

Teaching and Learning about Religion and Worldviews in English Schools: Religion and Worldview Literacy

**Teaching and Learning about Religion and Worldviews in English Schools:
Religion and Worldview Literacy**

Martha Shaw

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VID Specialized University

post@vid.no

www.vid.no

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Abstract

The future of Religious Education (RE) in England and in wider Europe continues to be a matter of debate. In the UK particularly, there is a perceived crisis in RE, a large part of which relates to confusion over its aims and purposes and to the challenge of keeping up with a changing religion and worldview landscape. Within these debates the term 'religious literacy' has gained considerable currency and is widely accepted as an educational aim. The phrase is increasingly used both within RE and more broadly in a range of professions and settings to describe a level of knowledge and understanding about the diverse religion and worldview landscape and the skills to be able to engage with that diversity in a positive way.

The idea of religious literacy has been theorised in a general context, yet despite its increasing usage, there is no agreed, shared definition of what constitutes religious literacy, or what it looks like in the educational context specifically. This thesis explores the idea of religious literacy and its application in school classrooms. I draw on findings from a national study into stakeholders' views on the future of teaching and learning about religion and worldviews in schools to challenge the idea of religious literacy. These findings illustrate the key role of RE in preparing young people to live in diversity, yet also reveal a complex nexus of values underpinning teachers' practice and an appetite for an overhaul of content and new representations of religion and worldviews in curricula that better reflect the changing reality, as evidenced in sociological research.

I explore the potential of 'religious literacy' to reconcile stakeholders' aspirations for the purpose and content of learning in RE, in its application to the context of the school classroom. I conclude that whilst religious literacy is useful as a theoretical model, its application in the classroom requires modification. These modifications relate to: 1) the explicit extension of 'religion' to 'worldview' to better categorise lived reality and diversity 2) a focus on the construction of knowledge 3) the foregrounding of a reflexive element in understanding and 4) moving from a linear to a circular model. My analysis extends religious literacy from a theoretical model applicable to a range of settings, to a pedagogical model of Religion & Worldview (R&W) literacy. I argue that as a model of educational praxis, R&W literacy better meets the aspirations of stakeholders and has potential to reconcile some of the key debates around both the purpose of RE and the representation of religion in curricula.

List of Articles

Article 1: *Religious Literacy through Religious Education: The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief*, co-authored by myself as lead author and Adam Dinham¹. Published in *Religions*, 2017, 8(7). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8070119>

Article 2: *Values Underpinning Teachers' Practice in Religious Education – A values typology for RE*, single authored. Currently under review with the *Journal of Beliefs and Values*.

Article 3: *New Representations of Religion and Belief in Schools*, single authored. Published in *Religions*, 2018, 9 (11). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110364>

¹ In line with the British referencing system, authors are listed alphabetically, rather than in order of contribution. For clarification: Adam Dinham conceptualised and framed the RE for REal project. I led the fieldwork and we co-analysed the material. I completed the first draft of this article, which Adam Dinham iterated.

1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to develop understandings of religious literacy in classrooms. Religious literacy is a contested concept, yet one growing in popularity in debates around the future of Religious Education (RE) and beyond. The idea of religious literacy has been theorised as an approach to addressing religion in general but has not as yet, been developed as an approach to teaching and learning in school classrooms. My key research question is:

How could religious literacy translate into the classroom context?

As part of this, my sub-questions are:

What kind of knowledge and understanding does religious literacy involve in the classroom context and for what purpose?

What are the relationships to the aspirations of key stakeholders in learning about religion and worldviews?

The empirical basis for this thesis is a 12 month research project for which I was the main field researcher: *REforREal – What do young people really need to know and understand about religion & belief?* RE for REal is a project within the Religious Literacy Programme, housed by the Faiths and Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London. The project examines future directions for teaching and learning about religion and worldviews in English secondary schools (age 11-16) from the perspectives of pupils, teachers, parents and employers. The project was prompted by the urgent conversation underway within the Religious Education (RE) community in the UK about the future of the subject in schools, following both concerns over the quality of teaching and learning and growing criticisms of the policy muddle which frames RE (Dinham & Shaw, 2015).

This thesis is presented in 3 articles and this accompanying commentary. The first article presents an open interrogation of participants' aspirations for the future of teaching and learning about religion and worldviews. It presents these stakeholders' aspirations for this

learning in relation to its purpose (What should it be for?), its content (What should it include?) and its structure (Where within the school curriculum should this learning take place?).

The analyses in the RE for REal project and in article 1 highlight possible ways forward for the future of RE but the interpretation falls short in terms of usefulness to classrooms and teachers. The next two articles further explore participants' views on the purpose and content of learning about religion and worldviews in English schools as a basis for my analysis of how religious literacy translates into the classroom. Article 2 focuses on the views of teachers and examines their rationales for teaching about religion and worldviews from the perspective of professional practice. This article asks: What values do teachers ascribe to their practice of teaching about religion and worldviews? These are analysed in light of wider debates around the purpose of Religious Education, illustrating a tension between intrinsic (knowledge for its own sake) and instrumental (for personal or social worth) aims.

Participants' views on content are explored in article 3 and analysed in relation to wider debates around the representation and conceptualisation of religion and worldviews. Arguing that much representation is shaped by outdated and reductionist epistemological assumptions, this article presents an analysis of what needs to change in terms of representation if learning in this area is to meet the aspirations of stakeholders.

The final stage of analysis, presented in this commentary, recontextualises these debates and stakeholders' aspirations for purpose and content in light of the idea of religious literacy. To do this, I employ Dinham's framework of religious literacy as *category, disposition, knowledge and skills*. Dinham proposes this theoretical framework as a linear process, applicable to policy and practice settings, and extends the invitation to develop the model in contexts of professional practice (Dinham, 2017). I take religious literacy as a mode of analysis and populate this framework with stakeholders' aspirations for the purpose and content of learning about religion and worldviews. In doing so I ask how the religious literacy framework might be applied in the context of school classrooms and how it might reconcile stakeholders' aspirations.

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to RE research and to strengthen the relationship between research and practice in RE. The development of the concept of religious literacy in relation to the classroom context can be seen as an example of “theorising originating from academic practice” meeting “theorising from school practice” in a “third space” (Skeie, 2015, p138). RE in England is a multidisciplinary endeavour. Traditionally dominated by theology and religious studies, the school subject is influenced by a range of other disciplines, from sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and more recently, feminist, queer and post-colonial theory (Cush & Robinson, 2014). My own approach to theorising about learning about religion and worldviews mirrors this inter-disciplinarity, drawing on perspectives from educational studies, sociology and religious studies.

1.1 Background to this Study: Religious Education in England Today - from religious instruction to a subject in crisis

In exploring teaching and learning about religion and worldviews in English schools this thesis is very much set within, but not confined to the context of Religious Education. Whilst religion and worldviews feature within the broader curriculum and in the informal curriculum, most teaching is found within RE lessons and the role of RE in schools forms the basis of my discussion. As such, this thesis makes a particular contribution to discussions around the future of RE in English schools.

RE is compulsory for pupils in all schools in England and Wales up to age 18 but is not part of the National Curriculum.² The 1944 Education Act made Religious Instruction compulsory for all state-maintained schools and made it mandatory for schools to follow an ‘Agreed Syllabus’, developed within each of England’s 56 Local Educational Authorities by a ‘Syllabus Conference’, consisting of representatives of the Church of England and other Christian denominations.

² It is not compulsory in sixth form colleges for students aged 16-18,

These syllabuses were generally based on a Christian, scriptural approach. Changes in legislation had little impact on RE until 1988, when the Education Reform Act shifted the stated purpose of RE from 'teaching religion' to 'teaching *about* religion', and indoctrinatory teaching was prohibited (UK Parliament 1988, Section 9). 'Religious Education' replaced 'Religious Instruction'. Though not part of the newly introduced National Curriculum, the 1988 Act set RE in the context of the whole curriculum, which must promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Syllabuses were still locally determined but, in recognition of a growth in religious diversity, multi-faith 'Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education' (SACREs) replaced the Christian 'Syllabus Conferences'. The Act required Agreed Syllabuses to "reflect the fact that religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain" (UK Parliament 1988, Section. 8.3) as remains the case today.

