealed that the use of language and expression of concepts was remarkably similar in each of the categories of response as the examples illustrated. Further investigation of the qualitative data did, however, demonstrate that there were some subtle differences between the boys and girls in their use of language and expression along with the focus of the subject matter. This was evident in the children's responses to Questions 7 and 10. It was some boys, for example, who expressed the meaning of death in terms of the body's physical decay whereas the girls did not respond in that way (Question 7).

The findings of other studies provide little to compare with the range of the findings of this research. This is primarily because other researchers, if they have considered gender as an independent variable, have tended to examine specific issues relating to gender. Ng, for example, wanted to find out whether 'girls are significantly more interested in learning about death and dying than boys' (Ng, 1998). He found from his research in schools in Birmingham, UK that there was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls and the perceived levels of '*interest* in learning about death and dying' (Ng, 1998). His study showed that girls were more interested than boys to learn about death and dying. This is an issue which was not directly addressed in my research. Clark explored the bereavement experiences of 28 children (5 to 11 year olds), 99 young people (11 to 18 year olds) and 24 adults using a mixture of interviews and questionnaires in England during the early 1990s (Clark, 1996). She was interested in the association between bereavement with moral and spiritual development. She reflected on some issues relating to gender which mainly concerned the fact that more females than males took part in the study. As far as the interviews were concerned, this was because more females than males admitted to having personal bereavement experiences. This is also an issue that was not directly addressed in my research which has attempted to take a more inclusive approach of the concepts.

As previously stated, it could be possible from the data gathered for the 'National Religious Education Festival' of 1997 for analysis to be carried out to test the association of gender on the most relevant question concerning the concepts of *death* and *life after death* which was Question 3 (Blaylock, 2001a, Blaylock, 2001b, Blaylock *et al.*, 2001, Fageant & Blaylock, 1998, Jepson & Draycott, 2001; Appendix 4; 9; 10; Section 5.2). The test of significance could then be complemented by examining patterns in the qualitative data. However, no such analysis is available from the findings of the *Festival* research for comparison those of this research project.

6.2.9 Location hypothesis: Children not living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region are as able as those who do to conceptualize death and life after death

Birmingham and Durham were selected as the two locations for the key part of the *death and life after death children's concepts study* — the main research study questionnaire, principally because of their seemingly religious and cultural differences (Section 5.4; Appendix 8). The city of Birmingham in the West Midlands is multi-faith, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic whereas the city of Durham in the North-East is predominantly mono-faith, mono-cultural and mono-ethnic (Section 5.3). There was a total of 406 respondents in Birmingham and 357 in Durham to the main research study questionnaire (Section 6.2.2; 6.2.3).

In order to test this null hypothesis quantitatively the Pearson chi-square test was conducted for a test of association of location on each of the four most relevant and pertinent questions: applied first to the closed Question 11, followed by Questions 7, 8 and 10 (Appendix 7). Qualitative analysis is then used to illustrate the associations where appropriate. For each category of response there will be discussion of the predominant trends followed by the exceptions.

The result of the chi-square test for when the children were asked: 'do you think there is life after death?' (Question 11) gave a p value of 0.000. The p value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the two selected locations and how the possibility of life after death is perceived. Therefore, there appears to be an association between location and concepts of the existence of life after death. More than half (52%; 213/406) of the respondents in Birmingham thought there is life after death compared with 43% (152/357) of those in Durham which was therefore the predominant response from both locations. The observed count was up for Birmingham by 19 on the expected count and for Durham it was down by 19 on the expected count (Table 6.15). In Durham more than a quarter (28%; 100/357) of children responded that they 'do not know' if there is life after death compared with 17% (67/406) of those in Birmingham. The observed count was 22 higher than the expected count for Durham and the observed count was 22 less than the expected count for Birmingham (Table 6.15).

In summary, the quantitative analysis revealed that the null hypothesis was not confirmed as there appeared to be an association between location and the perceived existence of life after death.

Table 6.15 Comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 11

Do you think there is life after death?				
Response	Count	Location		Total Respondents
		Birmingham	Durham	
Yes	Observed count	213	152	365
	Expected count	194	171	365
	% Observed	52%	43%	48%
Maybe	Observed count	55	65	120
	Expected count	64	56	120
	% Observed	14%	18%	16%
Do not know	Observed count	67	100	167
	Expected count	89	78	167
	% Observed	17%	28%	22%
No	Observed count	71	40	111
	Expected count	59	52	111
	% Observed	17%	11%	15%
Total Respondents	Observed count	406	357	763
	Expected count	406	357	763
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 23.155; df = 3; *p* value = 0.000 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.13 Graph showing comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 11

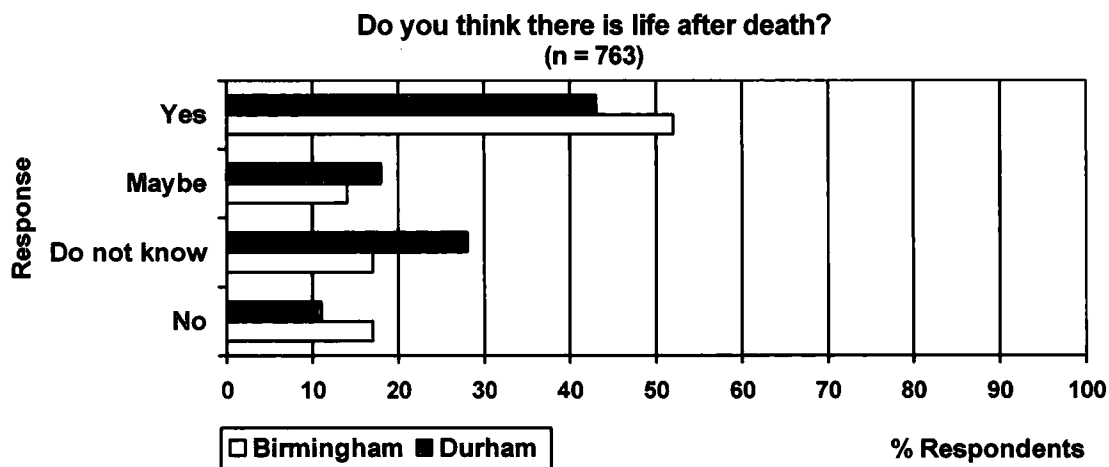


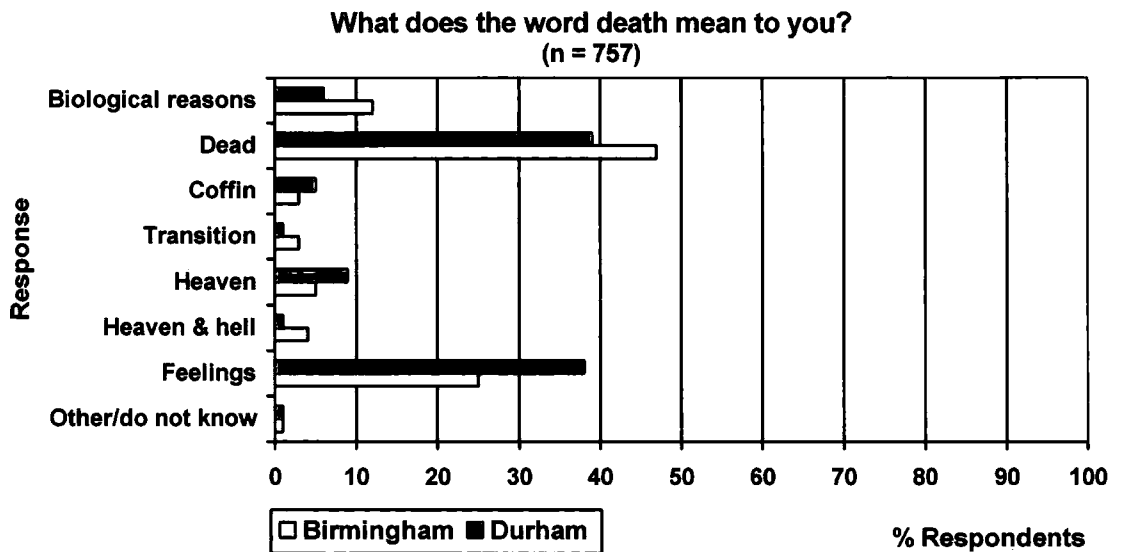
Table 6.16 Comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 7

What does the word death mean to you?				
Response	Count	Location		Total Respondents
		Birmingham	Durham	
Biological reasons	Observed count	48	21	69
	Expected count	37	32	69
	% Observed	12%	6%	9%
Dead	Observed count	191	137	328
	Expected count	175	153	328
	% Observed	47%	39%	43%
Coffin	Observed count	13	16	29
	Expected count	16	14	29
	% Observed	3%	5%	4%
Transition	Observed count	12	5	17
	Expected count	9	8	17
	% Observed	3%	1%	2%
Heaven	Observed count	21	32	53
	Expected count	28	25	53
	% Observed	5%	9%	7%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	17	4	21
	Expected count	11	10	21
	% Observed	4%	1%	3%
Feelings	Observed count	99	134	233
	Expected count	124	109	233
	% Observed	25%	38%	31%
Other/ Do not know	Observed count	3	4	7
	Expected count	4	3	7
	% Observed	1%	1%	1%
Total Respondents	Observed count	404	353	757
	Expected count	404	353	757
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 35.103; df = 7; *p* value = 0.000 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.14 Graph showing comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 7



The chi-square test result for when the children were asked: ‘what does the word death mean to you?’ (Question 7) gave a p value of 0.000. The p value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the locations and how the children there defined ‘death’. Therefore, there appears to be an association between location and concepts of the meaning of death.

There were two predominant categories of response from both locations in response to the meaning of ‘death’ which were ‘dead’ and ‘feelings’. Thus, nearly half (47%; 191/404) of the children in Birmingham gave ‘dead’ as their response compared with more than a third (39%; 137/353) of those in Durham. The observed count was 16 counts higher for Birmingham compared with the expected count. For Durham, the observed count was 16 less than the expected count (Table 6.16).

The qualitative patterns in the data from the 757 respondents provide evidence of a more complex picture as it is the nuances in some of the responses which illustrate that there appears to be an association between location and concepts of the definition of death. Most of the responses reveal, however, the similar use of language and expression by children living in the two generally contrasting regions.

The examples of differences in the nuances of expression between the regions can be illustrated as follows. Some children in Birmingham, for example, saw the timing of one's death as integral to God's schedule. In contrast, this was not evident in the responses from children in Durham.

When **God** believes **it is time** for some to die.

6MB9 [Birmingham; Christian]

When **God** believes **it is time** for someone to die.

6MB2 [Birmingham; 7th Adventist]

When **God** believes **it is time** for someone to die.

6MB12 [Birmingham; Sikh]

Themes that emerged in the predominant category of response of 'dead' such as dying and sleep show the commonality between the two selected locations as the following paired examples illustrate — firstly Durham's and then below Birmingham's.

Death means **killed** no longer alive and death is not pleasant whatever the circumstances.

6SD5 [Durham; no religion]

When someone dies or is **killed** and everyone misses them.

6RB66 [Birmingham; Sikh]

The last stage of your life when you just fall **asleep** and never wake up.

6BCD50 [Durham; no religion]

When somebody is dead you will cry. That someone is **sleeping**.

3GB53 [Birmingham; Christian]

Furthermore, the quantitative analysis demonstrates that more than a third (38%; 134/353) in Durham responded with 'feelings' in comparison with a quarter (25%; 99/404) in Birmingham. The differences between the observed and expected count was more noticeable as it was 25 more for Durham and 25 less for Birmingham (Table 6.16).

When the children reported 'feelings' as the category of response there was much cohesion between those in Birmingham and Durham in the use of language and expression as the patterns in the qualitative data reveal. This was true for whether the focus was on the plain sadness surrounding death or the mixture of feelings which may be felt or relating personal bereavement experiences to the definition of death as the following responses describe.

The word death means a **scary part of natural life**.

6SD64 [Durham; Christian]

It means a **sad time** for most people and me but also a **happy time** because our loved ones are **moving on**.

6RB32 [Birmingham; Christian]

Death is die but I don't really **think** of it because it almost makes me cry because a lot of people have died in **my family** when I was alive.

3SD3 [Durham; Christian]

Reminds you of a person in **your family** who is dead and you will feel sad.

6RB35 [Birmingham; Christian]

In summary, the quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis. The results determined that there appeared to be an association between location and how death was defined. It is of importance to note what the patterns in the qualitative data from the 757 responses revealed. Exploration of the data showed that the general trends were revealed in the category of response of 'dead'. Thus the differences according to location were demonstrated through the nuances of expression and focus in the subject matter as the examples quoted illustrate. If the difference between the two regions is essentially a matter of a less multi-faith dynamic compared with a multi-faith one, then the responses could be expected to reflect that. Careful examination of the data gave no such indication. However, the key themes showed the similarity in the use of language and expression by children in both regions.

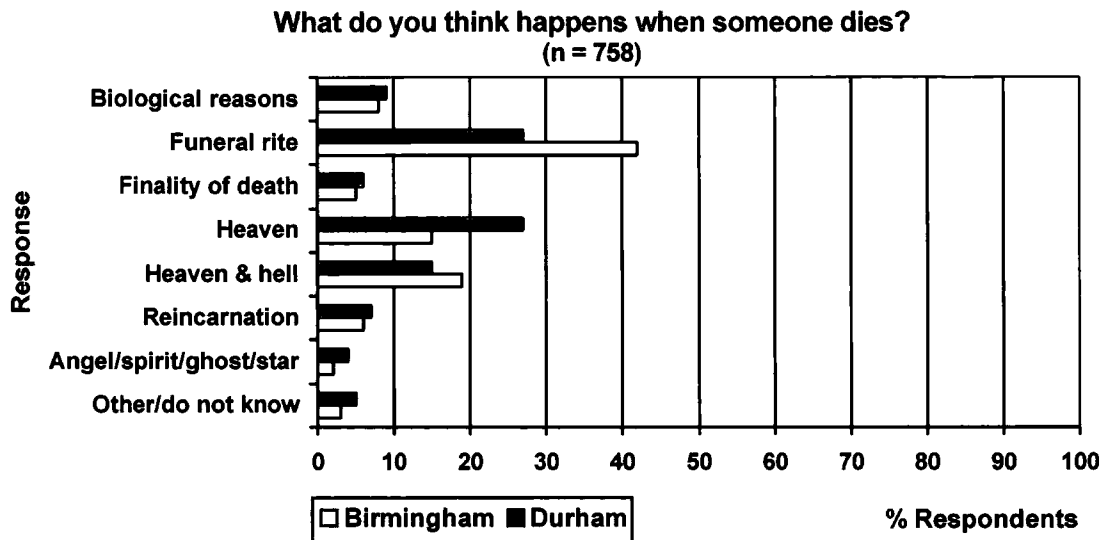
Table 6.17 Comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 8

What do you think happens when someone dies?				
Response	Count	Location		Total Respondents
		Birmingham	Durham	
Biological reasons	Observed count	33	32	65
	Expected count	35	31	65
	% Observed	8%	9%	9%
Funeral rite	Observed count	170	97	267
	Expected count	142	125	267
	% Observed	42%	27%	35%
Finality of death	Observed count	19	21	40
	Expected count	21	19	40
	% Observed	5%	6%	5%
Heaven	Observed count	60	97	157
	Expected count	83	74	157
	% Observed	15%	27%	21%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	75	52	127
	Expected count	67	60	127
	% Observed	19%	15%	17%
Reincarnation	Observed count	26	25	51
	Expected count	27	24	51
	% Observed	6%	7%	7%
Angel/spirit/ghost/star	Observed count	7	14	21
	Expected count	11	10	21
	% Observed	2%	4%	3%
Other/ do not know	Observed count	12	18	30
	Expected count	16	14	30
	% Observed	3%	5%	4%
Total Respondents	Observed count	402	356	758
	Expected count	402	356	758
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 33.845; df = 7; p value = 0.000 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.15 Graph showing comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 8



In response to the question: ‘what do you think happens when someone dies?’ (Question 8) the chi-square test result gave a *p* value of 0.000. The *p* value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between Birmingham and Durham and how what happens when someone dies conceptualized in those places. Therefore, there appears to be an association between location and concepts of what happens when someone dies.

The likelihood is that a key influence in analysing children’s perceptions of what they think happens when someone dies was the ‘funeral rite’ category where a higher proportion (42%; 170/402) in Birmingham expressed this compared with about a quarter (27%; 97/356) in Durham. The observed count was much higher by 28 than the expected count in Birmingham and it was much less by 28 in Durham (Table 6.17). Maybe this result is connected to the possibility of children in a multi-faith region sharing their experiences of funerals and the similarities and differences of the different faith communities’ funeral rites with each other.

The patterns in the qualitative data from the key category of response of 'funeral rite' demonstrate, however, how comparable the responses were from Birmingham and Durham. The similar use of language and expression by many children living in both regions is evident as the examples highlight. The responses are presented as pairs from the two selected locations — firstly Durham and then Birmingham.

People have **funerals**.

6GD52 [Durham; Christian]

The person who has died has a **funeral**.

6MB65 [Birmingham; Buddhist]

More than a quarter (27%; 97/356) of children in Durham reported 'heaven' as their response compared with those in Birmingham (15%; 60/402) as the survey data shows. The observed count for Durham was higher by 23 than the expected count. The observed count for Birmingham was less by 23 than the expected count (Table 6.17).

The patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'heaven' reflect the general trends. One nuance which was recorded as a theme from some of the children in Durham was the notion of heaven being a place where the deceased are able to watch over the living. In contrast, this theme was not expressed by any children in Birmingham.

They go to heaven and **watch over people/us**.

6SD50 [Durham; Christian]

They go to heaven and they don't get older, they **watch over people**.

6HD50 [Durham; Christian]

The qualitative data also reveal that the use of language and expression are analogous from children living in both regions when responding with the category of response of 'heaven'. These descriptions show the children explaining that when someone dies their body is buried or cremated and their soul 'goes up to heaven'.

They **rise up** to heaven, and their body is **buried or burned**.

6BCD54 [Durham; Christian]

They have a funeral and are **buried** and their **soul goes up** to heaven.

6RB64 [Birmingham; Christian]

Furthermore, the quantitative analysis shows that similar proportions gave 'heaven and hell' as the category of response — 19% (75/402) in Birmingham whereas 15% (52/356) in Durham. The observed count was a few more for Birmingham than the expected count and for Durham it was a few less (Table 6.17).

'Heaven and hell' is seen to be a main concept for both locations when analysing the qualitative data. The patterns in the data under the category of response of 'heaven and hell' reflect the general trends. Some children in Birmingham described the combination of God as being in heaven and Satan in hell. The consequence of which is that the deceased would be judged accordingly to join one or the other. These responses were all from children who indicated that they were Christian (Question 19, Appendix 7). There was no evidence of such descriptions in the Durham responses.

They go to heaven or hell. **God in heaven and hell to Satan.**
6CB55 [Birmingham; Christian]
They might go and join **God or Satan.**
6CB59 [Birmingham; Christian]

Similarly, there was another aspect of judgement which only some of the Birmingham children depicted which was the citing of there being an actual day of judgement at some point in the future for all people.

I think when we die we have to wait until **judgement day**. **Judgement day** means the end of the world.
3MB17 [Birmingham; Christian]
Judgement day.
6GB50 [Birmingham; Muslim]

Furthermore, the example by a Sikh in Birmingham reveals how he places the focus on what happens when someone dies on their going to heaven and hell. This is rather than the concept of reincarnation being emphasized and incorporated which is what would be anticipated from a Sikh following Sikh doctrine (Section 2.7). There was no such example in the Durham responses.

Their spirit goes up in the sky by God and God checks if he needs to go to **hell or heaven.**
6GB13 [Birmingham; Sikh]

The patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'heaven and hell' indicate that there is an implied judgement in the vast majority of responses. When the children reported the idea of the 'good' being allowed to enter heaven and the 'bad' being sent to hell, the responses were remarkably similar in both regions. The following paired example is typical.

They go to heaven and hell. **Heaven** people are **good**, **hell** people are **bad**.
It is decided by what they done in life.

6FD17 [Durham; Christian]

They go to heaven or hell. The **good** people go to **heaven** and the **bad** people go to **hell**.

6CB5 [Birmingham; Muslim]

In summary, the quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis. The results showed that there appeared to be an association between location and concepts of what happens when someone dies. It is of equal worth to note what the patterns in the qualitative data from the 758 responses revealed. Exploration of the data showed that the general trends were revealed in the categories of response of 'heaven' and 'heaven and hell'. Thus the notable differences according to location were demonstrated through the nuances of expression and focus in the subject matter as the examples indicated. However, the key themes again showed the similarity in the use of language and expression by children living in both regions.

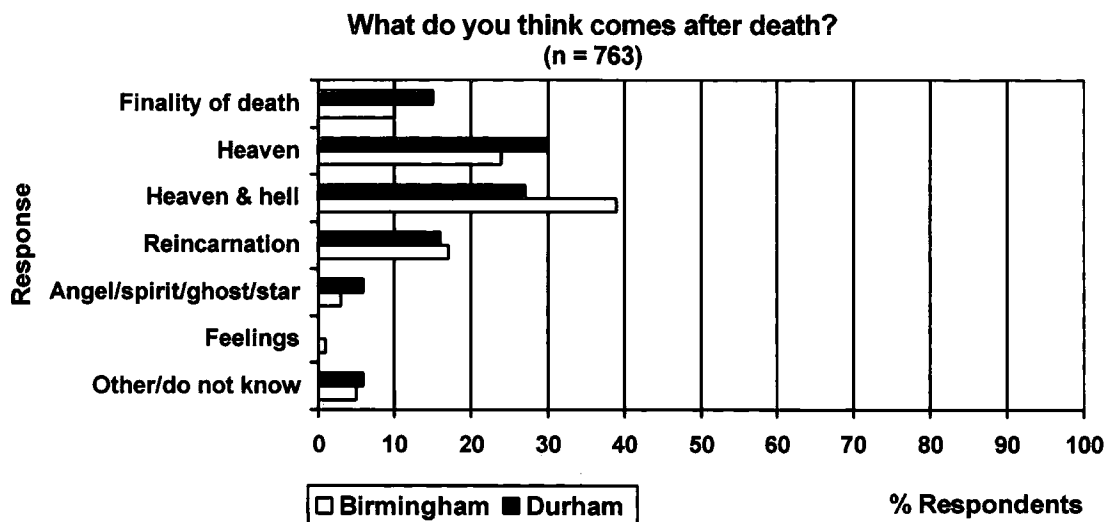
Table 6.18 Comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 10

What do you think comes after death?				
Response	Count	Location		Total Respondents
		Birmingham	Durham	
Finality of death	Observed count	41	52	93
	Expected count	50	44	93
	% Observed	10%	15%	12%
Heaven	Observed count	98	108	206
	Expected count	110	96	206
	% Observed	24%	30%	27%
Heaven & hell	Observed count	159	97	256
	Expected count	136	120	256
	% Observed	39%	27%	34%
Reincarnation	Observed count	69	56	125
	Expected count	67	59	125
	% Observed	17%	16%	16%
Angel/spirit/ ghost/star	Observed count	14	20	34
	Expected count	18	16	34
	% Observed	3%	6%	4%
Feelings	Observed count	5	1	6
	Expected count	3	3	6
	% Observed	1%	0%	1%
Other/ do not know	Observed count	20	23	43
	Expected count	23	20	43
	% Observed	5%	6%	6%
Total Respondents	Observed count	406	357	763
	Expected count	406	357	763
	% Observed	100%	100%	100%

< 1 n.s.

Chi-square = 19.021; df = 6; *p* value = 0.004 so is significant at 99% confidence level

Figure 6.16 Graph showing comparison of Birmingham and Durham children reporting different categories — Question 10



The chi-square test result for the question: 'what do you think comes after death?' (Question 10) gave a *p* value of 0.004. The *p* value indicates that there is a highly significant association between the variables at 99% confidence level but it is unknown where it is in the table. The test of association shows that there is a statistically significant difference between both locations and how they conceive what comes after death. Therefore, there appears to be an association between location and concepts of what comes after death.

From examining the survey data for what comes after death, there were two predominant themes for both the selected locations: 'heaven and hell' and 'heaven'. More children (39%; 159/406) reported 'heaven and hell' in Birmingham compared with over a quarter (27%; 97/357) in Durham. The observed count was much higher by 23 than the expected count for Birmingham. The observed count for Durham was much less by 23 than the expected value (Table 6.18).

The patterns in the qualitative data under the category of response of 'heaven and hell' reflect the general trends. Thus the data revealed that there were some aspects of what is perceived to come after death which were only found in one or other of the regions' responses. Some children in Birmingham, for example, wrote about the deceased being dressed in grave clothes before then making reference to heaven and hell, whereas there were no such descriptions found in the Durham responses.

After death you go into a grave. From the grave they put a **nightie over them**. They will go to hell or heaven.
6RB35 [Birmingham; Christian]

In the same way, it was some of the Birmingham responses which mentioned the combination of burial and cremation as following death along with heaven and hell. In contrast, the Durham responses made no such reference.

Buried. Cremated. Some people go to heaven – good people or hell – bad people. God decides who is good and who is bad.
3GB62 [Birmingham; Muslim]
They get **buried** or **burnt**. The good people go to heaven and the naughty people go to hell. God says that because he is looking at and hearing people.
3GB85 [Birmingham; Muslim]

Similarly, a child in Birmingham demonstrated an awareness of cultural and religious practice which is particularly evident in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region. There was no parallel example from the children in Durham.

They can go to **Bangladesh** or somewhere to be buried in **their country**. Some people go to heaven, the people who don't swear. If they swear they go to hell.
3GB1 [Birmingham; Muslim]

Further investigation of the patterns in the data revealed that it was only some children in Birmingham who quoted there being an actual day of judgement at some point in the future and that God presides as the 'judge' over who is sent to heaven and who goes to hell.

After death there is **judgement day**.
6GB75 [Birmingham; Muslim]
They wait in their grave until **judgement day**.
6RB56 [Birmingham; Muslim]
The **judgement day** about where you will go, Heaven/Hell.
6GB61 [Birmingham; Christian]

Heaven — Christians or hell — non-Christians. **God is the judge** and the angels are the witnesses to what you've done with you're life.
6DB10 [Birmingham; Christian]
They don't come alive again because they're under the ground dead. They go to heaven or hell. The good ones are going to go to heaven and the bad ones are going to hell. **God is the judge**.
3RB70 [Birmingham; Hindu]

The following are examples from some children of non-Christian faith-base in Birmingham who showed some awareness of what would be perceived as being part of a Christian viewpoint concerning concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Section 2.3; 2.7). There were no parallel responses from the children in Durham.

People who are **not a nice** person they will go to **hell**. People who are **good** go to **heaven**. **God decides** this.

6RB3 [Birmingham; Sikh]

Eternal life in heaven (good people go **heaven**, bad people go **hell**) and I think that **God chooses** who's good and bad.

6MB57 [Birmingham; Sikh]

The image of hell in a Muslim's response, also from Birmingham, corresponds to a number of faiths' depictions of implied judgement on the deceased during the course of history, and the theological understanding and interpretation applied (Chapter 2). There was no comparable example among the Durham responses.

Then you go to God. You might go to the bad place or the good place. The good place is heaven. The bad place is hell. God and Jesus decide who goes to the good place and who goes to the bad place. If you go to heaven you eat apples and you have a nice time too. If you go to **hell** God puts a **metal thing through his tongue with fire**.

3GB16 [Birmingham; Muslim]

It was children in Durham, however, who remarked that the deceased would be reunited with others whereas children in Birmingham gave no such indication.

You see God in heaven **people who have died**. People who are **evil like Hitler** will go to **hell**.

6JD2 [Durham; Christian]

Heaven or hell and you may **see your family**.

3GD2 [Durham; Christian]

Exploration of the qualitative data in the 'heaven and hell' category show that there were exceptions too, as many responses from the two locations were similar in the use of language and expression when explaining the implied judgement associated with the deceased being sent to heaven and/or hell. The following example typifies this.

You go to **heaven** in the clouds and some bad people don't. They go to **Hell**.

6BCD60 [Durham; Christian]

Another key influence in the quantitative analysis has been the category of 'heaven'. A slightly higher proportion (30%; 108/357) in Durham gave 'heaven' as the category of response compared with about a quarter (24%; 98/406) in Birmingham. The observed count was 12 more than the expected count for Durham and 12 less for Birmingham (Table 6.18).

Unlike the category of 'heaven and hell', examination of the category of 'heaven' reveals consistency between the regions in the patterns in the data with no obvious differences in the detail and use of language and expression. Thus there are only exceptions to the tendency in this category. The examples cited exemplify the themes children in Birmingham and Durham reported: the deceased being in heaven; their spirit going to heaven; being with God; and images of life in heaven.

Heaven comes after death. So people want to go to heaven.

6BCD71 [Durham; Christian]

The person who is dead they go to **heaven**.

3GB61 [Birmingham; Muslim]

Heaven — their **spirit goes** to heaven and lives with **God**. **Everybody** goes to heaven.

3HD60 [Durham; Christian]

Their **spirit go to heaven**. **God** keeps them safe. **Everybody** go there.

3CB56 [Birmingham; Hindu]

Life again in a different place — **heaven**.

6FD3 [Durham; Christian]

Comes another **life in heaven**.

6RB71 [Birmingham; Muslim]

In summary, analysing the null hypothesis quantitatively showed that it was not confirmed. The results demonstrated that there appeared to be an association between location and how what comes after death was conceptualized by children. It is also pertinent to note what the patterns in the qualitative data from the 763 respondents revealed. Exploration of the data showed that the general trends were revealed in the category of response of 'heaven and hell'. Thus the notable differences according to location were demonstrated through the nuances of expression and focus in the subject matter as the examples illustrated. However, the key themes again showed the similarity in the use of language and expression by children living in both regions.

6.2.9.1 Hypothesis discussion and confirmatory conclusions

The quantitative analysis on each of the four questions through testing the statistical significance of the independent variable location, revealed an association between region and the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Therefore, the null hypothesis that children not living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region are as able as those who do to conceptualize *death* and *life after death* was not confirmed.

Qualitative analysis was used to explore and illustrate the themes of the cross-tabulations by quoting examples of the children's responses. Examination of the qualitative data revealed some subtle differences in the use of language and expression along with the focus of some of the subject matter. There was some evidence for this in all three of the open-ended questions which were analysed as the recorded examples indicated. However, the range of responses from the children from the two selected locations showed that there were exceptions to the findings in the quantitative data as they were comparable in the ability that was demonstrated through the similar use of language and expression.

There is little from other studies which can be compared with the findings of this research. This is because other researchers have appeared to only conduct their work in one location and frequently with small sample numbers invariably below hundred. Location, may mean that a sample has been taken from one region which may include one, two or a few schools (Clark, 1996, Frangoulis *et al.*, 1996, Ng, 1998). Where the sample has been taken from different locations then often the results have not been interpreted to include location and the possible differences in a mono-faith and multi-faith environment as an independent variable. An example of this is 'The Children and Worldviews Project' which has encouraged and enabled children to share their opinions on subjects such as bereavement experiences and whether heaven exists (Erricker *et al.*, 2002, Erricker *et al.*, 1997). As previously indicated, it could have been possible from the data gathered for the 'National Religious Education Festival' of 1997 for analysis to be carried out to test the association of location on the most relevant question concerning the concepts of *death* and *life after death* — Question 3 (Blaylock, 2001a, Blaylock, 2001b, Blaylock *et al.*, 2001, Fageant & Blaylock, 1998, Jepson & Draycott, 2001; Appendix 4; 9; 10; Section 5.2). However, no such analysis is available for comparison with the data from this research project.