Whilst syllabuses are locally determined, there have been national, non-statutory frameworks produced to support those responsible for the development of local syllabuses³. In 1994, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) published non-statutory model syllabuses, which included six 'main' religions, a model adopted in many Locally Agreed Syllabuses. In 2004, the successor Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) introduced another non-statutory national framework, which further widened the range of religions to be studied and recommended that students have the opportunity to study "secular philosophies such as humanism" (QCA 2004). This was followed by further national, non-statutory guidance in 2010 (DCSF), 2013 (REC) and 2017 (CoRE).

The turn of the century saw the beginnings of reform of the school system in England, which would have an impact on the status and delivery of RE. The 1998 School Standards and Framework Act introduced four categories of school within the state system: Community

³ It is not a legal requirement that local syllabuses follow the national frameworks, and the extent to which they are followed varies from one local authority (and indeed one school) to another.

(formerly County schools); Foundation; Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled⁴. This brought a wide range of schools ‘with a religious character’ into the state system. This was further expanded by the introduction of Academies in 2000 under the New Labour government. Academies are state funded schools that are directly funded by the Department of Education and independent of local authority control. The impact of these changes on RE was an increased diversity in provision as Voluntary Aided schools and Academies are not required to follow locally agreed syllabuses. The Coalition Government (2010-2015) rapidly expanded the Academies programme and introduced Free Schools, which like Academies, have freedom from national and local government control over what to teach. The impact on RE has been an increasing diversity of approaches in a context which was already complex.

In recent years, there has been the growing sense that RE in England is in a state of crisis. Changes in the schooling structure have undermined the influence of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education’ (SACREs), and cuts in local authority funding and staffing have further weakened other local support structures for RE such as local advisors. Other policy changes have intensified this sense of crisis. These include the decision to exclude RE from the English Baccalaureate Certificate⁵ (EBACC) and removal of short-course results as a measure of school performance, which has led to a reduction in teaching time devoted to the subject, with many schools delivering RE through tutor time, or ‘RE days’ rather than as a discrete subject on the timetable (Dinham & Shaw, 2015). There have also been government cuts to funding for trainee teachers in RE resulting in the increased use of non–specialist teachers.

The impact of these measures is that RE has been marginalised within the curriculum and suffered a loss of status. Alongside this, the schools inspectorate, Ofsted⁶, outlined a ‘quality emergency’ in 2010 reporting that the provision of RE was inadequate in 60% of schools and

⁴ There are several types of school within the state-funded sector in England. State schools receive funding through their local authority or directly from the government and different types of school have different funding arrangements and governance structures. [More details](#).

⁵ The EBacc is a school performance indicator based on the results of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in traditional academic subjects

⁶ Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. It is a non-ministerial department of the UK government, reporting to Parliament and is responsible for inspecting schools.

identifying the need for improvement in all areas; subject knowledge, pedagogy and planning, teacher training, attainment and progress and leadership (Ofsted 2010).

The sense of crisis is well recognised within the RE community and even former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove recognised that RE had been an ‘unintended casualty’ of recent curriculum reforms (REC, 2013, p.8). Since then, RE has been further marginalised from wider initiatives in curriculum development by the absence of publicly funded national support for a review of RE provision, to parallel the review of the National Curriculum carried out in 2013 (REC, 2013, p.33). In response, the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC) conducted its own review, producing a new, non-statutory programme of study for RE: *Religious Education: A National Curriculum Framework* (NCFRE). The REC Review called for significant changes to address RE’s crisis, challenging the existing ‘settlement’ for RE, and arguing for improved support systems, more coherence in curriculum planning and assessment and more robust teacher training (REC, 2013).

Despite the perceived crisis, RE remains a popular subject and its importance is recognised by the public at large. Research into attitudes to RE conducted by YouGov in 2012 on behalf of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC) showed that over half of all adults in England and Wales who gave an opinion either way said that RE should remain a compulsory subject. 58% agreed it was beneficial for all pupils to participate in RE lessons and this figure rose to 63% among 18-24 year olds (YouGov, 2012). RE is popular in educational policy too, where it has been seen as a promoter of community cohesion and good community relations (APPG, 2015). The 2006 Education and Inspection Act made it a legal requirement for schools in England to promote community cohesion and for Ofsted to inspect its provision (since revoked). RE is seen as making a unique contribution in this area (Ofsted, 2010; REC, 2013; APPG, 2015) and seen as an effective vehicle for the promotion of ‘British Values’ as set out in the Government’s Prevent Strategy (DfE, 2015). So whilst on the one hand RE in England has suffered from a series of policy measures that have reduced its status and had an impact on

quality, it is also considered an important subject in terms of its contribution to a safe and harmonious society.

Within this context, one of the recommendations of the RE for REal report was that a national panel be established to review the key issues around the purpose, content and structure of RE and the surrounding legislation. Subsequently the independent Commission for Religion Education (CoRE) was established with the remit to make recommendations to improve the quality and rigour of RE. During an 18 month consultation period, Adam Dinham and I were invited to give evidence to the Commission, based on the findings of the RE for REal project. Many of the recommendations in the RE for REal report now find expression in the proposed National Entitlement (CoRE, 2018). Key amongst these is a focus on lived religion and the changing nature of the religion and worldview landscape, and the study of religion as a concept. A significant sociological focus in the proposed Entitlement mirrors the key messages emerging from the RE for REal research and is further discussed in article 3. Whilst there is significant support for the CoRE national entitlement, it remains non-statutory amidst a continuing campaign for legislative reform (see Chater ed., forthcoming).

Whilst set in the English context, my thesis has relevance for RE in other contexts. The role of religious education is a debated and contested subject in most countries around the world (Stern, 2018). Across Europe the position of and the perceived role of RE varies considerably. In many countries such as Italy and Poland, a confessional approach dominates. In others, such as Sweden, a more 'social scientific' approach is adopted with a focus on ethics (Stern, 2018). There is a wealth of research around the role of religious education across Europe, a large part of which stemmed from the REDCo research project (Religion and Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor in Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries), which was funded by the European Commission and ran from 2006-2009 (See Knauth et al., 2008). Whilst this body of research highlights the different approaches to RE across Europe, it also reflects the trend for RE to be situated within the context of human rights education and education for democratic citizenship. In Norway particularly, the debates around the position of RE have

gained pace in recent years in response to increasing religious pluralism, and have many parallels with debates in England. As in England, the purpose of RE - its intrinsic and instrumental value, particularly in relation to personal development remain topics of debate in Norway (see Skeie, 2015, 2017). Within these debates, the concept of religious literacy is gaining popularity, although its meaning and application are also contested. What religious literacy means and how it might be developed in schools is of relevance then to the broader curriculum in England and to the wider European context.

1.2 A Note on Terminology

There are some important issues of terminology that require clarification in relation to this thesis. The terms 'religion', 'belief' and 'worldviews' are used throughout, all of which are contested concepts, used in varying ways in the literature and in policy. There is also some difference in usage in different national contexts, particularly with respect to the term 'worldviews'. As noted by Braten and Everington in their comparison between Norway and England, these usages reflect important political debates (Braten & Everington, 2019).

There is a notable shift in my own language throughout this thesis from use of the phrase 'religion and belief' in the first and third articles to 'religion and worldviews' in the second article⁷ and in this commentary. Alongside this, there is a corresponding shift in language from 'religious literacy', when discussing existing literature and theory, to 'religion and worldview literacy' in my final model.

This shift in terminology is a reflection of both the language of policy and the research process itself. The adoption of the phrase 'religion and belief' in articles 1 and 3 is reflective of the language widely used in the UK at the time of publication and in UK equalities legislation in which 'religion or belief' is a protected characteristic (Legislation.gov.uk, 2010). It was used to

⁷ Article 2 was the last of the three to be submitted for peer review and thus adopts the same terminology as this commentary. It remains 'article 2' in order to preserve the flow of argument in this thesis.

reflect the diverse landscape of religious and non-religious beliefs, practices and identities, which I argue should be the subject of study in schools.

My use of the term 'worldviews' is reflective of its increasing currency in the RE community in England. Unlike in Norway, where the integration of the study of religions and non-religious worldviews is firmly established (Braten & Everington, 2019), in England integration is happening slowly and, as recognised by Jackson, faces significant practical and political challenges (Jackson 2014). In England, the term was first used in curriculum guidance for RE in 2004 (QCA, 2004) and has since grown in usage. However, the meaning applied to the concept is not consistent (Braten & Everington, 2019). Worldview is a translation from the German concept of Weltanschauung, "referring sometimes to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual, or wider grouping, interprets and interacts with the world" (Jackson, 2014, p70). Jackson highlights a useful distinction made by Van der Kooij et al. (2013) between 'organised' and 'personal' worldviews. These are summarised neatly by Braten and Everington:

In this interpretation of the concepts, an organised worldview has developed over time as a more or less coherent system with sources, traditions, values and ideals and a group of adherents. It prescribes answers to existential questions, includes moral values and aims to influence thinking and action and provide meaning in life. A personal worldview is a view on life, identity, the world and existential questions that includes values and ideals. It may draw on a variety of sources, and it influences an individual's thought and action, usually giving meaning to life. It can be eclectic and idiosyncratic and might not involve belonging to a specific group (Braten & Everington, 2019, p292)

The extent to which an organised or personal worldview draws on religion is variable and as such, the term 'worldview' incorporates both religious and non-religious views on life. Yet Braten and Everington (2019) note a lack of consensus in policy and practice as to whether the

term refers to all worldviews (religious and non-religious) or, more narrowly only to secular worldviews. The recent report published by England's Commission on Religious Education (CoRE, 2018) proposes that RE be renamed 'Religion and Worldviews' and understands the term 'worldviews' as including religious and non-religious, institutionalised and personal worldviews. The retention of the two terms 'religion' and 'worldviews' might suggest otherwise. However, the CoRE report explains that the term 'religion' is retained both in order to maintain continuity with the familiar 'Religious Education' and to place emphasis on young people understanding the conceptual category of religion.

This focus on religion as a category was a key recommendation of the RE for REal research (Dinham and Shaw, 2015) and central to this thesis. Alongside this, I argue for a broader representation of religious and non-religious worldviews that includes more informal and personal experiences and understandings. As such, I use the phrase 'religion and worldviews' in a similar way to the Commission for RE; I keep *religion* to denote a focus on the conceptual category of religion and employ *worldviews* to mean religious and non-religious ways of life and ways of understanding life that shape the experience of individuals groups and communities. The same phrasing is used in this commentary to describe these experiences and ways of life in society as the 'religion and worldview landscape'.

As this thesis will show, the process of research and analysis, in populating Dinham's framework of religious literacy, has led me to employ the language of 'religion and worldviews' and 'religion and worldview literacy'. Whilst Dinham contends that his usage of the term 'religious literacy' incorporates religious and non-religious beliefs, practices and worldviews, I would argue that there is a need for clarity and an agreed definition. It is particularly necessary if 'religion and worldview literacy' is to be a model applicable in schools across a range of contexts, that there is a clear, shared understanding of the subject matter. The phrase 'religion and worldview literacy' better reflects the aspirations of participants, the direction of wider debates and the aims of my proposed model.

1.3 The Structure of this Thesis

Following this introduction, the structure of this thesis continues with Chapter 2 which presents a review of the key relevant debates and research. This is presented in two parts: Firstly a review of research and debates around the *aims and purposes* of RE and secondly, a review of research and debates relating to the content of RE, presented as *issues of representation*.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical perspectives that inform this thesis. This thesis is presented as a process of abductive analysis. As such, it is informed by a range of ideas and theories drawn from literature studied. These are drawn from religious studies and sociological theories on religion, pedagogical approaches to learning about religion and worldviews and theories of religious literacy. In terms of my own theorisation, those most explicitly employed are philosophical hermeneutics and religious literacy. These are therefore the focus of Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 presents the research design and methodology. This is followed in Chapter 5 by a summary of the three articles and their contribution to this thesis. Chapter 6 forms both the discussion part of this thesis and presents the expanded theorisation that I have developed. This is both a synthesis of the analyses found in the articles and a new abduction of this material in light of the idea of religious literacy. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis, outlining the contributions it seeks to make to both theory and practice.

2: Review of Relevant Research & Debates

As indicated above, a large part of the perceived crisis in RE revolves around confusion over its purpose and how it can best represent an increasingly diverse landscape of worldviews. The following section presents existing research and debates around these two key areas of 'purpose' and 'content', illustrating that a lack of clarity and consensus over purpose, and how to represent diversity have been a persistent challenge to RE policy and practice.

2.1 The Aims and Purposes of Religious Education

Whilst, as noted by Fancourt (2015), England has been an international leader in shifting from a nurture model of RE to an objective study of religions, a lack of consensus over RE's central purpose is seen by many as central to a state of crisis in relation to its position in schools (Castelli & Chater, 2018). The debate over purpose rests on the extent to which the central aims of RE are the personal development of the child, service to society or pupils' academic development. Whilst these debates are rife in the RE community in England, there is little empirical research into how these positions play out in schools. A notable exception is the *Does RE Work?* Project (see Conroy *et al.*, 2013), which included ethnographic case studies of 24 schools across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The study revealed the multitude of competing narratives and confusion over the purposes of RE, painting the picture of a "subject at crossroads" (Lundie, 2018, p349).

As commented by Lundie (2018), guidance documents have, since the 1980s, drawn on Grimmitt's (1987) influential, post-confessional language of 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. More recently, the 2013 non-statutory framework combines the three aims of; knowing and understanding a range of religions and worldviews, expressing ideas and insights about the nature, significance and impact of religion and worldviews and gaining and deploying the skills needed to engage seriously with religion and worldviews (REC, 2013). Other curriculum documents have generally attempted to reflect these broad aims, which are taken forward with differing emphasis from one locally agreed syllabus to the next.

This lack of consensus is exemplified by Ofsted's finding in 2010 that teachers were unsure which of the following objectives represented the core purpose of RE: to develop pupil's skills in investigating and evaluating the world of religion and belief; to help pupils develop positive values, attitudes and dispositions; to enable pupils to develop their own spirituality and reflect on deeper aspects of their own human experience, or to foster respect for diversity of religion and belief (Ofsted,2010, p42). Jackson (2015) neatly summarises the often competing aims of RE in terms of *intrinsic* aims (learning about religion and worldviews for their own sake, because they are part of the human experience and should therefore be understood) and *instrumental* aims (for the sake of personal or social development).

2.1.1 Religious Education as Personal Development

Since its confessional beginnings, the idea that RE should have as its prime purpose the personal development of the child remains a key thread. Whilst the 1988 Act prohibited indoctrinatory teaching in state maintained schools, it set RE within the broader curriculum and emphasised its contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC). This emphasis is promoted in influential pedagogical approaches to RE, reflected in curriculum documents (QCA, 2004; DSCF, 2010; REC, 2013) and was seen by Ofsted in 2007 as the key strength of RE (Ofsted, 2007).

That RE has a dual purpose of both implicit and explicit learning has long been accepted by many within the RE community. Michael Grimmitt's (1987) highly influential approach emphasises pupils' reflective and empathetic skills and their personal development alongside and in interaction with the development of their understanding of religions. Yet, whilst intended to be interdependent elements of learning, 'learning about' and 'learning from' religions were taken forward in local syllabuses (and internationally) as distinct attainment targets, with 'learning from' interpreted in terms of pupils' moral, social and spiritual development. For example, 'learning from religion' was framed in the 1994 model syllabuses as developing pupils ability to respond to religious and moral issues, reflect on learning from

religions in light of their own beliefs and experience and to identify and respond to questions of meaning within religions (SCAA, 1994a). The assumption about the role of RE in pupils' spiritual and moral and development is exemplified in the specification that RE should provide opportunities for "enhancing [pupils'] own spiritual and moral development" and "developing positive attitudes towards other people and their right to hold different beliefs" (SCCA, 1994a, p13). This suggests that the formalised distinction in curriculum documents between Grimmitt's 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion' has entrenched the aim of personal development as central to the subject.