6.3 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

Four null hypotheses have been postulated and the patterns of association between four independent variables examined — age, faith, gender and location.

1. Age: Younger children are as able as older children to conceptualize *death and life after death*
2. Faith: Children with no faith-base are as able as those with a faith-base to conceptualize *death and life after death*
3. Gender: Boys are as able as girls to conceptualize *death and life after death*
4. Location: Children not living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region are as able as those who do to conceptualize *death and life after death*

Each null hypothesis was tested for evidence of the patterns of association through a quantitative test of association between the variables using a test of significance. The findings of testing the statistical significance are summarized in Table 6.19

Table 6.19 Summary of quantitative analysis

Question	Age <i>p</i> value	Significant	Faith <i>p</i> value	Significant	Gender <i>p</i> value	Significant	Location <i>p</i> value	Significant
Q11	0.006	Yes 99% level	0.005	Yes 99% level	0.053	No	0.000	Yes 99% level
Q7	0.000	Yes 99% level	0.000	Yes 99% level	0.150	No	0.000	Yes 99% level
Q8	0.000	Yes 99% level	0.008	Yes 99% level	0.430	No	0.000	Yes 99% level
Q10	0.000	Yes 99% level	0.000	Yes 99% level	0.040	Yes 95% level	0.004	Yes 99% level

The results of the analysis were as follows:

Age hypothesis: quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis.

Faith hypothesis: quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis.

Gender hypothesis: quantitative analysis did confirm the null hypothesis, except on Question 10 which did not do so.

Location hypothesis: quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis.

Therefore, it was only the gender hypothesis which confirmed the null hypothesis, with the exception of Question 10 which asks: 'What do you think comes after death?'

Each results area was then complemented by qualitative analysis to explore possible trends and exceptions as appropriate. A range of examples of the children's responses were used to illustrate the findings and were evaluated.

The implications and potential for this research to contribute to a revision of Religious Education are discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION OF DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S CONCEPTS OF DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

7.1 OUTLINE OF CHAPTER

The chapter explores the current place of Religious Education in developing children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* from which the implications of my research are considered. Why Religious Education is the most relevant part of the school curriculum in which to explore these concepts with children of all ages and backgrounds as the data evidence from the research project confirm, is presented (Chapter 6).

There are three aspects of Religious Education which when combined demonstrate and reinforce the exploration of these concepts in this area of the school curriculum:

1. The nature and style of Religious Education
2. The inclusion of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* through investigating rites of passage and discussing ultimate questions
3. Through examining the major world religions' teaching on *death* and *life after death*

The chapter discusses each of these in turn.

The chapter begins, however, by discussing how the perception of death as a common taboo in Western post-modern society deterred some educationalists and had a modest impact on the research project. The nature of the taboo is not detailed here as it was discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.10).

Consideration of the detail of the presentation and discussion about each of the major world religions' teaching on *death* and *life after death*, rites of passage, and ultimate questions are in Chapters 2 and 3.

7.2 EXTENT AND ATTITUDES TO THE DEATH TABOO

Considerable difficulties could have arisen before being granted permission to go into schools to investigate children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*. The taboo, however, did have some limited influence on the project as some teachers were reluctant to co-operate with the research. The resistance was reflected in various ways and focused on concerns about whether children should be presented with an opportunity to discuss *death* and *life after death*, and whether they were capable of so doing.

7.2.1 The schools

The vast majority of schools which were approached to explore the possibility of distributing the main research study questionnaire to the children in Years 3 and 6 were unhesitatingly positive and supportive. The headteachers, Religious Education co-ordinators, and class teachers were in most cases, eager to do anything they could to help the research to be a positive, worthwhile and memorable experience for the children and worthwhile for the researcher. This confirmed their recognition of the validity and merit of the project and what could be its constructive influence on some incompletely and obscurely worded statements in Religious Education syllabi as analysed (Section 3.3).

However, some resistance was encountered. There were four schools only out of the seventeen contacted where senior staff were unwilling to co-operate. The senior staff of two schools in both Birmingham and Durham was unwilling to co-operate and allow the distribution of the questionnaire. This was despite initial contact being positive towards the research and appointments being made for visits to the schools to discuss the arrangements for scheduling the project. Most of the opposition came from the headteachers who apparently were concerned about either children's and/or parents' possible reaction to the subject matter. They were not prepared to reassure colleagues, parents and governors as appropriate. The attitudes expressed are noted in order to better understand the issues.

The headteacher of a Roman Catholic school in Birmingham felt that it was inappropriate for the children in her care, in either the Year 3 or Year 6 class, to be exploring the concepts of *death* and *life after death* in the weeks immediately after the bombing of the Twin Towers in New York, USA on 11 September 2001. She believed that 'the children should not discuss these concepts' and that 'there was no need for them to do so' in the aftermath of that tragedy and that, in fact, to do so 'would upset them'³³. Did the headteacher seriously consider that the children could be exempt from hearing about and seeing news images of the bombing outside of the school environment, notably through the media or at home? It would seem that this would have been impossible given the extensive news coverage and that the incident was a major and frequent topic of conversation. Unanswered was the question: When, with whom and at what stage would such headteachers allow children to discuss the concepts of *death* and *life after death*?

In a Church of England school it was the deputy-headteacher who was also the Religious Education co-ordinator, who objected strongly to children exploring these concepts as she thought it was inappropriate and unnecessary for them to do so. Additionally, she believed that 'they would end up traumatized from the experience and need subsequent counselling'³⁴. The headteacher of a county school in Durham made similar pronouncements concerning children exploring issues of *death* and *life after death*. These were expressed belatedly in a forceful manner soon after arrival at the school when the researcher was ready to start distributing the questionnaire. The necessary arrangements had already been made with the headteacher and relevant class teachers all of whom had previously agreed to the distribution of the main study questionnaire to children in the two selected age groups. The children and their class teachers were ready for the research to commence when the change occurred³⁵. A Religious Education co-ordinator in another Durham school informed the researcher that she 'obviously did not have any children of her own, because otherwise she would not be hoping to carry out any research with children on the subject of *death* and *life after death*.' Indeed, it should be 'known that it is inappropriate to wish to find out children's views on death'³⁶.

³³ Reference to face-to-face conversation recorded in fieldwork notebook.

³⁴ Reference to telephone and face-to-face conversations recorded in fieldwork notebook.

³⁵ Reference to face to face and telephone conversations recorded in fieldwork notebook.

³⁶ Reference to face-to-face conversation recorded in fieldwork notebook.

Before the research could be conducted in the Jewish school in Birmingham, the headteacher had to consult with the Rabbi who was the school's Religious Education adviser. He gave permission for the questionnaire to be distributed to the older, Year 6 children but not to the younger, Year 3 children. He considered 'it was unnecessary for the younger children to be thinking about *death* and the possibility of *life after death*'³⁷.

Each of these experiences reveals how some adults treat the discussion of death as a taboo subject and consequently, contribute to the extent of the taboo in communities and wider society (Section 2.10). They are also helping to perpetuate it for the next generation through the children whose lives they are a part. It would seem that these adults are trying to protect and shield children from the realities and risk-factors of 'living life'. They want to cocoon the children. It appears that they believe that by so doing it would guard against and indeed, probably somehow prevent the children from the prospect of sadness, discomfort, upset or even addressing the issues.

In marked contrast to these unsupportive attitudes, there were teachers who acknowledged that there is a taboo of death and that there is a need to lessen the extent, through for example, amending Religious Education syllabi. This influenced their positive attitude towards the research project.

7.2.2 The children

None of the children who participated in the research project appeared to have the same sense of the taboo of death compared with that expressed by some adults.

In the interviews for Pilot Study No.2, children in both age groups commented that they appreciated the opportunity to share their views about *death* and the possibility of *life after death*³⁸. Some of them went further by adding that they would value the chance to discuss these issues in school. Informally, during the distribution of the main research study questionnaire, children in both age groups from the two selected locations made similar remarks³⁹. Several children spoke of their gratitude for having been able to do so, especially when they had experienced personal bereavement affecting family, friends or pets. Some children indicated these personal views in their

³⁷ Reference to telephone conversation recorded in fieldwork notebook.

³⁸ Reference to transcripts of Pilot Study No.2 interviews.

³⁹ Reference to conversation recorded in fieldwork notebook.

responses to the questionnaire, especially to Questions 7, 9, 13, 14, 18 and 22 (Appendix 7).

Some Year 6 girls shared their heartfelt concern for a school friend who had recently experienced firstly, the death of her aunt and then her mother. She had told them that nobody in the family had spoken with her about it. The friends said that they 'felt very sorry' for her and so they were trying to look after her, especially because they knew that she was 'very sad'. They had talked with her about what happened and how she felt⁴⁰.

This example suggests and is evidence from my research project that by the time children are 10-11 years of age (Year 6), in their last year of primary school, some of them are becoming aware of and have experienced aspects of death being a taboo. Would it be possible for some children to react by being warily cautious about when, where and with whom they might discuss concepts of *death* and *life after death*?

There is further evidence which demonstrates that children are willing and able to discuss a raft of issues among themselves, including concepts of *death* and *life after death*. Children participating, for example, in 'The Children and Worldviews Project' by emailing one another through the website message board frequently share their opinions on aspects such as bereavement experiences and the possibility of the existence of heaven (Erricker *et al.*, 2002, Erricker *et al.*, 1997). During the 1970s several groups of primary school age children in Shropshire had conversations tape-recorded with their knowledge and consent. Death in relation to prayer and the dying was explored following 'a long discussion' which had mainly focused 'on the nature of prayer' (Herbert, 1977). The cousin of one of the girls in the class had died in the week prior to participating in the discussion. The child's death was revealed by the children as a consequence of the class discussion. Teachers and other adults need to be able to listen and be prepared to respond in such situations (Frank & Pearson, 1998, Gatcliffe, 1988). Christopher Herbert summarized the value of the Shropshire children's debates:

At one level, and in some ways the most important part of our 'research', the project was all about *listening*: listening to the nuances, the subtle shifts, the colour and tone of what they were saying. I am certain that learning how to *listen* to children is vital to any kind of teaching, and in religious education where youngsters are grappling with meaning, doubly so. (Herbert, 1977)

⁴⁰ Reference to conversation recorded in fieldwork notebook.

7.2.3 Response to adult inhibition of death taboo

From my research it is apparent that teachers and parents need to have an informed and greater awareness of the nature and issues of the taboo of death and its impact on children. The descriptions of some school responses summarized in Section 7.2.1 reflect the reluctance by some adults to be willing and able to discuss these concepts with children in an informed manner. This is in contrast to the children's responses summarized in Section 7.2.2

Martin Palmer asserts in 'Death Rites', which was written for teachers:

Sensitive, open and intelligent exploration of the subject of death is an undertaking which few teachers feel prepared for or willing to tackle. This is partly due to a general reticence about death and which is one of the peculiar features of late 20th century Britain. But this reticence is compounded by an individual fear and uncertainty about disturbing such a difficult area. Yet we do ourselves and our children a great disservice if we ignore or trivialise death. (Palmer, 1983: 1)

Widely held perspectives on death in the USA reflect very closely those in Britain (Feifel, 1963, Glaser & Strauss, 1965). Violent deaths are reported daily by the media which seems to suggest people are capable of accepting death as an everyday occurrence, but in reality they are 'unwilling to talk about the process of dying itself' (Glaser & Strauss, 1965: 3).

Death is, after all, one of the characteristic features of human existence, and the people of any society must find the means to deal with this recurring crisis. Presumably one way to deal with it is to talk and read about it. Curiously, however, Americans generally seem to prefer to talk about particular deaths rather than about death in the abstract. Death as such has been described as a taboo topic for us, and we engage in very little abstract or philosophical discussion of death. (Glaser & Strauss, 1965: 3)

Where the extent of the taboo is less prevalent or where there are adults for whom death is not a taboo subject, then the children's concepts could be expected to be more open. This can be helped when children are able to be in situations where they can explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* in a caring, enquiring and thought-provoking environment. Children's willingness and ability to discuss these concepts is supported through their use of language and expression, while drawing on their observations and experiences, including bereavement and any aspects of personal faith. The range of children's responses presented under the different categories of response to Questions 7, 8 and 10 from the perspectives of age, faith, gender and location clearly

demonstrate this willingness and ability (Chapter 6). Consequently, the evidence of my research is that this is regardless of the children's age, faith, gender or location. The implication is that children could then be in a better position to discover and enhance their understanding other people's concepts of *death* and *life after death* as well as acknowledge and accept that their own views may evolve as they journey through life. This process would also minimize potential confusion surrounding the concepts for people of different ages, faith, gender and location.

The findings of my research have shown that even if death remains a common taboo, children will still have ideas and beliefs about *death* and *life after death* (Chapter 6). Their apparent natural curiosity about most things and in this subject will not disappear. There will always be children who will find ways of investigating these concepts and, in the process, share their thoughts and beliefs with others. The problem is that this can inevitably lead to children being avoidably less well-informed or misunderstand or be confused about some aspects of the topic. This consequence should be widely considered to be educationally unacceptable as it is unjust to children.

If children are encouraged to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* then it would follow that the continuance and extent of the death taboo would decline and be quickly broken (Henshall, 1997, Walter, 1994; Section 2.10). The taboo seems to be perpetuated in part because as children become adults, many perpetuate the taboo attitude of parents and family across Western society to discuss the concepts. It appears that there is a process taking place during a person's development from childhood, through the teenage years and into adulthood and it is related to their experiences of life which can enhance death as a taboo.

Another reason for children being able to explore these concepts is that it would help them to be better prepared for any bereavement they subsequently experience as they would have a greater awareness of mortality — their own and other people's, death rites and the possibility of life after death. A Year 6 girl tellingly wrote as her response to what the word 'death' means to her (Question 7):

This word means a lot to me it can bring tears to my eyes! It signifies never seeing life as meaningless.
6GB79 [Muslim]

Martin Palmer's comments endorse the importance of allowing and encouraging children to have the opportunity to discuss *death* and *life after death*:

Yet without mourning, the suppressed emotions can wreak havoc and it is sometimes this emotion which scares people most. Many children suppress either actual experience of such a loss, or fear of such a loss occurring. To discuss death is to run the risk of unleashing this – yet perhaps that is one vital and essential role which the sensitive teacher can undertake and thus help to develop within the child a greater personal maturity. Ignoring death doesn't make it go away! (Palmer, 1983: 1)

7.3 NATURE AND STYLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The nature and style of Religious Education places it in a unique position in the school curriculum for exploring the concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children as inferred and expounded in Chapters 2; 3 and 4.

'Nature and style' is being used to mean the way in which Religious Education allows children to have space and time within the school environment to engage with beliefs and practices of the challenges, meaning and mysteries of life which are also at the heart of the major world religions. Religious Education can encourage children to discover, explore and reflect on these beliefs and practices as well as to express their response to them (QCA, 1998a, QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c, QCA, 2000, QCA, 2004; Chapter 3). Children are then in an informed position to compare and contrast their beliefs and practices with their peers', including those associated with a faith community. The manner in which Religious Education is taught and presented to children and the way they are encouraged to engage with the issues before them is inextricably linked to the nature and style of the subject. Religious Education can provide a special combination and setting for exploring various pertinent, relevant and potentially life-challenging concepts which are particularly associated with the teaching, beliefs and practices of the different faith communities. These are in fact, first and foremost, applicable to people in their everyday lives which will include those holding a particular religious faith and those of none.

Religious Education can be most effectively presented as a forum where children are given the opportunity to be able to study in a secure environment. Given time to contemplate, articulate, discuss, explore and share their own opinions and experiences, beliefs and practices, hopes and fears, and to discover and become informed respectfully of each other's perspectives. This is independent of any association with a faith

community. Many commentators of Religious Education, for example across the UK, acknowledge this special advantage despite their differing approaches to its teaching, content and purpose (Cooling, 1994, Erricker *et al.*, 1997, Grimmit *et al.*, 1991, Hammond *et al.*, 1990, Hull, 1997, Jackson, 1997, Watson, 1993) Children can examine the impact and possible difference that these factors seem to have on people's attitudes and lifestyle. Children then discover that their opinions are may be the same or different to varying degrees. The forum is a place where each child may appreciate being heard and valued and, in so doing, be able to develop a greater awareness and understanding of mutual respect and tolerance. Children can be made aware that their concepts may be enhanced, adapted or changed as they experience more of life, and that that is part of the process of engaging with life's issues.

School becomes a familiar environment for children, a place of discovery and learning where 'the education of the whole child' should be valued, striven for and upheld. In this way, children are continually presented with challenging and exciting opportunities where their minds can be stretched and skills and concepts developed. Schools like to see themselves as caring communities where mutual respect and support proliferate, as children are stimulated, encouraged and helped to prepare for the next stage of their lives, leading into adulthood. There is usually an awareness and celebration of diversity. Religious Education is uniquely placed to keep demonstrating, enhancing and exploring these values and ethos.

There are times when school communities experience bereavement, when a member of that community dies or someone associated with it dies (Yule & Gold, 1993). Sometimes these deaths are more understandably expected when the deceased was suffering from a life-limiting illness. On other occasions, death may be sudden, possibly as a result of an accident. These latter deaths can be perceived as being more traumatic for children as well as others in the community to manage and reconcile.

Whenever a school community faces bereavement there needs to be space and time made available to grieve (Brown, 1999, Clark, 1996, Leaman, 1995, Lines, 1999, Lines, 2000). Religious Education is an ideal context in which this can take place and for it to become part of the school culture. The evidence of my research project suggests that ~~children were willing and able to discuss~~ *death* and *life after death* regardless of age, faith, gender or location (Section 6.2.6; 6.2.7; 6.2.8; 6.2.9). There were no subsequent reports of any of the children surveyed being adversely affected. It would be

appropriate and logical for schools to consider having a 'bereavement school policy'. Erica Brown's work, for example, provides clear, concise and sensitive material for producing meaningful, practical and helpful guidelines for such a school policy (Brown, 1999). If the exploration of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* becomes or is already part of a Religious Education curriculum then that would surely aid any period of bereavement affecting the school community. This process would go some way to providing an holistic approach to each child's education — 'the education of the whole child'.

7.4 INCLUSION OF THE CONCEPTS OF DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The concepts of *death* and *life after death* are most frequently considered in the context of rites of passage and through the use of ultimate questions in Religious Education syllabi and thus providing the opportunity for children to examine them (Chapters 2; 3). This was previously shown in the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* (Section 3.3). The teaching and insights that the different faith communities have on the nature of *death* and the belief and hope in *life after death* can be a useful link with rites of passage and underpinning ultimate questions when investigating these concepts with children.

In the teaching of these concepts, recognition would be made of the individual child's experiences and thus being aware of 'where the child is at'. The teaching would draw on their life experiences whether or not they have yet experienced bereavement and/or are associated with a faith community.

Effective Religious Education teaching uses a range of resources which are available for use in schools from books, posters, video and film, the internet, museums and art galleries, places of worship, to people's narratives, especially those with relevant experience to share including those who belong to a faith community. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has advocated the value and thereby, the use of members of faith communities in presenting the narrative of their faith experience to others (Williams, 2004a, Williams, 2004b).

Theological education can be just as much the unexpected encounter with another believer's vision as it is the absorption of a biblical idea or a doctrinal formula. (Williams, 2004a)

The researcher was able to discuss with the Archbishop and establish that there were parallels with what he was advocating as the premise for theological education with Religious Education. 'The narratives of people's lives [including death and bereavement] should be shared, valued and reflected upon in order for the recipient to become enriched, grow and develop concepts' (Williams, 2004b).

As a result of the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* and the findings of the main research study questionnaire, it has become clear that Religious Education syllabi should also plan and advocate that the concepts of *death* and *life after death* are revisited (Section 3.3; Chapter 6). This would enable re-exploration during the children's education and development. This would enable children to develop their concepts further by growing in their awareness of the complexities of the issues and their ability to express them as they progress.

7.4.1 Exploring the concepts of death and life after death through ultimate questions

Ultimate questions are an integral part of Religious Education as they are those ontological questions which are concerned with the meaning and mystery of life (Section 3.3; 3.4.). The main research study questionnaire was designed to include a series of ultimate questions for the children to respond (Section 5.4.5). Therefore, the concepts of *death* and *life after death* can easily be explored, integrated and discussed in this manner. Exploration of ultimate questions is something all children can share in (Watson, 1993).

David Winkley and Sandy Sasso are two examples of those who argue the importance of children being given the opportunity to question and the process of their questioning (Sasso, 2001, Winkley, 1994, Winkley, 1995). The process allows children to develop concepts and consequently, could aid their spiritual nurturing and growth.

When exploring ultimate questions with children it is important that they feel secure and comfortable when and with whom they share their opinions, so that the experience can be a positive and beneficial one. They also need to know that they can be completely open and honest, and that their peers and the adults working with them will treat them with respect. The evidence in this research supports the notion that primary school age children appear to value the opportunity to think through some of life's seemingly more difficult and challenging questions and issues (Chapter 6). They

are capable of, and usually keen to bring to the discussion, knowledge and understanding from their personal experiences at any age, and those of each other's, as seems appropriate to them. This was especially evident in the analysis on age and location (Section 6.2.6; 6.2.9). My research shows that if they belong to a faith community, then they frequently convey those beliefs and practices too (Section 6.2.7). In this way they can learn from each other. Children regularly seem to have an ability to pragmatically reveal insight into an issue or dilemma which may be lost or stultified in adulthood. This appears to surprise many adults who often, mistakenly, try to be over-protective and shield children from the reality of which most of them seem to be well aware. Most importantly, children appreciate being listened to and consequently having a forum where that can readily occur. (Blaylock, 2001a, Blaylock, 2001b, Blaylock *et al.*, 2001, Erricker *et al.*, 2002, Erricker *et al.*, 1997, Herbert, 1977, Jepson & Draycott, 2001).

Robert Coles, professor of psychiatry and medical humanities, University of Harvard, in his book 'The Spiritual Life of Children', draws on his experiences of listening to children for over thirty years from around the world (Coles, 1992). He asserts why adults should have this type of encounter with children and consequently journey with them, even for 'just one stop', on their religious quest as they each wonder at the meaning and purpose of life and contemplate the prospect of life after death.

So it is we connect with one another, move in and out of one another's lives, teach and heal and affirm one another, across space and time – all of us wanderers, explorers, adventurers, stragglers, and rambles, sometimes tramps or vagabonds, even fugitives, but now and then pilgrims: as children, as parents, as old ones about to take that final step, to enter that territory whose character none of us here ever knows. Yet how young we are when we start wondering about it all, the nature of the journey and of the final destination. (Coles, 1992: 335)

7.4.2 Exploring the concept of death as a rite of passage

As was discussed in Chapter 2, death is widely viewed as a rite of passage by members of societies and faith communities alike across the world. Various beliefs and practices characterize each rite of passage (Collinson & Miller, 1990). The exploration of rites of passage is part of Religious Education and they are advocated in Religious Education syllabi for county and faith schools and Government publications, in particular, the Model Syllabuses (Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education, 1994, QCA, 1998a, QCA, 1998b, QCA, 1998c, QCA, 2000, Shedden & Bellett, 2000,

Standing Conference, 1995a, Standing Conference, 1995b; Chapter 3). Death needs to be precisely identified as a rite of passage in Religious Education syllabi as the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* revealed (Section 3.3).

Birth, initiation which frequently takes place during puberty, marriage, and death, are the main rites of passage and which the faith communities have doctrine, beliefs and practices related to them.

Funerals have three main functions: disposal of the body, accounting for the dead person's spirit, and dealing with the needs of those left behind. Furthermore, death, like birth, is a natural event which cries out for meaning. Thus in death rites we can see very clearly the fusion of the main teachings of the faith and the fears and hopes of the believers. (Palmer, 1983: 1)

Martin Palmer makes the connection between the teaching, beliefs and practices of the faith communities and the need for there to be death rites for the community, especially the bereaved, and hence death as a rite of passage.

The children's responses to the main research study questionnaire showed their awareness of death rites regardless of age, faith, gender or location (Chapter 2; Section 6.2.6; 6.2.7; 6.2.8; 6.2.9). These findings were particularly evident in the range of responses to Question 8 (Appendix 7).

7.4.3 Exploring the concepts of death and life after death through various faith communities' teaching

Each religion contains teaching about the place of *death* in relation to how life should be lived, its purpose, and how they connect to a belief and hope in *life after death* (Chapter 2). Each of the faith communities has a long tradition of rituals demonstrating their care for the dying, procedure for the disposal of the body, care and comfort for the bereaved. In addition, a funeral service to celebrate the life of the deceased and acknowledgement of the hope of *life after death*, and subsequently keeping and cherishing the memory of the deceased.

An awareness of various aspects of the faith communities' teaching was evident in the children's responses to the main research study questionnaire (Chapter 6). The analysis on children's faith-base particularly substantiates this (Section 6.2.7). Some children in their response to Question 19 indicated personal, maybe family association between two faiths, for example there were nine children who answered that they were

Hindu/Sikh and less commonly, two children who were Christian/Muslim (Appendix 7). One child was Christian/Sikh, one was Christian/Jewish and another Hindu/Muslim. This could also influence their concepts of *death* and *life after death* while Religious Education could potentially widen rather than confuse their understanding.

The researcher was involved with writing a teaching resource publication to be used with primary school age children (Jepson & Draycott, 2001; Chapter 5; Appendix 9; 10). In the 'Introduction' to 'Listening to Children Talk about Death, Dying, and Life After Death' the link between the concepts of *death* and *life after death* in the religions and Religious Education was given:

All religious traditions, and indeed non-theistic life stances, have insights to offer about death, dying and life after death, which means that for RE to ignore these dimensions does both the religion(s) and our pupils a disservice. (Jepson & Draycott, 2001: 22)

The teaching resource suggested to teachers that:

The practices which surround death and dying have developed out of and reflect beliefs which offer insights into what the religion teaches about the after-life and the experience of adherents in finding strength and comfort in their beliefs. The rituals surrounding death rites reflect the beliefs and experience of the faith community. It is important that any curriculum experience which focuses on such practices takes sufficient account of the beliefs and experiences reflected in and through them. (Jepson & Draycott, 2001: 22)

If there is a thorough exploration of the teaching, beliefs and practices of the faith communities' concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children, then they should be more accurately informed. They would have a greater depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding *death* and *life after death* as well as more appreciation of the core values of the various faith traditions. Children would be able to compare and contrast their individual or personal perceptions of the concepts with those of the faith communities which often involve school friends. Some children, for example, would discover that they hold a mainly Christian view whereas others would realize they have much in common with a Hindu perspective on life after death. This would be regardless of whether the children say they belong to that or another faith community or not. As a result of some of the findings from this research project, this exploration would also help to minimize the potential for inconsistencies and even seeming contradictions in children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Chapter 6). By discovering and learning about what the faith communities' views and practices

concerning *death* and *life after death*, the children would therefore develop a more accurate and sophisticated use and expression of the language associated with these concepts. The evidence from my research further demonstrates that children would also feel more confident about sharing their opinions and be able to do so in a variety of ways both verbally and in writing.

7.4.4 Implications of this research for Religious Education

Analysis of the four independent variables of age, faith, gender and location and the patterns of association between children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*, when examined with the patterns in the qualitative data, have implications for the teaching of Religious Education:

- The test of significance of age shows that there is a need to approach the teaching of the different age groups of children — 7-8 and 10-11 year olds, in different ways (6.2.6). However, the findings from the qualitative data reveal that there is a range of responses within each age group. The paired examples quoted in Chapter 6 confirm this. Teachers should be alert and aware of the need to accommodate such diversity. These findings should help to reinforce the reliability of good practice.
- The quantitative data for faith show that those recorded as of no faith-base had less recognition of the concepts. Here again, the qualitative data show considerable variation in recorded details of the concepts to the extent that some of no faith-base provided comments about, for example, heaven. These findings have been discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 (Section 6.2.7). As also discussed in Chapter 6, those ascribing to a particular faith show considerable variation in the influence of the specific faith community's doctrine and practices. These more complex differences should be taken into account by those responsible for Religious Education too.
- The quantitative gender findings imply that there is no necessity to make any distinctions between the teaching of boys and girls (6.2.8). The qualitative data as indicated by the paired responses quoted in Chapter 6 also reflect this.
- The location findings — both the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that there is a need to recognize that different approaches in methods and content of

addressing Religious Education are desirable and necessary to consciously respond to regional cultural and faith differences. These aspects have been identified and discussed in detail in 6.2.9.

The implications summarized confirm that teachers should recognize the importance and need to modify their presentation of Religious Education in the light of the quantitative findings. They should be concurrently alert to and respond to the likely range of child responses as illustrated by the qualitative data discussed in Chapter 6. These data provide reliable evidence in place of likely former anecdotal assumptions which may have been made and for teachers to respond with greater confidence.

This summary of the findings from the quantitative and qualitative research could contribute to substantiated guidelines for those with responsibility for Religious Education and its implementation. Future revision of Religious Education syllabi should take account of these findings in order to progress the value and meaningfulness of Religious Education and the teaching of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Section 3.3). This could have implications for some of the other concepts considered in the differing Religious Education syllabi.

Religious Education is one of the four compulsory subjects in the curriculum. The other three are English, mathematics and science. Consequently, consideration of the topics of ultimate questions and rites of passage fit more recognizably under Religious Education than the other compulsory subjects or under subjects such as music or health education or citizenship (Claire, 2001). Thus Religious Education is the most relevant place in the school curriculum to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* with children of different ages, faith, gender and location. Whether the children belong to a faith community or not and regardless of whether they have yet experienced personal bereavement or not, Religious Education is particularly an appropriate subject area for children to be given the opportunity to discuss these concepts. It is an area of the curriculum where children are often particularly used to in depth discussion and reflection on what they, their peers and other members of society believe and practice.

As a result of children being given the opportunity to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* in a constructive and informative manner then the taboo of death will be challenged and the cycle of taboo should stand a better chance of being broken rather than perpetuated.

Children's ability and views matter and they need to be given voice, space and a place in order for them to grow in awareness. Their being given the chance to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* constitutes adults being proactive in listening to children and encouraging and facilitating their listening to others. As Brenda Watson advocated:

Effective RE would take such reflection [personal experience] a stage further. It would discuss specifically religious views on the purpose of life and attitudes to death. It would also discuss how general experience may be potentially seen as religious experience. Words such as 'spiritual' would probably form part of the discussion. (Watson, 1993: 77)

Children would therefore be better equipped with skills, language, knowledge and awareness for life and living if they were given the opportunity to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* during their childhood.

Adults working with children need to trust them and help them to trust themselves. This amounts to affirmation. Teachers need to help children to draw on their own experience and to learn to recognize it, and its value to themselves without value judgement. By allowing children the space, time and energy to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* through Religious Education, teachers would be pro-actively demonstrating these principles, and therefore, reflect the awareness and understanding of the 'education of the whole child' which is fundamentally the purpose of Religious Education.

In addition, by schools being actively willing to incorporate the concepts of *death* and *life after death* into the Religious Education curriculum the central principle of ERA 1988 'which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life' would be fulfilled (1988; Section 3.2). The quantitative and qualitative data from this research add considerable evidence to support this.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Evidence from my research shows that it has become clear that children need and therefore, should be given the opportunity to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Chapter 6). This is counter to some adults' attitudes to avoiding the subject of death or who consider that children probably do not have the maturity to consider these concepts or indeed, should be shielded from engaging with them. The cycle of perpetuating death as a taboo, particularly prevalent in Western post-modern society, needs to be challenged. The truth is of paramount importance.