However, many are critical of the idea that pupils' moral, spiritual or social development should be a central aim, seeing it as ancillary to 'good RE'. For example in its 2013 report, *Religious Education: Realising the Potential*, Ofsted calls for a deeper understanding of religion, reporting an over emphasis on social, moral and ethical issues at Key Stage 3 (the first 3 years of secondary school) extending into a focus on philosophy and ethics at GCSE⁸ and Key Stage 4 (the last two years of secondary school), at the expense of learning about religion & belief itself: "In many of the schools visited, the subject was increasingly losing touch with the idea that RE should be primarily concerned with helping pupils to make sense of the world of religion and belief" (Ofsted, 2013, p14). This links to concerns over a lack of academic rigour in contemporary RE, often characterised by a very limited appreciation or understanding of religious language. For example, Wright contends that RE should look to Religious Studies and Theology and tap into a centuries-long tradition of developed linguistic skills for the study of religion (Wright, 1993, p75). Wright echoes Ford's vision of a partnership between Theology and Religious Studies which embraces religious language and truth claims (Ford, 2011).

Rigour aside, there is a growing unease in the wider RE community with the idea that RE should bear the sole or even primary responsibility for a child's personal development, particularly in relation to moral education. As argued by Wright (1993), all subjects are responsible for the future development of society – morality, citizenship and multiculturalism are cross-curricular

⁸ General Certificate of Secondary Education – examinations taken at the end of secondary school.

themes, not religious issues. Whilst acknowledging that the idea of RE as moral educator is attractive to those who are uncomfortable about the place of RE in schools, Wright is clear that its place should be no different than other subjects – it will contribute to SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) development, the hidden curriculum, the ethos of school and to morality, but only in so far as they relate to the subject matter (Wright, 1993, p89). Others are equally perturbed by the association between morality and religion, recognising that morality is not only found in, or derived from religion (see White 2004).

2.1.2 The Instrumentalisation of Religious Education

Alongside personal development there is concern that RE has been instrumentalised by policy, with the implication that learning about religion and worldviews is intended to perform a primarily social task - to form citizens who can connect across difference. As with personal development, the social function of RE is longstanding. The 1944 Act sought to unite a nation in Christian morality following the atrocities of the 2nd World War, and the 1988 Act, although not focused on cohesion as such, has been seen as opening the door to teaching to promote tolerance and understanding through the inclusion of world religions (Copley, 2010). The tragedies of 9/11, the 2001 riots in the UK's Northern towns and the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London threw religion and its role in cultural diversity and cohesion into the spotlight. With the introduction in 2006 of a duty on schools to promote community cohesion, the role of RE as a deliverer of social goods became more explicit. Both in curriculum guidance and policy documents, RE is presented as a key site for the promotion of community cohesion (see Ofsted, 2010 2013; APPG, 2015, DCSF, 2010). For example, Ofsted is clear that: "A major success of RE is the way that it supports the promotion of community cohesion. In many schools RE plays a major role in helping pupils understand diversity and develop respect for the beliefs and cultures of others" (Ofsted, 2010, p5). Likewise the 2010 curriculum guidance states that "RE's subject matter gives particular opportunities to promote an ethos of respect for others, challenge stereotypes and build understanding of other cultures and beliefs. This contributes to promoting a positive and inclusive school ethos that champions democratic values and human rights" (DSCF, 2010, p8).

RE's perceived role in the development of good citizens and a 'better society' aligns it with Citizenship education (introduced as a statutory subject in the English National Curriculum in 2001), an alliance promoted by the RE Council for England and Wales which in 2007 stated that 'RE should be aligned more closely with other related developments in education, particularly citizenship, personal, social, health education with its significance for moral education, diversity and community cohesion, and the personalisation of learning, to ensure a synergetic approach to the contribution of education to social and community issues' (cited in Grimmitt, 2010, p297). A new strand of the Citizenship curriculum, 'Identity & Diversity; Living together in the UK' introduced in 2007, which included critical thinking about ethnicity, religion and race, brought the two subjects still closer together.

The onus on RE to deliver the 'goods' that hold society together is evident too in the implementation of the UK government's Prevent strategy. In response to the so-called *Trojan Horse* affair in 2014, in which there was an alleged conspiracy to Islamise schools in Birmingham, a duty was placed on schools to promote 'British values'. This was strengthened in 2015 with the 'Prevent Duty', which places on schools a legal duty to prevent pupils from being radicalised into extremism. The Department for Education (DfE) defines extremism as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs" (DfE, 2015, p5). This marks an important shift, from definitions of extremism as violence to being about values and beliefs. DfE stresses that the Prevent duty should be taken as part of schools' wider safeguarding agenda, but the promotion of 'British values' is seen too as part of pupils' SMSC⁹ development. Given the perception of RE as a key site for the delivery of SMSC in schools, this aligns it with the security agenda. Likewise the inclusion within 'British values' of 'tolerance of other faiths and lifestyles' places further emphasis on the role of RE in the delivery of a set of prescribed, state imposed values. The link between RE and preventing extremism is further

⁹ Under section 78 of the Education Act 2002, all schools must promote pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development.

exemplified in the government funded, REsilience Project¹⁰, led by the RE Council for England and Wales (REC) which provides training for RE teachers on community cohesion and preventing violent extremism.

Many are critical of such 'instrumentalisation' of RE. Gearon, for example, sees the inclusion of the religion dimension in citizenship education as an intrusion into RE territory and as politically sanitising religion in service to, rather than critique of the state (Gearon, 2010). Gearon points out the dangers of reducing religion to politics and limiting it to its social usefulness, at the expense of religion's "broader theological, metaphysical and existential scope" (Gearon, 2010, p45). Gearon notes the irony that religion, once marginalised by politics, is now becoming subsumed by a 'liberal autocracy'; "RE is being used in the service of social and community cohesion to serve the interests of a particular political community, and a particular form of coherence, one whose rational and political traditions – historical but alive in contemporary context – are easily identified through their antagonism to and (belatedly) the manipulation of religion" (Gearon, 2010, p122). Similarly Wright warns of the dangers of the ideology of "comprehensive liberalism" with tolerance as an end itself. Gearon suggests some projects framed as intercultural citizenship education, such as the European Commission funded REDCo¹¹ research and the Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religions and worldviews in public schools, produced by the organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) are evidence of the politicisation and securitisation of religion (Gearon, 2013).

Others, such as Jackson see RE as complementing citizenship education "through the process of helping children debate issues relevant to plural society" (Jackson, 2003, p67). Indeed there is a much clearer focus at the European level around the role of religion and worldviews in education for intercultural citizenship, represented in the Council of Europe's 2008 Recommendation calling on member states to "pursue initiatives in the field of intercultural

¹⁰ See <http://resilience-england.recouncil.org.uk>

¹¹ A European Commission project on religious education, dialogue and conflict (REDCo). Includes 9 projects in 8 European countries (See Knauth et al., 2008).

education relating to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions in order to promote tolerance and the development of a culture of ‘living together’” (Council of Europe, 2008). The Recommendation sets teaching and learning about religion and worldviews as a strand of intercultural education and key to intercultural competency. In evidence of the growing trend in aligning the aims of RE and intercultural education, Jackson’s *Signposts* (2014), intended to assist implementation of the 2008 Recommendation for schools, policy makers and teacher trainers, has been widely incorporated into teacher training courses across Europe.

This research hopes to make a contribution to these debates over the aims and purpose of learning about religion and worldviews in two ways. Firstly by providing a stronger empirical basis for the discussion of aims and purposes, it seeks to bring some clarity to this muddle. Secondly, by drawing out the aspirations of key stakeholders in learning about religion and worldviews it explores how these might be reconciled.

2.2 Debates around the Content of Religious Education - Issues of Representation

The question of why pupils should study religion and worldviews is inseparable from that of which religions and worldviews they should study - purpose and content are interdependent. Whether for the purposes of promoting cohesion or for the intrinsic aim of understanding the world we live in, there is general agreement that RE should develop an understanding of the diversity of religions and worldviews. However, RE in England has been widely criticised for failing to get to grips with the diversity and complexity of religion and worldviews (see for example, Jackson 1997; Barnes 2012; Ofsted 2013; REC, 2013). This reflects concerns over both the range of religious and non-religious worldviews that are represented in curricula and the ways in which they are represented. The debates around the representation of religion and worldviews in curricula are explored in depth in Article 3. What follows is a summary of the key issues.