School is an advantageous and universally available place where meaningful consideration of the search of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* should occur, especially as school is a familiar environment for discovery, learning and understanding for children. Religious Education is the most relevant area of the school curriculum where children's discovery, learning and understanding can be focused on the exploration of these concepts through investigating ultimate questions with the rites of passage and doctrines of the major world religions. Children's knowledge and perceptions of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* would deepen and develop if they had an awareness of the doctrine and death rites of the world religions which was informed. They would have a wider understanding of how their thinking may relate or be informed by the teaching, beliefs and practices of the faith communities.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.1 SUMMARY

In the Introduction it was stated that the research project focused on exploring the following questions on the concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Section 1.3):

1. What are primary school age children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*?
2. What is the place of the concepts in the teaching of Religious Education?

It is from this basis that the methodology was developed to investigate:

- What concepts of *death* and *life after death* do primary school age children have and express?
- If and to what extent are children's concepts associated with demographic factors such as age and gender?
- If and to what extent are children's concepts associated with environmental factors such as belonging to a faith community and living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region?

Consequently:

- How might these research findings impact on Religious Education syllabi in different environments?

To achieve this, the literature concerning different aspects of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* and their place in Religious Education, and consequently, the relational interaction of the pertinent issues raised by these concepts, was reviewed. Firstly, the understanding of death in the context of rites of passage in each of the six major world religions through their doctrines and death rites was considered as well as reference to those for whom death marks the end of existence (Chapter 2). Death as a taboo and the impact that it has on discussing *death* and *life after death* with children was also deliberated in Chapter 2. The place of Religious Education in the English school system was presented and this in consequence was followed by a study of the place of *death* and *life after death* in the Religious Education syllabi in England (Chapter 3). The literature concerning research on the concepts of *death* and *life after death* was then reviewed (Chapter 4). The review focused on the research conducted on

children. There was also a review of some of the influential research within the context of Religious Education, on children's thinking, including that of Ronald Goldman.

The thesis then developed to focus specifically on the research process of the distinct parts of the Study which form the thesis, namely:

1. The National Religious Education Festival study
2. Religious Education syllabi *death* and *life after death* content comparison study (reported in Chapter 3)
3. *Death* and *life after death* children's concepts study

The research process and methodology employed in the research project was presented separately for the three distinct parts of the Study forming the thesis (Chapter 5).

A recognized limitation to the main survey was the possible disparity between schools and classes as to what Religious Education pupils had already received of possible relevance to the subject matter of this thesis. This was inevitable, but potentially of more significance to children's responses than other more minor limitations noted.

The data and the key findings from the *death* and *life after death* children's concepts study were presented and discussed alongside other academic research (Chapter 6). The analysis of the main research study questionnaire was in relation to the research questions and their association with children's concepts of *death* and *life after death*. The four hypotheses postulated focused on the patterns of association between children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* and several independent variables. The association of four independent variables was examined — age, faith, gender and location.

The following hypotheses were tested for evidence of the patterns of association between variables through a quantitative test of significance:

1. Age: Younger children are as able as older children to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*
2. Faith: Children with no faith-base are as able as those with a faith-base to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*
3. Gender: Boys are as able as girls to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*
4. Location: Children not living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural region are as able as those who do to conceptualize *death* and *life after death*

The results of the analysis were as follows:

Age hypothesis: quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis.

Faith hypothesis: quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis.

Gender hypothesis: quantitative analysis did confirm the null hypothesis, except on Question 10 which did not do so.

Location hypothesis: quantitative analysis did not confirm the null hypothesis.

Thus it was only the gender hypothesis which confirmed the null hypothesis, with the exception of Question 10 which asks: What do you think comes after death?

The tests of significance were then complemented by examining patterns in the qualitative data to explore trends and exceptions where appropriate. A range of examples of children's responses were used to illustrate the findings and debate and were evaluated.

There followed the discussion chapter which discussed children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* in relation to their place in the teaching of Religious Education (Chapter 7). The chapter demonstrated and discussed the children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* in relation to the findings from the main research study questionnaire in conjunction with other academic research. Implications and potential impact of this research for Religious Education were also considered.

8.2 OVERALL CONCLUSION

This thesis has investigated the possible influences on children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* and it has discussed if and how these concepts may have a place in Religious Education. Children have demonstrated their willingness and ability to express their concepts of *death* and *life after death*, regardless of age, faith, gender or location.

It has become clear that children need and are capable of comprehending and discussing the concepts of *death* and *life after death*. They therefore, should be given the opportunity to explore further these concepts. This is regardless of whether some adults feel death is a taboo subject or thinking that children probably do not have the maturity to consider these concepts or indeed, should not be given the opportunity to engage them. The tendency to perceive death as a taboo, particularly prevalent in Western post-modern society, should be challenged. School is an advantageous and in Western countries universally available place where meaningful consideration of the search of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* should occur, as school is a familiar environment for discovery and learning for children. Religious Education is the natural part of the school curriculum where children's discovery and learning can be focused on the exploration of these concepts, through investigating ultimate questions alongside examining the rites of passage of the principal world religions. Children's knowledge and perceptions of the concepts of *death* and *life after death* would grow, deepen and develop if they had some awareness and are responsibly informed of the doctrine and death rites of the world's major religions. They would have a better understanding of how their thinking maybe associated and informed by the teaching, beliefs and practices of the faith communities.

The analysis of the *Religious Education syllabi death and life after death content comparison study* and the findings of the main research study questionnaire raised implications for the Religious Education syllabi (Section 3.3; Chapter 6). Thus the relevant sections of the Religious Education syllabi of both the LEAs' and faith communities' which include rites of passage and ultimate questions, should clearly indicate and adequately include the concepts of *death* and *life after death* (Section 3.2; 3.3; 3.4). The Durham Diocesan Syllabus for Religious Education, 'Diocese of Durham RE Syllabus 2000', provided a good example of this (Shedden & Bellett, 2000; Section 3.3.8).

The subject of death and life after death, though it requires sensitivity on the part of the teacher, is of fundamental importance.
(Shedden & Bellett, 2000: 3.81)

Adults working with children need to trust them and help them to trust themselves. This amounts to affirmation. Teachers should help children to draw on their own experience and to learn to recognize it, and its value to themselves without value judgement. This would bring children to a greater knowledge and awareness of themselves, and consequently, enable and encourage them 'to be in touch with themselves'. As children recognize all these elements and become more confident and adept at doing so, then they would be able to turn their attention to include other people, their beliefs and practices, the circumstances of their lives and situations. By allowing children the space, time and energy to explore the concepts of *death* and *life after death* through Religious Education, teachers would be pro-actively demonstrating these principles, and therefore, reflect the awareness and understanding of the 'education of the whole child' which is fundamentally the purpose of Religious Education. The qualitative and quantitative data produced and analysed in this thesis provide sufficient confirmation to support the meaningful and worthwhile updating of Religious Education syllabi for implementation by teachers and those responsible for Religious Education.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In pursuing any research topic, at least as many questions tend to be raised as it proves possible to answer. This study was no exception. The following questions form the basis of suggestions for possible future research:

1. How might children's personal experiences influence their concepts of *death* and *life after death*?
2. How could teachers draw on children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* to facilitate their conceptual and thereby possible spiritual development?
3. To what extent do cultural differences affect children's concepts of *death* and *life after death* and how do these vary and how important are they in community cohesiveness?

These questions were considered to be beyond the scope of this thesis although nevertheless they relate to it.

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Education Acts

Summary of the Main Features in the Education Acts Relevant to Religious Education in England and Wales

Act	Year	Main features relevant to Religious Education in England & Wales
Elementary Education (ch 75)	1870	<p>Introduction of Board Schools: funded by the State through the Board of Education</p> <p>Content of Religious Instruction is Christian</p> <p>Cowper-Temple clause: no religious catechism or formula distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught in Board Schools</p> <p>Denominational teaching allowed in church schools: Church of England, Roman Catholic & non-conformist</p> <p>Time-table conscience clause stipulated for Board Schools: Religious Instruction & collective worship at the start or end of day; parents' right to withdraw their child & teachers' right to withdraw from teaching Religious Instruction & collective worship</p>
Education (ch 19)	1902	<p>Introduction of LEAs: replaced school boards & so responsible for elementary & other than elementary schools ie secondary, teacher training, technical & adult education & denominational school management except denomination maintain majority on school governing body & denominational Religious Instruction</p>
Education (ch 31)	1944	<p>New school management with set up of county, voluntary controlled & voluntary aided schools</p> <p>Religious Instruction made only compulsory subject</p> <p>Religious Instruction includes collective worship</p> <p>LEA encouraged to appoint a SACRE</p> <p>Each SACRE responsible for legal management of Religious Instruction in county & voluntary controlled schools in area</p> <p>LEA to convene an occasional body: Agreed Syllabus Conference to produce & recommend Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Instruction</p> <p>SACRE & Agreed Syllabus Conference to comprise 4 groups: A: Christian denominations, B: Church of England, C: associations representing teachers, D: LEA</p> <p>Locally Agreed Syllabus introduced & given legal status & to be Christian in content but non-denominational</p> <p>County & voluntary controlled schools (some exceptions due to Trust Deed) to use Locally Agreed Syllabus</p> <p>Voluntary aided schools can have denominational Religious Instruction</p>
Education Reform	1988	<p>Introduction of National Curriculum — Religious Education alongside it</p> <p>Religious Instruction becomes officially Religious Education</p> <p>Religious Education no longer to include collective worship which is a separate term</p> <p>Multi-faith approach to Religious Education made statutory — content of Religious Education to be in the main Christian while taking account of other principal religions represented in GB</p> <p>Cowper-Temple clause amended: pupils can study such catechisms or formularies</p> <p>LEA to constitute a new SACRE & Agreed Syllabus Conference which will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area — other faiths' representatives to join group A</p> <p>Each SACRE to publish an annual report on its work</p> <p>LEA encouraged to send SACRE's annual report to NCC, local LEA schools & teacher training institutions & be available for public inspection</p>
Education (Schools)	1992	<p>Introduction of new system of independent 4 yearly school inspections by Ofsted which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> spiritual, moral, social & cultural development of pupils whether a school is meeting the law in providing Religious Education & a daily act of collective worship
Education	1993	<p>SACRE & Agreed Syllabus Conference meetings are required to be open to the public</p> <p>If LEA not adopted a new Locally Agreed Syllabus since September 1988 to convene Agreed Syllabus Conference to do so by April 1995</p> <p>LEA to institute a review of its Locally Agreed Syllabus within 5 years of last review & then every 5 years after completion of each further review</p> <p>Amendment: each SACRE required to send its annual report covering the last academic year to SCAA (later QCA)</p>

**City of Birmingham Education Committee
Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction (1950)**

PRIMARY (JUNIOR) SCHOOLS

(7 years plus to 11 years plus)

- A. *Stories of Jesus. These would be chosen so that an outline of the whole of the Story of Jesus would be covered during the first three years. During the last year the Life of Christ as given in St. Mark's Gospel might be taken.*
- B. *Stories Jesus would hear of great men and women of His own country at various stages of the nation's history, showing the part they played, how they served their fellow men and how they were inspired by their belief in God and His purpose as they understood it.*
- C. *Stories from the New Testament to illustrate how Christianity spread through the teaching and adventures of its early preachers and heroes.*
- D. *Stories of the followers of Jesus who have served their fellow men in different countries and at various periods of history.*
- E. *The service of God and our fellow men which we should give in our own day.*
- F. *The Christian Festivals.*

Aim and Method

The junior stage is one of rapid development; the child is increasingly inquisitive, adventurous and anxious to experiment. The aim of the teaching is therefore to give the right direction to this growth by lessons from the lives of great heroes of Christendom and the Old Testament.

During the infant stage, the object was so to present the truth concerning God and Jesus as to satisfy the child's

17

need for security. Teaching about God's care and Jesus' kindness and love was directed to this purpose, and to evoking the natural response of gratitude and service. When we come to the age of greater independence and adventure, we have to bring out the fact that there are not only good deeds and right thoughts, but bad deeds and wrong thoughts. The child will learn that God may be 'angry' and that Jesus found it necessary to overthrow the tables of the money changers in the Temple. Many of the Old Testament incidents and adventures of Jesus' followers will raise problems of sin and wrong-doing, and it will be necessary to take account of the power of evil. This is a field into which the teacher can only venture after serious thought and preparation. The primitive emotions which are sometimes evoked by Old Testament stories will need careful handling. They cannot be entirely suppressed without danger that the child's faith may become complacent and non-militant. The means whereby evil can be overcome may be suggested by stories of heroism and by appeals to the child's sense of adventure, based upon incidents in the Life of Our Lord, and the experiences of saints and missionaries. The child should learn that endurance and sacrifice in these lives would not have been enough in themselves without dependence upon God, and that evil is best opposed in the strength that comes from prayer and worship. The help that we can receive from and give to others through Christian fellowship should not be neglected.

The substantial development of the child's own powers will call for a gradual change in teaching methods. He is beginning to read, and during the period he will acquire some sense of chronology and certain skills as well as the greater degree of independence already referred to. For this reason the story-telling technique will begin to give way (as it does in other subjects) to methods which involve reading and writing and practical work by the child himself, and which call for his co-operation in thought and discussion.

18

The most important consequences of these changes will be (1) that the life of Jesus can be dealt with more historically and systematically. The sequence of its treatment and the relations of one incident to another will need careful consideration, so that the child can form a balanced picture of our Lord.

(2) that the several parts of the syllabus will need to be integrated so that the child's religious education will show form and purpose. The method of basing a series of lessons upon a teaching theme or project, using material from the Bible and from Christian history, is admirably suited to religious instruction.

The arrangement of the material to be dealt with year by year may be the most important aspect of the teacher's planning.

Memorisation is an important agency in the learning process during the junior years. Inspiration as well as instruction can be gained by learning suitable passages from the Bible, hymns and other material. There is some difference of opinion about the value of learning passages which may not be fully understood till later, and the teacher must decide this latter question in the light of the policy followed in his general literary teaching. The apparatus of instruction in this period will include suitable books for reading and worship, materials for models and plays, pictures, films and film strips, and above all the Bible itself.

The act of worship should be maintained at an inspiring level, and not allowed to become perfunctory or monotonous. The words of prayers should be significant to the children, and the prayers themselves should be varied sufficiently to accord with the mood of the community and the demands of the occasion. The appeal of music will be important and the quality of singing and accompaniment should not be allowed to fall. Much important teaching of the communal aspects of the Christian Faith can be given at this stage by dignified and reverent corporate worship.

Material

The more detailed syllabus suggested below, which is only one of many possible expansions of the basic syllabus, may be too comprehensive, especially in the third year, but might be covered in a good 'A'. It is intended to indicate, for example, that the Life of Jesus should be more fully covered than in the first and second years. Where the schemes are concentric the treatment should be progressive or from a different angle. Cognate hymns in the School Hymn Book, Songs of Praise or Oxford Book of Carols should be taken at the time of the lesson.

1st Year (7 to 8)	2nd Year (8 to 9)	3rd Year (9 to 10)	4th Year (10 to 11)
<p>A. God the Father sent His Son Jesus to live on earth with His people. Story of Christmas. The home of the boy Jesus. Jesus in the Temple. Jesus began to teach about God and to heal. (a) The Prodigal Son. The Sower. The Good Shepherd. The Good Samaritan. (b) Healing of the Centurion's Servant. Widow's son raised.</p>	<p>The Shepherds. The Wise Men. The Manger Birth. Jesus the boy in the home at Nazareth. Jesus teaches by Parables and remembers His home and family. Lost sheep. Lost coin. Prodigal Son. Jesus teaches also of God's care. God's mercy. God's law. God's love. Prayer. He calls friends to be with Him. Other friends—Mary, Martha and Lazarus—Zacchaeus. Jesus also performs miracles, e.g., Feeding the multitude. Raising the daughter of Jairus.</p>	<p>The Revelation of God in the Son:— (a) The Birth of the Herald of the Son of God (Benedictus). (b) The gift of the Son (Magnificat). (c) The preservation of the Life of the Holy Child. (d) Jesus in the Temple. (e) His Baptism and John the Baptist. (f) His temptations. (g) His Teachings (i) The Sermon (St. Matt. V and VI); (ii) Our duties, e.g., to God—to our neighbour—to be servants—to shew humility. (iii) Parables of the Kingdom, e.g., The Sower—The Leaven—Hidden Treasure. Parables of the Talents. (iv) Story of Rich Young Ruler. (v) The Disciples and their training. Miracles for the Disciples. (h) The Last Supper. (i) Trial—Crucifixion—Resurrection. (j) The Disciples after the Resurrection.</p>	<p>Study of St. Mark's Gospel. The Writer (N.B. St. Mark XIV, 51). His connection with Peter and Paul. His splendid narrative—vivid short gospel yet full (Note—no account of birth of Jesus) wealth of detail, especially wonderful observation of the Saviour's looks and emotions. (N.B. Oral Tradition v. written accounts. Gospels for the Gentiles. Vide Moffat Tr. Introd., p. xxx). Little matter peculiar to this Gospel. Chaps. IV, 26, VIII, 22, XIV, 51. Gospel probably used by St. Matthew and St. Luke. The Subject Matter (some idea of Chronology): (1) The Forerunner, I, 1—8 (2) Baptism and Temptation, I, 9—13 (3) Ministry (Capernaum) I—IV (4) Ministry (Galilee) IV—VII (5) Ministry (Tyre and Sidon) VII (6) Ministry (East of Lake) VII—VIII (7) Bethsaida. (8) Caesarea Philippi. (9) Last Journey to Jerusalem IX—X. (10) Holy Week, XI—XV (11) Resurrection, XVI (12) Jesus' Purpose.</p>

1st Year (7 to 8)	2nd Year (8 to 9)	3rd Year (9 to 10)	4th Year (10 to 11)
<p>B. Biographies (very simply told) of Noah. Abraham—call—Lot—his son Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob's ladder. Jacob and Esau and his family. Jacob and Joseph's brethren in Egypt. Re-union with his family. Samuel—Hannah's gift—call. David—shepherd—Goliath—as King.</p>	<p><i>those Jesus heard about (or in form of a typical story of each character).</i> Biographies simply told: Noah. Abraham (and Isaac). Jacob (at Bethel). Joseph (in Egypt). Moses. Joshua. Gideon. Samson. Ruth. Samuel. David. In some of these cases the boyhood is interesting.</p>	<p><i>Biographies (continued):</i> Samuel (Saul, David) Jonathan. Solomon—his prayer—glory—wisdom. Elijah. Elisha. Story of Naaman. Isaiah. Jeremiah.</p>	<p>The Messianic Hope of the Old Testament (Simply developed). Forming the Nation. The First Kings and prosperity. The Line of David. Later Kings and adversity—deliverance and deeds of service. Daniel. Nehemiah (Cyrus). Judas Maccabees. Prophecies of the Deliverer.</p>
<p>C. These sections in this expansion of the outline are dealt with in the later stages of the Junior School Course but where modern examples are available they can be used, e.g., The life and work of Florence Nightingale could be taken after a story of healing.</p>		<p>If time, stories from the Acts simply related, e.g.: Stephen. Peter's Courage. Barnabas. Paul's Sea Voyage. (Basil Matthews).</p>	<p>Selected stories from Acts—Luke—Pentecost—Peter's power and courage—Philip and the Ethiopian. Paul becomes a Christian. Paul spreads the Gospel. Paul's voyage—Paul in Rome. Also 'book' of Philemon.</p>
<p>D.</p>		<p><i>In some schools these biographies will closely correlate with History Schemes.</i> e.g.: St. Augustine of Hippo. St. Gregory I. St. Hilary. Caedmon. St. Anselm. St. Francis. Father Damien (after story of Naaman).</p>	<p>e.g.: The Pilgrim Fathers. Milton. Bunyan. Handel. Elizabeth Fry. Lord Shaftesbury. David Livingstone. Dr. Schweitzer.</p>

1st Year (7 to 8)	2nd Year (8 to 9)	3rd Year (9 to 10)	4th Year (10 to 11)
E. Material for this section will be woven into the whole four-year course.			
F. In each year appropriate stories to be taken and suitable teaching to be given on the occasion of the main Christian Festivals.			
<i>Suggestions for Memory Work (optional)</i>			
Lord's Prayer Psalm XXXIII A few sayings of Jesus. <i>e.g.</i> The Golden Rule. St. Matt. VII, 12 (a). St. John X, 11—14.	Deut. XXIV, 19—22 2 Sam. XII, 1—6 Lord's Prayer. Psalm XXXIII. A few sayings of Jesus.	Gen. I—II, 3. Commandments (shortened). Joshua I, 9. Psalm I, XXXIII, XXXIV. Micah IV, 3—5, VI, 8. St. Matt. V, 1—12.	Gen. I—II, 3. 1 Kings III, 3—14, XIX, 9—12. 'Messiah' passages in Isaiah. Commandments (shortened). Psalm I, VIII, XV, XIX, XXXIII, XXXIV, XXXV, XCV, 1—7a, CXXII, 23—30, CXXXIV. St. Matt. V, 1—16. 1 Cor. XIII. Selections, Eph. VI. Philippians IV, 4—9.

City of Birmingham District Council Education Committee
Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction (1975)

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM
DISTRICT COUNCIL EDUCATION COMMITTEE
AGREED SYLLABUS OF RELIGIOUS
INSTRUCTION

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN INFANCY AND EARLY
CHILDHOOD

Appropriate age 3-8 years.

A selection from each of the following topics:—

1. FESTIVALS

Christians: Sunday.

Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday,
Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Day,
Whitsun.

Saints' Days, such as: Andrew, David, George, Patrick, Anthony,
Benedict, Christopher, Francis, Margaret, Nicholas, Valentine.
Thanksgiving: for home and church—Mothering Sunday, for
food—Harvest Thanksgiving.

Hindus: Diwali, Raksha Bandhan.

Jewish: Sabbath.

Passover, Pentecost, New Year, Tabernacles, Hanukkah, Purim,
New Year for Trees.

Muslims: Friday.

Id-ul-Fitr, Muhammad's Birthday, Lailat-ul-Qadar.

Sikhs: Diwali, Birthdays of Nanak and Gobind Singh.

2. RITUALS AND CUSTOMS

Rituals and customs which express religious faith in the context of family life
and in the corporate life of religious communities—acts of worship, devotions
and thanksgiving; observances linked with marriage and with the birth and
rearing of children.

3. STORIES FROM WORLD RELIGIONS

Stories of Jesus and of his friends, and stories Jesus told.
Stories of Rama, Sita, Krishna, and other stories from Hinduism.

Stories of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Ruth; of the Rabble Hill and
Althea.

Stories of Muhammad, stories of the Companions.

Stories of Nanak, Amar Das, Arjan, Gobind Singh.

4. THE WORLD OF NATURE

Religion as a response of wonder and mystery in the face of such natural
phenomena as the seasons, the elemental forces of nature, natural and plant
life, colour, light, texture and sound.

5. RELATIONSHIPS

Religion as an interpretation of selfhood and as a view of persons living in
community; approached through the idea of the child's relationships with
others in the home, class, school and neighbourhood. References will be made
to illustrations from world religions treating such qualities as love, trust,
acceptance, forgiveness, compassion, care, courage, patience and endeavour.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN LATER CHILDHOOD

Appropriate age 8-12 years.

1. IDEALS FOR EVERYDAY LIVING

How people express religious ideals and aspirations through:—
family life

service to the community

acts of love and courage

the quest for new knowledge in the service of mankind

2. FESTIVALS AND CUSTOMS

How Christmas, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh festivals and customs
inform, nourish and express religious faith.

3. SACRED PLACES

How architecture, design and decoration, observance and symbolism express
and communicate religious faith in the home, by the wayside and in church,
temple, synagogue, mosque and gurdwara.

4. SACRED LITERATURE

How sacred writings preserve and inspire living traditions of religious faith; with reference to the various kinds of language and literary form in the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Qur'an, the Granth.

5. WAYS OF LIVING

Stories from world religions of founders and of great exemplars of faith, together with studies of the ways of living which they have inspired, with particular reference to:—

Christianity — Jesus; Peter and Paul
Hinduism — Rama and Sita, Krishna
Islam — Muhammad; the Prophets
Judaism — Abraham and Moses; the Rabbits
Sikhism — Nanak; Gobind Singh

And, to clarify the distinctive features of religion by comparison and contrast, the stories of Nansen and Doid with an account of how Humanists apply their ideals in everyday life.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN ADOLESCENCE

Approximate age 12-16 years.

1. THE DIRECT STUDY OF RELIGION

One major and three minor courses. One of these four courses must be in Christianity.

(i) A major course, of the pupil's own choice where possible, in one of the following world religions:—

Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism
with reference to each aspect as history, mythology, doctrine, ethical outlook, liturgical life, inner experience, artistic and social expression.

(ii) *Either* two minor courses, each based on one of the religions listed above

Or a minor course in one of the religions listed above, and a minor course in a theme or theme from those religions.

(iii) A minor course, of the pupil's own choice where possible, in a course for living which shares many of the dimensions of religion whilst not admitting belief in realities transcending the natural order. This course will thus highlight the distinctive features of religious faith.

THE INDIRECT STUDY OF RELIGION

Religious beliefs, values, attitudes and practices arising from and applied to topics selected from the following two sections:—

- (i) Problems confronting the individual—
Identity, morality, relationships within the family, friendship, sexuality, money, smoking and drugs, work and leisure.
- (ii) Problems confronting the community—
Human communities, caring, the welfare state, children, the aged, the sick, the homeless, race and community relations, the quality of life, the trade unions, the mass media, advertising, 'drop-outs', war, famine, world population, international aid, the use and conservation of resources.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN THE SIXTH FORM

One or both of the following:—

1. Further study of topics listed in the section "Religious Instruction in Adolescence".

2. A critical treatment, in depth, of some of the topics listed below:—

1. Buddhism.
2. The problems and opportunities created for religious faith by philosophical discourse about appearance and reality, the nature of man, ethics, God, religion, the nature of religious language.
3. Descriptive/comparative studies of the nature of man, the meaning of life, human destiny, human suffering.
4. The contribution of the arts to the expression, communication, evocation and criticism of religious faith; with reference to poetry, dance, drama, the novel, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the film, the mass media.
5. The function of celebration, festival and ritual in world religions.
6. Mysticism.
7. Studies of great leaders whose actions and policies have been motivated by strong religious or anti-religious feelings.

National Religious Education Festival
 Primary and Secondary School Age Questionnaires



The Primary Questionnaire

1 Religions try to show people the best way to live.

Suppose a king or queen sent out messengers to find out the best way to live, and they asked you.

What could you tell them?

2 Some people feel that God can help you, or cheer you up, or warn you, or that God is watching you.

Have you ever felt someone or something near you in this kind of way?

Write about how you felt.

3 Here are two comments about death.

'When we die, we lie in the grave, and I'm afraid that's the end of us.'

'I think dying is like being born. You leave the place you know, but you go to a wonderful place you don't know.'

What are your thoughts about death, and life after death?

4 At school, in RE, you learn about Jesus, and perhaps about the Buddha, Moses, or Muhammad (pbuh).

Do you enjoy these bits of school? Can you say why?

Please tell us what you like about RE.

5 Religions can bring peace and harmony, but people also fight about religion.

What do you think can help people find peace and harmony?

6 A big religious question is about what God is like.

What are your own thoughts and beliefs about God?

7 Some people pray many times a day, others not at all.

If you could talk or write a letter to God, what would you say? What questions would you ask?

8 Religions sometimes teach their followers about freedom, truth, justice, love and forgiveness.

Who has taught you about these things? What have you learned?

9 Religions often give their followers a vision of a perfect world.

If you could dream a better world, and make it real, what would your dream be like?

Draw us a picture or make up a symbol to show your dream.

These questions may be freely reproduced for use in your school.

The Secondary Questionnaire

1 Religions try to show people the best way to live.

When you think about it carefully, what would you say is the best way to live?

2 'Sometimes I get a feeling that I am aware of a presence or a power different from my everyday self.'

Over a third of people in the UK agree with this. Have you ever had a feeling like this?

Please describe your experience.

3 Here are two viewpoints about death.

'When we die, we lie in the grave, and I'm afraid that's the end of us.'

'I think dying is like being born. You leave the place you know, but you go to a wonderful place you don't know.'

What are your thoughts about death and the after-life?

4 Religions often give their followers a vision, or a hope for the future of humanity and the rest of the world.

What are your hopes for the future in your own lifetime? What sort of a world do you dream of?

5 Religions can bring peace and harmony, but are also a cause of conflict sometimes.

What is complete peace and harmony to you?

What do you think causes war and conflict?

6 A big religious question is about what God is like.

What are your own thoughts and beliefs about God?

7 Some people pray many times a day, others not at all.

What are your thoughts about the subject of prayer?

8 Some people don't believe in God, but they do believe in the value of humanity.

What do you think about the value of people?

9 Many religions ask people to try and learn life's lessons from their experience.

Can you explain what your experience of life, so far, has taught you?

10 Religions sometimes teach their followers about freedom, truth, justice, love and forgiveness.

Who has taught you about these things?

What have you learned?

11 In RE, you get chances to learn about religions, think about your experience and form your own views of life and faith.

Please tell us what you have got out of your RE lessons, and what you like about RE.

These questions may be freely reproduced for use in your school.

**Pilot Study No.1:
Festival Questionnaire**



Celebrating RE

This questionnaire may be freely photocopied
Primary Version for 7-11 year olds.

The National Religious Education Festival

The Pupils Speak

To the pupil: This questionnaire gives you a chance to write about some of the things that matter most to you.

Please write with detail and thoughtfulness. You may give your name if you wish, but you don't have to.

Thanks for joining in this part of the RE Festival: you never know, but what you say could end up in a book.

To the teacher: This questionnaire is part of CEM and PCFRE's initiative for the National RE Festival. Teachers are invited to make as many copies as they like, and use them with pupils of any appropriate age. We think about 45 minutes is needed to introduce and administer the questionnaire. Children will benefit from discussion of the questions. PCFRE will use the results of the questionnaire to compile a booklet of the nation's children's views on faith. You might use the feedback, for example for display or an article in a school magazine. Our aim in this is to help schools celebrate what's good in RE, and to help pupils articulate their own beliefs, values, hopes and commitments. All schools who send in questionnaires will be entered in a draw for a free gift of a book or a music CD. Thank you for your involvement.

PCFRE

1 Religions try to show people the best way to live. Suppose a king or queen sent out messengers to find out the best way to live, and they asked you. What could you tell them?

2 Some people feel that God can help you, or cheer you up, or warn you, or that God is watching you. Have you ever felt someone or something near you in this kind of way? Write about how you felt.

3 Here are two comments about death.
'When we die, we lie in the grave, and I'm afraid that's the end of us.'
'I think dying is like being born. You leave the place you know, but you go to a wonderful place you don't know.'
What are your thoughts about death, and life after death?

4 At school, in RE, you learn about Jesus, and perhaps about the Buddha, Moses, or Muhammad [pbuh].
Do you enjoy these bits of school? Can you say why?
Please tell us what you like about RE.

5 Religions can bring peace and harmony, but people also fight about religion.
What do you think can help people find peace and harmony?

6 A big religious question is about what God is like. What are your own thoughts and beliefs about God?

7 Some people pray many times a day, others not at all. If you could talk or write a letter to God, what would you say? What questions would you ask?

8 Religions sometimes teach their followers about freedom, truth, justice, love and forgiveness. Who has taught you about these things? What have you learned?

9 Religions often give their followers a vision of a perfect world. If you could dream a better world, and make it real, what would your dream be like? Draw us a picture or make up a symbol to show your dream.

10 And finally, please tell us:
Your age: _____ Are you: a girl _ a boy _
Your School: _____
Your religion (optional): _____
And if you want to, your name: _____

THANK YOU for taking part in this survey. Your views and ideas are very valuable. They may be quoted in a book.

Please return copies of completed questionnaires by the end of November 1997 to:

**Savita Ayling
National RE Festival
PO Box 12981
London E17 9UH**

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Registered address: Royal Burgess, Victoria Street, Dover, Kent, CT16 3BW. Char. No. 108193.