2.2.1 The Changing Religion & Worldview Landscape

A wealth of sociological research points to the dramatic changes in the religion and worldview landscape over the last few decades. Contrary to earlier predictions (Berger, 1967), these do not simply reflect a process of secularisation. Rather, as Davie explains, society is becoming both increasingly secular and religiously plural at the same time (Davie, 2015a). For example, Davie suggests that the British population can now be thought of in thirds: religious, spiritual and secular (Davie, 2015b, p162).

This relates to the pattern highlighted by Woodhead of the demise of 'old style' religion characterised by national, hierarchical structures, passive membership and formal practices and the increasing dominance of 'new style' religion, with less structured forms of practice, participation and authority (Woodhead 2012a). Davie's famous phrase of 'believing without belonging' captures the increasingly individualised and informal nature of much religious practice (Davie 1994). Alongside this, Davie stresses that whilst fewer people are now religious, those who are, take it more seriously: "the religious and the secular are more consciously articulated" and that "both, moreover, are varied" (Davie, 2015b, p16). Lee's work in particular shows us that the secular requires as much attention as the religious. She demonstrates a discernible shift from the 'hollowly secular' to the 'substantively nonreligious' (Lee, 2015), illustrating that non-religion is not just an absence of religion but something actively expressed, more often than not in the company of others (Davie, 2015b). This body of research suggests that making sense of secularity, irreligion, and the relationship between them is crucial to our understanding of contemporary society.

The sociological research emphasises the lived nature of religion and worldviews, the importance of individual interpretation and diversity within tradition. Hervieu-Léger's notion of *bricolage* (2000) is illustrative of the way in which individuals devise their own religious identity. Such research shows that fluidity in religious identity and in tradition is part and parcel of the changing landscape. At the individual level, as McCloud demonstrates, identities are

characterised by hybridity and fluidity as individuals improvise new religious blends from cultural materials available to them (McCloud 2017, p. 17). Analyses of transnational religion present illuminating examples of everyday, lived, blended religion (see Levitt, 2006) and stress the importance of understanding fluidity at the level of tradition as well as identity. Through interaction and reinterpretation, traditions transform and new traditions are formed (see for example Pasura and Erdal 2016).

2.2.2 Religious Diversity and Religious Education

There is an increasing awareness in the RE community of the complexity of the religion and worldview landscape. In relation to the breadth of religious and non-religious worldviews to be included in curricula, there is recognition that an understanding of diversity must go beyond a superficial knowledge of the major faiths, either those represented in Britain or the world religions and must include non-religious worldviews. However, much RE practice and many RE text books still refer to the 'big six', an idea that is largely unquestioned (Revell, 2012). This can be seen as a result of the 1988 Act and its insistence that syllabuses reflect the 'fact that the religious traditions are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principle religions represented in Great Britain'. The 1988 Act, and the accompanying multi faith SACREs¹² are a product of the broader multiculturalist policy of the time. The SACRE system, which gives religious organisations an influence over the curriculum is largely limited to 'representatives' of the major religious faiths found in the UK, although a few now include a Humanist 'representative'.

Alongside this legislation, the prominence of a 'world religions' approach, underpinned by the phenomenological approach to RE developed by Ninian Smart in the late 1960s has been blamed for a reductionist portrayal of religion (Flood, 1999; Wright, 1993; Revell, 2012; Jackson, 1997). The idea of world religions with shared characteristics resulted in schemes of work shaped by themes such as 'founding fathers' and 'holy books'. In a reflection of multiculturalist policy, this approach emphasises similarity between religious traditions and presents them as

¹² Standing Advisory Councils for RE.

static entities that can be objectively studied. Many are critical of this relativist and sanitised portrayal of religions. Critique rests on the premise that such a representation side-lines religions and belief systems that do not fit neatly into such a framework, fails to account for internal diversity within traditions (Wright, 1993) and over-emphasises the positive side of religion, brushing over its controversial nature (See Chater & Erricker, 2013).

Jackson's Interpretive Approach is viewed by many as coming closest to providing an understanding of the true diversity and nature of religion (see Skeie, 2015). Rather than the representation of religions as discrete belief systems, the interpretivist approach adopts a much looser understanding of 'religion' and religious traditions, one that is closer to the empirical data and to the experience of learners, with much attention paid to the internal diversity of religious traditions, and their interpretation by the individual. Thus Jackson is critical of the approach taken in the 2004 non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education, arguing that its "view of cultures is inadequate, using the language of separate bounded cultures and downplaying the contested and challenging cultural forms and syntheses that are the reality across the generations" (Jackson 2004, p220). Jackson draws on the research of Gerd Baumann that demonstrates the creativity and reshaping that occurs through intercultural encounter (Jackson, 2004).

Jackson argues that the "European Enlightenment view of 'religions' as clearly distinct and internally consistent belief systems should be abandoned in favour of a much looser portrayal of religious traditions and groupings, variously delimited and politically contested by different practitioners and non-practitioners, and in which some individuals may locate themselves or be located by others" (Jackson, 2004, p90). Individuals may be seen as or identify as part of a tradition in certain contexts and not in others. They may also synthesise a range of cultural resources, particularly in the context of our globalised society, as examples of transnational religion demonstrate (See Levitt, 2006, Pasura and Erdal 2016). This process of context-driven cultural change is of particular interest to Jackson.

The interpretivist approach promotes an insider perspective and as such can be seen to challenge the portrayals of religion and worldviews found in many RE approaches and curricula. The insider/outsider debate reflects epistemological concerns over the shaping of knowledge about religion and worldviews in a Western, liberal, secular mould. Since Said's challenge to stereotypical constructions of Islam (Said, 1978), many scholars have pointed to the stereotypical way in which knowledge about religion is constructed. Stoddard and Martin argue that these constructions perpetuate a set of clichés that stem from the development of the ideology of political liberalism in early modern Europe (Stoddard and Martin, 2017). Key amongst these clichés is that religion is a private affair (Walsh, 2017), that religion is always primarily about belief (McCloud, 2017) and is necessarily concerned with the transcendent (Dorrough Smith, 2017). Similarly, King questions the usefulness of the category 'religion' in relation to non-Western cultures, recognising the "preoccupation with truth (rather than practice and forms of life) and with a canon of authorised scriptures as the location of the true essence of religion" (King 1999, cited in Hinnells 2009).

Recent developments within the RE community in the UK are responding to these concerns and there is an emerging focus on issues of categorisation. A key development within English RE has been the University of Exeter's 'Identifying Principles and Big Ideas for RE' project (Wintersgill, 2017). In line with the approach taken in Science education in England, the project generated a set of 'Big Ideas' for RE, intended to shape curriculum content, improving its coherence and relevance (Freathy & John, 2019). The 'Big Ideas' include an explicit focus on continuity, change and diversity, on religion and worldviews in society, and on religion and worldviews as identity. The 'Big Ideas' fall short however of a critical exploration of the key concepts of 'religion', 'worldview', 'spirituality' etc. As outlined above, consideration of category is however included in the curriculum guidance proposed by the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE, 2018) through the explicit focus on the concept of religion.

This focus on the concept of religion may open a space for the exploration of epistemological concerns in terms of questioning representations of religion and the construction of knowledge

about religion and worldviews. These concerns are taken up by Freathy & John (2019) who in building on the 'Big Ideas' project, note the absence of consideration of epistemology and methodology and suggest a further set of 'Big Ideas *about* the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)'¹³. They argue the need for 'Big Ideas' that "highlight aspects of contestation, which point to the variety and influence of epistemological and methodological approach, and which encourage pupils to ask questions of their own locatedness and their own perspective, because meaning is situational and contingent (Geertz, 2002a,227)" (Freathy & John, 2019, p33). In the Nordic context, Skeie raises similar concerns around the categorisation of religion and asks whether an anti-essentialist position is possible to maintain in the classroom setting and what strategies might support it (Skeie, 2015).

As illustrated, the real religion and worldview landscape and how it is understood, lived and negotiated is far more complex and dynamic than many representations suggest. The evidence emerging from sociological research suggests new representations are needed, alongside a critical analysis and deconstruction of existing 'knowledge' about religion and worldviews.