4. Here are two comments about death.
'When we die, we live in the grave, and I'm afraid that's the end of us.'
'I think dying is like being born. You leave the place you know, but you go to a wonderful place you don't know.'
What are your thoughts about death, and life after death?
5. Religions try to show people the best way to live.
Suppose a king or queen sent out messengers to find out the best way to live, and they asked you.
What could you tell them?
6. At school, in RE, you learn about Jesus, and perhaps the Buddha, Moses, or Muhammad (pbuh).
Do you enjoy these bits of school?
Can you say why?
Please tell us what you like about RE.

7. Religions can bring peace and harmony, but people also fight about religion.
What do you think can help people find peace and harmony?

8. Religions sometimes teach their followers about freedom, truth, justice, love and forgiveness.
Who has taught you about these things?
What have you learned?

9. Religions often give their followers a vision of a perfect world.
If you could dream a better world, and make it real, what would your dream be like?
Draw us a picture or make up a symbol to show your dream.

Your name:

Your age:

Your religion, if you belong to one:

Are you a boy or a girl?

Thank you very much for filling this in!!

Main Research Study Questionnaire

Version 1

Aspects of RE: Children's Questionnaire

Please try to answer these questions the best you can.

Some of the important words are written in bold.

Where there is more than one box, tick which is right for you.

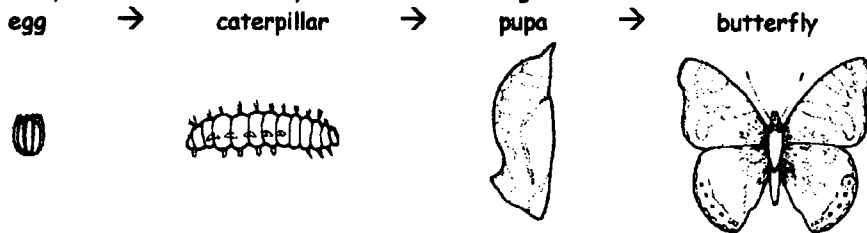
It is important that you try to share what you think and believe.

Please write your name here, if you wish: _____

1. Are you a boy or a girl ?

Stages of life

You may know that a butterfly has several life stages:



2. People's lives have several stages. What do you think they are? Please write here:

3. What do you think is the last stage of people's lives? Please write here:

4. What does being alive mean to you? Please write your thoughts here:

5. At what stage does death come in people's lives? Please write here:

End of life

6. Why do you think a person dies? Please write here:

7. What does the word *death* mean to you? Please write your thoughts here:

8. What do you think happens when someone dies? Please write here:

9. What feelings might people have when a pet or someone they love dies? Please write your thoughts here:

10. What do you think comes after death? Please write here:

11. Do you think there is life after death? Please tick one answer:

Yes

Maybe

Don't know

No

12. If your answer is *yes* or *maybe*, write down what life after death means to you.

Saying goodbye and remembering

13. How might you say goodbye to a pet or a person who has died? Please share your thoughts here:

14. How might you remember a pet or someone you have loved who has died? Please share your thoughts here:

15. Have you ever had the chance to share with someone what you think and believe about death and/or life after death? Please tick one answer:

- Yes Who was it with? Please write here: _____
Don't remember
No

16. Where have you found out what happens when someone dies? Please tick more than one answer:

- | | Yes | No |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| In assembly at my school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| In my class | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| In the playground | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At a club eg Brownies, Cubs, latchkey | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My parents told me | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My grandparents told me | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- I found out somewhere else. Please say where: _____

17. Talking about these things can be difficult for some people. Who do you find the most helpful people to talk to? Please give a score to each of these by ticking ✓ one number on each line.

① means you think they are unhelpful; ② means you think they are quite helpful;
 ③ means that you think they are helpful

	Unhelpful	Quite helpful	Helpful
With my teachers at my school	①	②	③
With my friends	①	②	③
With my parents	①	②	③
With my grandparents	①	②	③
With someone at my church, mosque or temple	①	②	③
Someone else. Please write who: _____	①	②	③

18. If there is anything else you would like to share about your thoughts or beliefs about death and life after death then please write it here:

19. Would you say that you belong to one of these religions? Please tick one answer:

Christian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>	No religion	<input type="checkbox"/>

Another one. Please write here: _____

20. Do you ever go to a church, mosque, synagogue or temple? Please tick one answer:

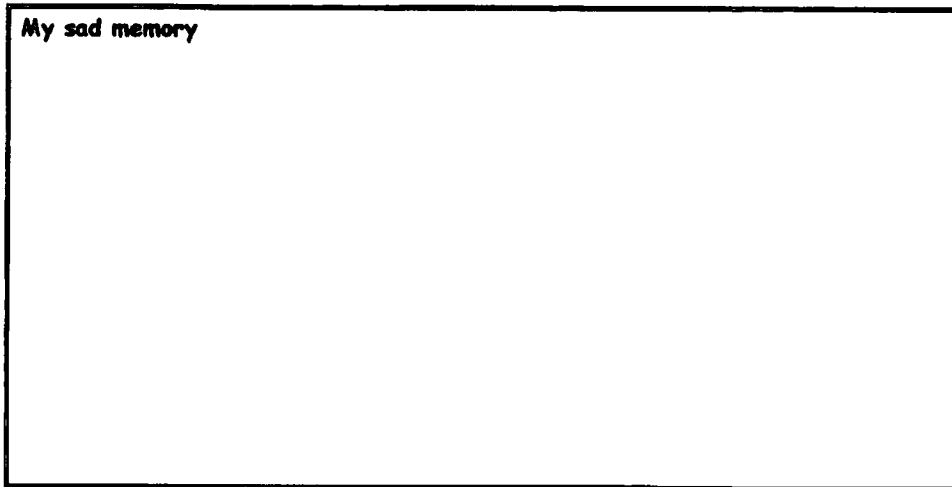
Yes
 No

21. If your answer is yes, then how often do you go to a church, mosque, synagogue or temple? Please tick one answer:

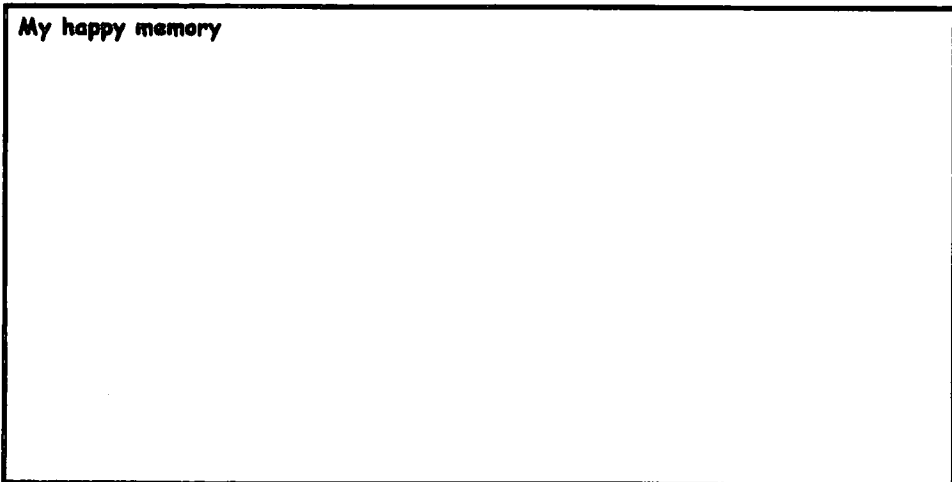
Every day	<input type="checkbox"/>	Once a month	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once a week	<input type="checkbox"/>	A few times a year	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. We all have happy and sad memories. Please write about one of each or you may like to draw.

My sad memory



My happy memory



Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts by filling in this questionnaire 😊
I hope that you have enjoyed answering these questions.

[This questionnaire is part of a Religious Education Research Project conducted by Rachel Japson BEd (Hons) MA in primary schools with approval from the School of Education, the University of Durham. February 2001]

Appendix 8

**Summary Table of Practical Research Project in Chronological Order
Ages, Locations and Sample Sizes of Participants for Study 1, Study 2 and Study 3**

Study	Age		Total Participants
Study 1: National Religious Education Festival study <i>Festival</i> questionnaire (2000-2001)	7-11 year olds Primary schools across UK		600
Study 2: Religious Education syllabi <i>death and life after death</i> content comparison study			
Model Syllabuses (2000):			
Faith Communities' Working Group Reports			
Model 1: Living Faiths Today			
Model 2: Questions & Teachings			
Birmingham (2001):			
Birmingham Agreed Syllabus			
Birmingham Diocesan Guidelines			
Durham (2001):			
Durham Agreed Syllabus			
Durham Diocesan Syllabus			
Study 3: <i>Death and life after death</i> children's concepts study (2000-2003)	Year 3 Age 7-8	Year 6 Age 10-11	
Birmingham			
Pilot Study No.1 (2000): <i>Festival</i> questionnaire	12	53	65
Pilot Study No.2 (2000): Semi-structured interviews	5	10	15
Main research study questionnaire (2001-2003):			
Primary Schools (code)			
GB	62	72	134
RB	58	77	135
MB	36	37	73
CB	17	21	38
DB	0	26	26
Total Questionnaire Participants	173	233	406
Durham			
Primary Schools (code)			
FD	22	41	63
GD	25	26	51
BCD	59	56	115
HD	24	19	43
SD	29	29	58
JD	12	15	27
Total Questionnaire Participants	171	186	357
Total Questionnaire Participants	763		

Jepson, R. & Draycott, P. (2001) Listening to children talk about life, death and life after death in: L. Blaylock (Ed) *Listening to children in primary religious education* (Derby, REToday Publishing) ISBN: 1-904024-12-2

Listening to children in RE

Listening to children talk about death, dying, and life after death

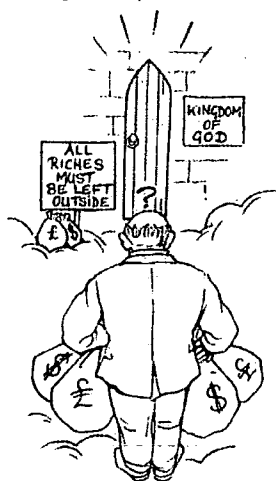
In this section, Rachel Jepson and Pamela Draycott reflect on the value of listening to what children say about death and dying for RE, and suggest a number of classroom activities which might help teachers to open these sensitive issues up with pupils aged 5-7 (p24) or 7-11 (page 25).

Introduction

All religious traditions, and indeed non-theistic life stances, have insights to offer about death, dying and life after death, which means that for RE to ignore these dimensions does both the religion(s) and our pupils a disservice. Many Local Agreed Syllabuses and Diocesan Guidelines outline areas of study that focus on these areas readily incorporating the two common RE attainment targets of learning about religions and learning from religion. The subject is also part of two strands within these attainment targets: Beliefs and practices surrounding death, dying, and life after death form one of the major rites of passage in all the major religions which are taught (learning about). Similarly, the issues and questions which are fundamental to the exploration of this topic form a significant component of discussing ultimate questions (learning from).

The practices which surround death and dying have developed out of and reflect beliefs which offer insights into what the religion teaches about the after-life and the experience of adherents in finding strength and comfort in their beliefs. The rituals surrounding death rites reflect the beliefs and experience of the faith community. It is

Jesus said 'It is harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.'



important that any curriculum experience which focuses on such practices takes sufficient account of the beliefs and experiences reflected in and through them. Ultimate questions are those deep and meaningful questions which are concerned with the meaning and mystery of life. They are at the heart of the RE curriculum, 'Why are we here? Where is happiness to be found? Is there a God? Is there life after death?' Children need to feel secure and comfortable with sharing their opinions. They need also to know that they can be completely honest and that their

peers and the adults working with them will treat them with respect. Children enjoy having the opportunity to think through some of life's more difficult and challenging questions and issues. They are usually keen to bring to the discussion their own experience and knowledge and understanding of their faith background, if they belong to one. In this way they learn from each other. Children frequently seem to have an ability to reveal an insight into an issue, which may be lost or stultified in adulthood.

The question

Question 3 focuses attention on thoughts about death and life after death. This question raises issues that some adults, including teachers, find disconcerting to address with young children. Why might this be? For some it may be that death is the taboo subject where once it was sex. For others their attitude is born out of wanting to 'protect children' from all that goes with death and dying including the uncertainties and potential fear-factor. The children who responded to this question did so however with a sense of honesty and openness which indicates that they welcomed an opportunity to explore such issues for themselves within the 'safety' provided by the questionnaire. It is important to note that the vast majority of children responded to the question, many with quite full responses. Those children who did leave the question unanswered, in the main, left other questions blank too. In their response, many children tended to either focus on the aspect of death or life after death. There were some children who commented on both but they were in the minority. Time and time again the children's responses expose an ability to reveal an insight into issues surrounding death, dying, and life after death which are enlightening and encouraging in their clarity, integrity, honesty and wisdom. Consequently, many children display spiritual awareness too. They express themselves in a very natural way, without embarrassment which is something that adults themselves find difficult when responding to issues raised by death and dying.



Children's responses in the questionnaire can be categorised in to five broad areas or main foci (with some overlap).

Death and Dying: My thoughts are that our life is over when you're dead and you live there in just a skeleton.
You feel sad and helpless and after a few weeks you get over it and then you begin to feel like they're still with you and you begin to brighten up again. I believe in life after death a bit so if you come back somebody would be frightened, but if you stay with them they will feel happy and get used to it.

Life after death: I am looking forward to when I am dead because I am going to a even better place with much more people and my dad. And I can't wait till the moment I stand before God and praise him

Heaven and hell: I think that when you die you stand before God and all your good and bad things are weighed. If you have more good you go to heaven. If you have more bad you go to hell.

I think when I die I will go a beautiful place where I will meet God. I think there will be no illness or bad feelings or anything bad I think it will be a beautiful place I think I would go to heaven and I want to go, it sounds so good. I believe in Jesus and I just want to be where he is. It will be so much fun after this life. I believe there will be another one, a better one a better place where there will be no stealing or anything bad at all and I just want to be God's friend.

Reincarnation: When you die I think you go up to heaven for a while then you come back down to earth and start again, and it keeps going round and round. But you can come back different: you might of been English and you come back American.

Uncertainty, doubts, concerns and worries Death scares me a lot, more than anything else in the world and I think thats because I have no idea what will happen when I die. No one knows poeple make things up like they go to heaven or they are, born again to reassure their selves. But I won't know until I die. I'm confused because there's people around me who believe different things.

A Conclusion

We would like to suggest that the key to exploring death, dying, and life after death with primary age children is for teachers to take the risk of doing so, and giving children a voice in expressing their knowledge and understanding, and beliefs and practices. The point is that children do think about these things and are being exposed to death and dying whether adults acknowledge it or not. They have opinions on the subject which they are able, willing and unafraid to discuss and explore in an open and mature manner. By enabling children to have these experiences within the school environment, teachers are equipping and helping them to develop as thinking, thought-provoking and reflecting people. Furthermore, the expectations of the 1988 Education Reform Act to promote the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society, and prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life, are being contributed towards.

Some Classroom Ideas for RE

General

A good lead into the topic of death, dying, and life after death with pupils in either lower or upper primary is by exploring the concept of loss:

Sitting in a circle, the teacher could tell the class a story where the children imagine that they are the character in the story who has borrowed a scooter (or whatever the latest craze is!) from their best friend. The children would be encouraged to visualise their character in the story. Your feelings of joy at being able to borrow the scooter would be expressed before you decided to go off exploring on your friend's scooter. While you were doing so something caught your attention - you could hear and see that some of your friends were having fun in the distance by a pond. You knew that the best way to reach them was to climb over the stile and walk across the field to where the pond was. So you jumped off the scooter and left it by the wall, clambered over the stile and rushed across the field to meet up with your friends. You have fun playing by the pond with your friends. All too soon it's time to make your way home. You retrace your steps across the field, clamber back over the stile and discover that the scooter which belongs to your best friend has gone! It has disappeared ... vanished ...