¹³ The brackets around (s) are as used by Freathy & John (2019).

3: Theoretical Perspectives

My analysis has been influenced by a range of theories and ideas. As outlined in the previous chapter, these theories are drawn from RE research and span the disciplines of Sociology, Education and Religious Studies. Alongside those already discussed, some have formed a more central component of my analysis. Firstly is that of religious literacy, which provides a central mode of analysis. Secondly are theories that see learning about religion and worldviews as a hermeneutic process, informed primarily by the hermeneutic philosophy of Gadamer. These provide an understanding of identity and tradition that I use to build on Dinham's theoretical framework of religious literacy in the context of learning in classrooms.

3.1 Religious Literacy

Within education the focus on types of literacies has been a growing trend (media literacy, digital literacy etc.). Moving on from earlier understandings of literacy as having the skills to read and write, these 'new literacies' broaden the concept to denote both knowledge and skills; a 'functional literacy' encompassing the idea that the literate person knows enough and has the necessary skills to apply that knowledge in a given context in order to 'navigate' or 'get by'. In this sense, literacy is seen as a social practice, with social worth (UNESCO, 2006). This focus on social practice frames literacy as a process, rather than simply a set of acquired knowledge and skills. It also broadens the meaning of the 'text' to encompass any given area of social life or social interactions. It is within this broader understanding of literacy that I place 'religious literacy'. As the following discussion will show however, there is significant variation in meaning and shifts in emphasis in the way 'religious literacy' has been understood.

Early mention of the phrase is found in Ward's 1953 article, *The Right to Religious Literacy* and followed in 1954 by sociologist Vladimir de Lissovoy's article, *A Sociological Approach to Religious Literacy* (Possamai & Blasi, 2020). There is then little mention of the term in academic discourse until Wright's 1993 publication, *Religious Education in the Secondary School – Prospects for Religious Literacy*. Since then, varied definitions of religious literacy have gained

currency both in discussions around the place of religion in public life and in debates around RE. In 2010 Ofsted bemoaned the “very low level of religious literacy” of school leavers, calling for a stronger focus in RE on deepening pupils’ understanding of the nature, diversity and impact of religion and belief in the contemporary world (Ofsted, 2010, p7). With a difference of emphasis, the Religious Education Council’s 2013 review of RE promotes religious literacy defined in terms of pupils developing skills in “investigating religions and worldviews through varied experiences, approaches and disciplines; reflecting on and expressing their own ideas and the ideas of others with increasing creativity and clarity and becoming increasingly able to respond to religions and worldviews in an informed, rational and insightful way” (REC, 2013, p10).

Wright (1993) provides a theoretical starting point for discussions around religious literacy in RE. For Wright religious literacy rests on skills of theological and philosophical reflection, defining religious literacy as pupils’ ability to “reflect, communicate and act in an informed, intelligent and sensitive manner toward the phenomenon of religion” (Wright, 1993, p47). Pupils are enabled to articulate their own worldview, through dialogue with the truth claims of other religious and non-religious traditions. The encounter that is of concern to Wright, is that with the “various public linguistic traditions that seek to account for the ultimate nature of reality” (Wright, 1996, p174).

Usage of ‘religious literacy’ also draws on understandings from outside RE that suggest a broader social phenomenon of religious illiteracy. Prothero (2007) contends that Americans have lost their understanding about religion and that there is a set of ‘building blocks’ of religious traditions, “their terms, symbols, doctrines, sayings, characters, metaphors and narratives” (2007, p15) that the religiously literate person should know. Prothero’s religious literacy rests on propositional and normative knowledge about the world religions that can be broken down into a set of facts that every American needs if they are to “participate fully in social, political and economic life in a nation and a world in which religion counts” (2007, p15). Prothero draws on Hirsch’s (1987) ideas on cultural literacy, advocating curricula that provide all Americans with the essential knowledge they require in order to navigate American culture.

Like Prothero, Moore (2007) bemoans a growing religious illiteracy in American society. Taking a cultural studies approach, Moore broadens the focus beyond knowing about the 'building blocks' of traditions to understanding their social and historical manifestations. She defines religious literacy as, "the ability to discern and analyse the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses" (Moore, 2007, p56). Religion is viewed alongside race, ethnicity, gender and class as a concept central to an understanding of history and society and religious literacy as central to the effective, peaceful functioning of a plural democracy. As such, religious literacy is seen as an essential life skill: "Even in schools where the population is seemingly (or perhaps truly) religiously homogenous, cultivating an informed respect for religious differences will equip students with the skills and temperaments to function more meaningfully and effectively within their home communities and the workplace realities they are likely to encounter in the future" (Moore, 2007, p33). Moore's approach is closely aligned with models of intercultural competency, with a focus on skills of encounter. Such an understanding of religious literacy has strong parallels with the learning envisaged in Jackson's *Signposts* (Jackson, 2014), intended to assist implementation of the Council of Europe's 2008 Recommendation on the dimension of religious and non-religious convictions within intercultural education (Council of Europe, 2008).

Like Prothero and Moore, Dinham (2016) contends that secular assumptions about the nature and relevance of religion have resulted in society losing the ability to 'talk well' about religion. Dinham highlights that this process has been accompanied by a period of rapid change in the religious landscape (Dinham & Francis, 2016), leaving society ill-equipped to engage positively with the current reality. A key part of this understanding of religious literacy is that misplaced assumptions that religion is in decline (secularisation) has led us to a situation in which, as observed by Davie, we have "a lamentable quality of conversation about religion, just when we need it most" (cited in Dinham, 2015, p45). In the period that society has not been taking about religion in public life, restricting it to the private realm, patterns of religion and non-religious belief and practice have been changing dramatically and come back into the attention of public

debate. As Dinham and I have argued, there is a 'real religious landscape' (Dinham & Shaw, 2015), which has changed beyond the imaginings of most people, and policy makers. Added to this, terrorist attacks over the last couple of decades and fears around immigration have dominated the re-emergence of religion in public life and characterised it in terms of threat and risk. As Davie has often observed, this lack of understanding and stereotypical notions of religion have led to a conversation that is often ill-tempered and ill-mannered (Davie, 2015a). Dinham argues that, "what we *need* is a much better quality of conversation about religion which is thoughtful, well-informed and supported" (Dinham, 2015, p54).

Dinham proposes religious literacy as a theoretical framework that is intentionally broad and applicable to a wide range of contexts, as well as schools, such as higher education (see e.g. Dinham & Jones, 2012), and professional and vocational training (see e.g. Davie & Dinham, 2016). Dinham suggests that the path towards religious literacy should involve four phases; *category*, *disposition*, *knowledge* and *skills*. *Category* implies thinking critically about the concept of religion in relation to the secular, and draws on a sociological perspective. *Disposition* involves the questioning of one's own prejudices towards religion, non-religion or another's religion. *Knowledge* refers to what we need to know about religion and belief in any particular setting. Finally, *Skills* incorporates the translation of knowledge into skilful encounter. Dinham acknowledges that the knowledge and skills required to be 'religiously literate' will vary from one setting to the next and that what religious literacy looks like is context specific. Dinham does not however, say how such literacy is to be arrived at in the educational context.

Dinham's framework emphasises both the functional and critical elements of religious literacy. The latter, critical literacy, would seem particularly relevant to the educational context. Critical literacy has its roots in the work of Paulo Freire (1970), which invites us to challenge received ideas in a dialectic and transformative process. Goldberg argues that the idea of religious literacy needs to be expanded to include the functional, cultural and critical dimensions and advocates a Freirean approach in which "students are encouraged and enabled to identify, examine and critique problematic, contradictory and multiple ways of seeing the world"

(Goldberg, 2010, p352). Critical religious literacy then involves the questioning of received knowledge about religion; “What knowledge is revered? Whose histories are legitimated? Whose voices are silenced? What religions are marginalised or excluded within dominant discourses?” (Goldberg, 2010, p353).

A Freirean approach emphasises the student’s agency and brings the student into a dialectic relationship with the subject matter. Here the idea of “self-critical scholarship” (Goldberg, 2010, p352) is important in emphasising the reflexive nature of critical literacy through which the student is enabled to recognise their own assumptions and bias that may shape their understanding.