Listening to children in RE

The key questions then to explore and discuss with the children would be their initial reaction, so:

- How do you feel?
- What would you do?

The sort of responses that the children would share may parallel the thoughts and feelings which people of any age experience when they are bereaved – guilt, sadness, fear, uncertainty, anger, etc. Discuss these different emotions, what is the best way to deal with them? Give pupils an opportunity to talk, write or draw a time when they have had one or more of these emotions and have successfully dealt with it or them. The children may well choose to share an experience of personal bereavement for their sad memory or emotion.

Follow up

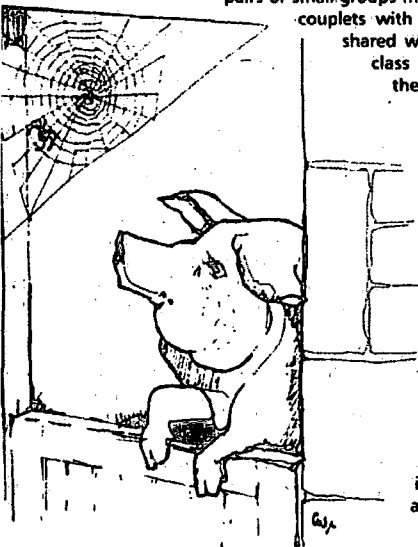
Introduce the idea of death being a loss to those left behind. People who have 'lost' someone often feel sad, angry, lonely and so on. Is anyone prepared to share any of their emotions when they were bereaved? Thank any child who 'volunteers' on behalf of yourself and the class for sharing such personal feelings with us.

Lower Primary – with the story of *The Goodbye Boat* by M. Joslin or something similar. *The Goodbye Boat* is an evocatively illustrated publication which addresses the death of a grandparent from a Christian perspective. It is however, suitable as a stimulus for pupils of all religious persuasions and none, dealing as it does with loss, sadness and the joy of remembering the good things shared.

Upper Primary – *The Mountains of Tibet* – a child's journey through living and dying by M. Gerstein and *Charlotte's Webb* by E.B. White.

Focus on the biblical passage 'A Time for Everything' in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (Judaism, Christianity) which may be read to or by the class.

Explore through discussion and role-play the couplets and then in pairs or small groups make collages of the couplets with their explanations shared with the rest of the class and recorded by the teacher.



What does the passage tell us about what Jews and Christians believe about life and death?

Does the passage reflect anything of what you believe?

Write your own couplets explaining your ideas about life and death.

Key questions which pupils may explore and discuss

- Why do you think a person dies?
- What do you think happens when someone dies?
- What feelings might people have when a pet or someone they love dies?
- What do you think comes after death?
- How might you say goodbye to a pet or person who has died?
- How might you remember a pet or someone you have loved who has died?
- How may you make 'Miss' feel better about the death of her pet?
- Why do some people find it difficult to talk about death?
- What do different religions tell us about what happens when someone dies? Do you think the same or something different?

Lower Primary

The Easter Story is at the heart of Christianity and at its heart is the death of a man whom Christians believe to be the Son of God. For Christian believers the sorrow, loneliness and desolation of Good Friday gives way to the joy, companionship and exhilaration of Easter Sunday. It offers hope and consolation to them during times of personal bereavement too.

Talk with the pupils about how sad the disciples were on Good Friday when Jesus died.

What happens in church which shows that sadness (decorations removed, no flowers)?

Compare that with how the disciples felt on Easter Sunday when they believed he rose to life again.

What happens in church to show that joy (plenty of decorations, flowers, Easter eggs)?

Make a display entitled 'Remembering Good Friday and Easter Sunday'. Divide the display into two one showing the sadness of Good Friday and the other the happiness of Easter Sunday. Pupils then write a sentence or two (with the help of an adult) about a time when they have been sad and a time when they have been happy. These do not form part of the display but are between the child and the teacher only, unless the child chooses to share them with others in the class.



People are often sad when someone they know dies (just like Jesus' friends were sad). If we know someone who is sad because someone has died what could we do to make them feel better again? (Say we are sorry, give them a sweet, remember the person who has died, play with them, be kind to them.)

Two resources to support / extend this work

The tale of the three trees (by Angela Elwell Hunt, Lion, ISBN 0-7459-1743-7 or ISBN 0-7459-4593-7 board-book). This is a Kentucky folk tale which provides an simple overview of the life of Jesus (birth, teaching and death) Each tree had a wish - to be made into a treasure chest, to become a mighty sailing ship and to stay on the hill and point people to God. At first all are disappointed - one becomes a manger, another is made into a fishing boat and the third is chopped down and left in the lumber yard. But they have their wishes fulfilled - one holds the baby Jesus, one is the vessel from which Jesus preaches and one is made into the cross on which Jesus is crucified.

Water Bugs and Dragonflies (by D. Stickney, Mowbray 1996 ISBN 0-264-669-04-5) - transformation - death and resurrection theme. The BBC's award winning *Worlds of Belief: 'Christianity - Easter'* programme is designed for upper primary but there is a short section towards the middle of the video which retells this story which could be used on its own with lower primary pupils.

Upper Primary

Use question 3 as a starting point for discussion about what the pupils believe about death and dying.

Either, give the question out as it is and ask the pupils to write their response to it; Or, ask the pupils in one class or year group to devise other questions around death and dying to be used with another class or year group. Pupils fill in the questionnaire without putting their name on it and the results are collated so that views across the year group or school are gathered. These are then used as a basis for discussion - what have we learned? What has surprised us?

How does my personal opinion link to the general views identified through the questionnaire?

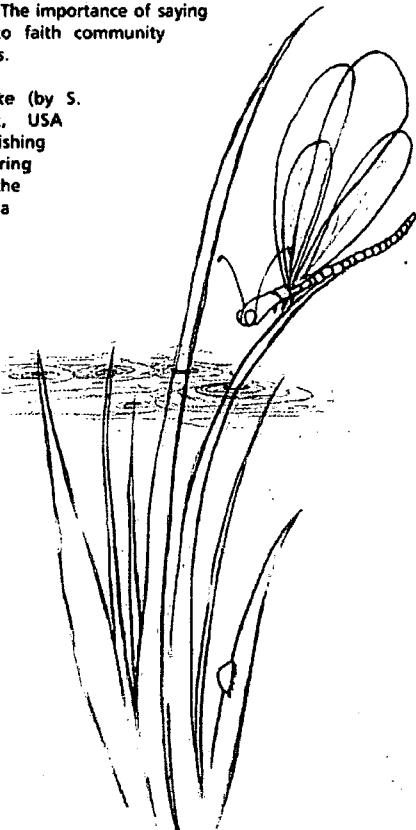
Or, devise a list of questions based around death, dying and the afterlife and conduct a continuum exercise (see page 26). Pupils each have a piece of paper with these questions (or similar) on. They tick (in pencil) the appropriate box for each statement. When each pupil has completed the stimulus sheet they fold it in half and then in half again and then swap six times around the class (to mix up the answers and so that the originator of each paper can not be identified - hence filling them all out in pencil too). Place down the side of the classroom numbers 1 - 10 (or as applicable). Read out each question clearly and then each pupils moves to the position against the wall which is identified on the sheet they are holding (not necessarily their viewpoint). This way the class gets an anonymous but accurate picture through the 'human bar-chart' of its views. The teacher can then ask individuals to say why they think someone might hold to that point of view (developing skills of empathy and expression).

Two resources to support and extend this work:

When Dinosaurs Die (Brown & Brown, 1996, Little, Brown and Co.) Key questions and feelings explored to do with death and bereavement. The importance of saying 'goodbye' linked to faith community beliefs and practices.

For Heaven's Sake (by S. Sasso Woodstock, USA Jewish Lights Publishing 1999). Exploring feelings relating to the death of a grandparent.

On page 31, we offer a writing frame, which can also be used as a series of conversational prompts, for example in group discussion or circle time. Pupils deserve some choice about which of these they comment upon, whether in speaking or writing.



Listening to children in RE

Tick the number which most closely links to what you believe for each statement. Number 1 is strongly agree and number 10 is strongly disagree.

Statement

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I believe that when you are dead you are dead and that is all. There is no life after death.

I believe that when you have died your spirit lives on in another form – like an animal, tree or flower.

I believe that when you die your body is finished with but your soul or spirit goes on living.

I believe in heaven.

I believe in hell.

I believe in God and therefore I believe in life after death.



Blaylock, L., Draycott, P. & Jepson, R. (2001) *Death and beyond: some ultimate questions in: L. Blaylock (Ed) Listening to young people in secondary religious education* (Derby, REToday Publishing) ISBN: 1-904024-13-0

Listening to young people in RE

Life after death?

In this article, Pamela Draycott and Lat Blaylock offer some curriculum ideas based upon the research into young people's views on death and afterlife done by Rachel Jepson. The crux of the work is to put teachers and learners in the role of listeners to perspectives from a range of religious and non-religious life stances.

One of the big questions for RE and for everyone is about life beyond the grave. Is death a full stop, or a comma? Is there nothing, or is dying like another birth? Will I meet God, find nirvana, or survive only as a memory? Our question about life after death was:

Here are two viewpoints about death:

'When we die, we lie in the grave, and I'm afraid that's the end of us.'

'I think dying is like being born. You leave the place you know, but you go to a wonderful place you don't know.'

What are your thoughts about death and the afterlife?

From many thousands of intriguing and insightful replies to this, we have selected eight examples (on the following page) which we think will help pupils to consider some of the issues clearly and deeply, whether they are taking examination courses, or working in general RE. The activities we suggest are flexible, but are suited to the learning needs of 12-16-year-olds.

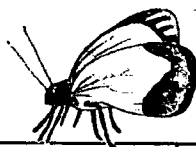
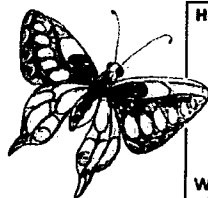
Who says what?

We suggest you copy the eight quotes on the following page and cut them up, providing a set for each group of four or five pupils. Ask them first of all to use their knowledge and understanding to work out 'who said what'. The order listed below corresponds to the page layout, so for pupil use mix these up.

Following on: five ideas

Pupils might use any of the five following activities to gather more data and reflect on this set of issues:

- 1 Take a survey yourselves, using the eight quotes on page 21. Ask all the pupils in a year group below you in school which one comes closest to their own view. Each member of the class should also ask two adults (other than teachers) for their views, and write them down (homework). Discuss what can be learned from this survey in class.
- 2 Brainstorm the questions about life after death you would like to ask if you could have an interview with a being who knows everything (God?). How do the religions you are studying answer these questions?
- 3 Research more deeply the ideas found in one religion (groups could tackle different faiths in this work, and present their findings to the class).
- 4 Choose the four quotes you disagree with most. Write your replies to the people, making your point.
- 5 Write up to 200 words of your own. Reflect carefully on your perspective on the end of life. This piece of writing will be better if you draft, discuss, amend and redraft it.



A 13-year-old, female, Hindu	B 16-year-old, female, Methodist Christian
C 14-year-old, Muslim	D 12-year-old, female, Christian
E 13-year-old, male, agnostic	F 15-year-old, male, Humanist
G 14-year-old, female, Hindu	H 14-year-old, female, atheist



Life after death?

Here are eight points of view from young people from many different backgrounds about death and the possibility of life beyond. Sort them out: who do you think said each one? Why? Discuss this with a partner. Your teacher will tell you the correct answers in a few minutes.

A Every time I pray or remember God, whenever I am in trouble god is saving me. I have been afraid of death, because I may never have this kind of life again. I believe in reincarnation. If I be good in this life I may reach Moksha (Being with God). If I am not good then my soul will be an animal or a tree.

B I find it strange to imagine that we die and then there is just nothing. I can accept that our bodies stop functioning, but not that our souls die too. I have no preconceptions about the afterlife but have never feared it. I doubt we will go to an unpleasant place.

C When I have died I will be judged about all that I have done. If you have done good, you will rest in peace, bliss, where the cool breeze of heaven would be near. But if you have done wrong or bad in the life time, then you would not be able to rest in peace. Your body will be squashed by the earth and it would all be unpleasant. We believe when the day of Judgement comes we will all be brought back to life and be questioned about everything we have done in this world, and then be judged by it.

D Death is like being born again, but being born into a new better place. To me it seems Earth is a place of God, but Heaven is God's home town. But Earth was like a tester place where you get a choice: God which is good, and Satan which is bad. If you're with God I believe you will go to Heaven, I have always imagined Heaven to be a wonderful place with flowers, trees and no pollution or bad things of the Earth. I think it would be totally perfect and everyone's good.

E When I was little I used to believe in reincarnation and about heaven and hell. But if there was a heaven and hell, everyone would go to hell, because no one can live their life without doing something bad. I think when you die, you die or maybe if you had unfinished business you would get to finish it.

F I don't believe in 'after life', I believe when I die, I will cease to exist and simply become a memory. However, as I have dabbled in the occult arts, I must admit I have detected what appears to be a being but whether it is paranormal or a ghost, I can only speculate. However, I have seen ghosts in my time.

G I myself do believe in an afterlife but in a different way. I believe that I was someone else before I was born and I have suffered bad things because of the bad things that the other person did. If your life is filled with holiness and no wrong doing I believe you only then go to heaven. The lives just carry on.

H I don't think there is anywhere like heaven or hell. It would be horrible to spend the rest of eternity in one place with the same people. Reincarnation is a nice idea but I don't believe that either the world would have the same people living on it over and over again. I would like to think that you go on to a place completely different from your last life: it makes the thought of death a lot less scary. But I think that once you're dead, you're dead. I think this is depressing but I can't believe in any of the other choices.



Death, Dying and the Afterlife – four creative curriculum approaches

1 Art Work

This could take various forms such as collage, freehand drawing, sculpture (using plasticine for example), printing. Rather than drawing a funeral procession it should be used for exploring beliefs and concepts connected with death, dying and the afterlife, encouraging personal and self-expression. For example:

- What colours and shapes can be used to express belief in heaven and hell, life after death, that death is the end and there is nothing else? In groups pupils identify different beliefs about death and the afterlife. They then divide themselves into pairs to work on one of those areas using colour, shape and texture to fill an A3-sized piece of sugar paper which is then displayed alongside the others in the group. Other class members examine the work and try to work out what concepts and beliefs are being explored.
- Have two vases of flowers ready as stimuli – one full of fresh, vibrantly coloured flowers and leaves and the other with wilted, dying and dead flowers and leaves. Show the class the dead vase first and get them to reflect on their thoughts and feelings as they look at the flowers. Pupils then choose one or two colours which reflect their mood following their experience and do an abstract painting to try to capture it. Repeat the activity using the vase of fresh flowers. Use this activity as a basis for exploring change and impermanence (Buddhism) or the transitory nature of life (Christianity).

2 Body sculpture

This as an active way of focusing pupils' thinking on the outward expression of inner feelings or attitudes, for example sorrow, love, anger, joy, fear, loneliness, hopefulness and many of the other emotions connected with loss, death, bereavement and belief in the afterlife.

Pupils are paired; one takes on the role of the sculptor, the other the 'clay' - the sculptors 'mould' their partners to express the emotions or feelings they wish to express. They could do this in role or from a personal point of view – either way a classroom atmosphere of sensitivity, respect and trust is necessary.

3 Debate

Pupils prepare a speech to argue for or against a motion, and others prepare short speeches 'from the floor' to lend support to one side. The speech is timed (3 minutes?) and those from the floor should be no more than 2 minutes. At the end of the debate a vote is taken and the motion 'carried' or 'defeated'.

Possible motions: This house believes that:

- heaven (or hell) is a figment of the imagination.
- death is not the end but a gateway to another life.
- how you behave in this life affects the next life.
- science has made it impossible to believe in life after death.

4 Priorities (Rucksack activity)

This activity does not so much explore what pupils believe about life after death but tries to help them identify what is important to them in life. Imagine death being as if you were going on a long journey. All you can take with you are things that fit into your rucksack – think not so much in terms of physical things but qualities such as love, hope, friendship, etc. What would you take with you?