3.2 Hermeneutical approaches

Criticality and reflexivity are key dimensions of hermeneutical approaches to the study of religion and worldviews. In terms of approaches to RE, Jackson’s Interpretive Approach has been influential in my analyses and embraces the ideas that I consider key to making religious literacy an educational process; representation, interpretation and reflexivity. Developed in the 1980s and 90s at the University of Warwick, the Interpretive approach focuses on the pupils’ interaction with religious content. Based on ethnographic research into transmission of religious culture, this approach examines the interplay between individuals, groups and the wider religious traditions (Jackson, 2014).

As outlined earlier, the Interpretive Approach promotes a representation of religion and worldviews that reflects the dynamic nature of the changing landscape as evidenced in sociological research. A key feature of the Interpretive Approach is the emphasis on how personal faith and tradition are shown to operate, and the importance given to the role that interpretation plays both on the part of insiders in holding to a faith and on the part of outsiders in trying to understand it (Jackson, 1997). “Cultures” are seen as dynamic, internally contested and fuzzy edged, while individuals are recognised as capable of contributing to the

reshaping of culture through making personal syntheses which might draw from a wide range of cultural resources, including their own ancestral traditions” (Jackson, 2009, p1).

This is based on an understanding of culture or tradition as being constantly modified through processes of interpretation and understanding. Building on Jackson’s approach, Meijer draws on Gadamer and Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of *historical consciousness* to understand how “traditions are developing and evolving historically – in and through the historical interpretations and actions of human beings over time, and of how the vitality of traditions depends on such constant reinterpretation” (Meijer, 2006, p12).

At the individual level, identity is seen as a process of interpretation, which actively draws on and negotiates aspects of tradition; “Like any interpretation, [this] personal identity is not unchanging and universally valid. It is, like any interpretation, tentative and open to deliberation” (Meijer, 2006, p8). Tradition and identity are then interwoven in the process of interpretation. People “live in and from and through tradition” (Meijer, 2006, p13).

For Meijer, historical consciousness is an awareness that our understanding is shaped by our tradition, which includes the values, prejudices and assumptions we bring to the learning encounter (Meijer, 2006). Drawing on Gadamer’s hermeneutics, this approach sees learning about religion and worldviews as a dialectic process in which the learner’s tradition and the object(s) of study are brought into conversation. Rather than pupils setting aside their personal perspectives, as with some phenomenological approaches, these are welcomed as a key part of the learning process. Through a hermeneutical approach, these are explored and challenged, in a reflexive process of interpretation. Jackson’s Interpretive Approach includes the reflexive process of ‘edification’ that encourages the learner to view their own perspectives in a new light through engagement with difference. Again, the philosophy of Gadamer is important here. Gadamer argues that it is through studying something different that preconceptions or prejudices can be identified and challenged (Gadamer, 1975). Reflexivity is seen as central to learning about the ‘other’ and a key component in approaches to intercultural education.

There are several key elements of the theories discussed above that I consider important in applying the idea of religious literacy to the classroom context. These can be summarised as

criticality of knowledge construction, reflexivity and dialogue. Chapter 6 analyses their relation to religious literacy and to the aspirations of stakeholders as evidenced in my research data.

4. Research Design & Methodology

This section presents the research design and methodology underpinning this thesis. It begins with an outline of the research design of the RE for REal project. This qualitative research project, for which I was the main field researcher, provides the empirical basis for this thesis. I outline below the process of data collection and analysis undertaken. I then outline how my thesis takes this data through a secondary interrogation. This is presented as a process of abductive analysis to answer the ‘puzzle’ of how religious literacy translates into the context of the school classroom. Stakeholders’ aspirations on purpose and content are interpreted in light of broader debates to consider how religious literacy can be applied to the context of school classrooms, and how it might reconcile stakeholders’ aspirations. Finally, the overall research design is presented as a hermeneutic spiral, leading to a working model of religion and worldview literacy for the classroom.

This research sits clearly within an interpretivist paradigm, in that it explores participants’ understanding of what it is valuable to know and understand about religion and worldviews. It starts with the perspective that there are as many truths to the value of learning about religion and worldviews as there are people. The aim is one of *Verstehen*, or “motivational understanding” (Skejervheim, 2000, p213), to explore the meanings and motivations that participants attach to this learning. However, whilst my focus is participants’ understanding, my methodology is not phenomenological in the Husserlian sense in that my position as researcher is not one of objectivity. Interpretive research “starts with the recognition that researchers are inevitably embedded in the intersubjective social process of the worlds they study” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, prologue). Such a methodology “rests on a belief in the existence of (potentially) multiple, *intersubjectively* constructed “truths” about social, political, cultural, and other human events; and on the belief that these understandings can only be accessed, or co-generated, through interaction between researcher and researched as they seek to interpret those events and make those interpretations legible to each other” (Schwartz-

Shea & Yanow, 2012, p 4). Thus my positionality as researcher is key to my analysis, a point I will develop later.

4.1 Data Collection

The RE for REal project sought the views of pupils, parents and teachers on *current aims and purposes* of learning about religion and worldviews in schools and what their *aspirations* are for RE in terms of its purpose, content and structure (it's place in the curriculum). The project also sought the views of employers on the same issues.

4.1.1 Sampling

Schools - The project set out to engage with 20 secondary schools (for pupils aged 11-16) across England. The intention was to have a sample that represented a geographical spread across England and a mix of rural and urban areas and of school types within the state-funded sector. The final sample was made up of nineteen participating schools. One school was unable to participate due to last minute clashes with exam timetables. The process of finding schools to participate in the project required working with several partners. Contact was made with the Local Education Authorities (LEAs), who oversee community schools and the (at the time, newly appointed) Regional Schools Commissioners, who oversee the academies in each of England's nine regions. This did not prove particularly successful and a call for participants was sent out via three national RE organisations; the National Association for Teachers of RE (NATRE), the Association of University Lecturers in Religion & Education (AULRE) and the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisors & Consultants (AREIAC). This generated a good response and as details of the project snowballed to other associated organisations, many more schools registered their interest.

A degree of pragmatism was applied in selecting the final sample (Patton, 1990), striking a balance between accessibility and representativeness. From a sample frame of 58 schools, a stratified sample of 20 was selected to represent a balance of school type (six community

Schools¹⁴ and fourteen academies¹⁵), geographical spread and a mix of urban and rural settings. In 2014, when the data was collected, around 60% of secondary schools had academy status (DfE, 2014), and the sample reflected this. Of the academies, six were Church of England academies, one was ecumenical, and seven were academies with no religious character. The significance of academy status is that these schools are not obliged to follow the Locally Agreed Syllabus, so the diversity in types of RE present in the sample should be broadly reflective of the national picture.

Given the complexity of the English schools system, the status of RE within it, and the scope of the project, the sample could not be representative of all kinds of schools. There were no other than Christian faith schools included for example. This was a conscious decision as it was felt that these would be better studied through a separate study. One reason for this is that faith schools generally teach RE from the perspective of a faith tradition, teaching 'in', rather than 'about' that tradition. Whilst this would provide interesting perspectives, the scope of the project was limited to the mainstream sector.

An important factor in the sampling process is that by drawing on the networks of the RE organisations mentioned above, the participants were more likely to have a keen interest in RE, based on their engagement with these bodies. This must be taken into consideration as it impacts on the representativeness of the sample and therefore the credibility of the findings. Inevitably those who responded to the call for participants already had an interest in RE and were more likely to be aware of the related debates through their connection with the RE organisation. Were the study to be undertaken again, ideally a truly random sample may improve the credibility of the results in this sense. However, the pragmatism applied in this study did allow for the generation of in depth findings from well-informed participants, which, bearing in mind the potential for bias, gives a valid insight into the views of those engaged in RE within the chosen schools.

¹⁴ State schools controlled by the local council

¹⁵ State schools that receive funding directly from central government, rather than from the local authority.

Teachers - Once contact was established with a key gatekeeper in each school, they were asked to select five teachers. The total sample was 97, made up of 27 RE specialists (who had a teaching qualification in Religious Education) and non-specialist RE teachers along with teachers in other humanities subjects and 19 representatives of senior leadership teams. In English secondary schools, there is a shortage of RE teachers with specialist training in the subject (Ofsted, 2013). In 2013 a report by the All Party Parliamentary Group for RE reported that 50% of RE teachers in secondary schools did not have subject specific qualifications or training (APPG, 2013). The sample of teachers reflects this. The purposive breakdown of the sample was considered important as members of the leadership team might have more of an overview on the place of RE in the school than classroom teachers of RE. Equally, teachers across the humanities were sought in recognition of the fact that religion and worldviews are taught about elsewhere in the curriculum, outside of RE, particularly in the humanities and Citizenship lessons. The above balance of characteristics provided a purposive sample (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) that met the needs of the study in that it represented teachers in and outside the RE space with varying degrees of specialism.

Whilst the intention was to access teachers from across this range, the decision of who to include in the study was left up to the school so in that sense the sample was self-selecting within the given frame. In practice, this meant that pragmatism again played a role in the sampling techniques, which could be said to make the findings less credible. That said, it can be assumed that those teachers who were willing to be involved, whatever their professional position within the school, had an interest in the role of learning about religion and worldviews and therefore their opinions are valuable to the study.

Pupils - Schools were asked to select ten Year 10 pupils (aged 14-15). The total sample was made up of 190 pupils. The final sample of pupils contained a balance of boys and girls. Whilst the socio-economic background of pupils was not recorded, the spread of schools involved, and the fact that they are all non-selective on academic grounds, contributed to a balanced demographic. Again, pupils were selected via the gatekeeper teacher within each school. In

some cases they were asked to volunteer and in other cases teachers selected pupils themselves. In this case, the criteria for selection were set by the teacher and factors such as 'willingness to speak', 'behaviour' and 'ability to articulate well' were mentioned. In one case, only students taking the GCSE¹⁶ qualification in RE were chosen as it was assumed they would have the most to say. All of these factors could impact the representativeness of the sample and the reliability of the results in that they may have an influence upon pupils' attitudes towards learning about religion and worldviews and/or their ability/willingness to express their opinions. More consistency in selection criteria could have overcome this to a degree. However, the overall sample represented pupils with a variety of attitudes towards RE as a school subject and varying degrees of willingness to articulate their views.

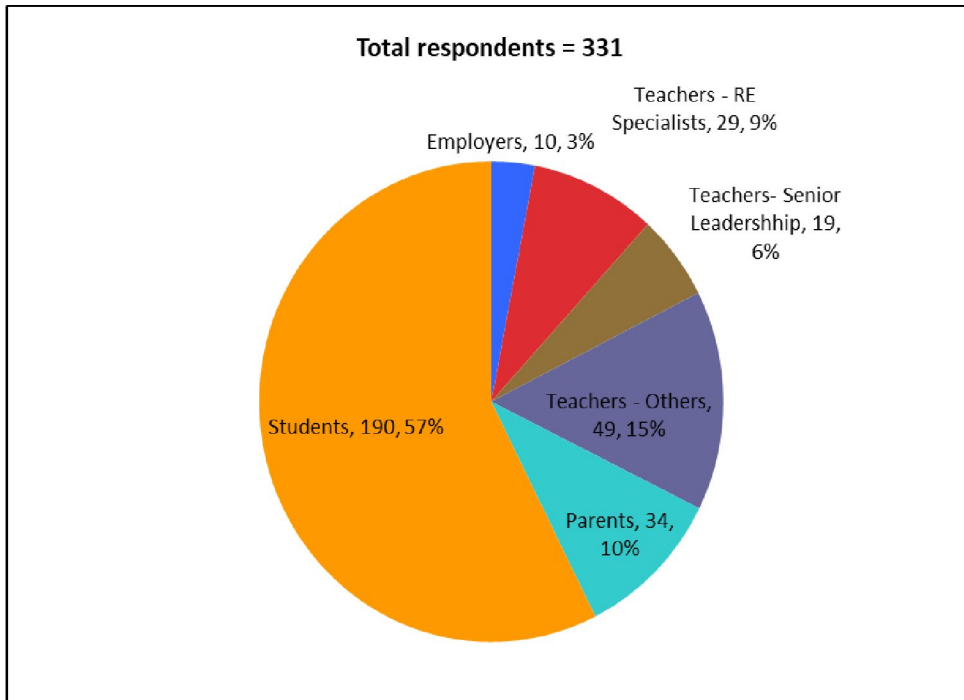
Parents - Each school also selected up to five parents to engage with the research. Again, these were self-selecting and so the sample was more likely to be made up of those parents with a keen interest in RE or in the role of religion in education. The final number of participating parents was 34, of whom most (80%) were female. This did have an impact upon the findings for example in the sense that parents, and women overall, tended to emphasise the personal development element of RE. Accessing parents was difficult and this group has the lowest level of participation in relation to the desired sample. Whilst this could perhaps have been improved within a longer time frame, the final sample was large enough to provide a range of responses and to draw out substantive themes.

Employers - Alongside the schools, the project also involved interviews with ten employers. Again, these were selected in a purposive sample to represent a range of public and private organisations. All employers held a senior role (e.g. Director) or were responsible for the hiring of staff and thus were chosen because they had experience relevant to this study in terms of the qualities, knowledge and understanding about religion and worldviews that are deemed relevant to the workplace. Given its scope, this thesis does not draw significantly upon the data

¹⁶ General Certificate of Secondary Education – examinations taken at the end of secondary school.

from employers, although the concept of 'work readiness' in relation to religious literacy is discussed and is something that could be explored in a further study.

The table below shows the breakdown of the total sample by group:



As outlined above, there were several factors impacting on the sample selection. The sample is by no means representative of all teachers, parents, pupils or employers and as such the findings are not generalisable to the wider population. Making generalisations is not the aim of this study or of interpretive research in general (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Rather, the aim is to explore the perspectives of key social actors engaged in the practice of teaching and learning about religion and worldviews in schools as well as those for whom the outcomes of this practice might have significance. Whilst not representative, the findings are indicative of perspectives and issues that may be experienced on a broader scale. A valuable follow-up study would explore the themes raised through the collection of quantitative data on a larger scale.

4.1.2 Methods

Semi-structured interviews were used for all groups (see Appendix D for interview schedules). The intention was to provide a balance between giving respondents the freedom to talk at will

on the subject, yet to provide enough structure to allow the results to be comparable. Most questions were open-ended, although on the questions of the aims of RE and the content it should include, a set of fixed prompts were used. These were devised based on the literature review, which highlighted key debates around purpose and content. The prompts were designed to reflect these debates. In constructing these, I was aware that they were based on my own interpretation of the debates and that there may well be other purposes or content that are of importance. For this reason, participants were asked to think about any other purposes or content that were not included.

Each school was visited once and semi-structured interviews carried out on an individual basis with the teachers. The pupils attended a focus group of maximum ten members and again, semi-structured group interviews were carried out. The focus groups took place within the school day. Some schools preferred for these to be conducted during a scheduled RE lesson, whereas in others they were conducted during other lessons or break time. In most cases a member of the teaching staff was present in these focus groups. This was left to the schools to decide. It is acknowledged that the time of the focus group and the presence or otherwise of a teacher may have had an effect on the level of engagement and validity of responses given by the pupils, yet it was felt that the best approach was to follow the wishes and practical requirements of the teachers involved. Pupils were not asked whether or not they liked learning about religion and worldviews, only their views on the purpose, content and structure. Nevertheless, they may well have been less inclined to talk negatively about the value of RE with a teacher present. As demonstrated by McCormick and James (1988) interviewing children presents several particular considerations of which the authority of the researcher and the potential for children to say what they think the researcher or others present want to hear are important. The inconsistency of the teacher's presence also raises questions about the reliability and comparability of responses given the differing contexts of the group interviews.

Some of the parents were interviewed during the visits to the schools. The majority however were interviewed by telephone due to practical restraints such as working hours. Again, the

draw backs of telephone interviews, for example the limited capacity for building a rapport with participants were acknowledged but the pragmatic decision was made to be guided by the wishes of the participants to ensure a greater sample. As mentioned, the parents were the hardest group from which to secure a sample, with a total of 34 taking part out of an anticipated 95, so here validity was hampered by pragmatism. The employers were also mostly interviewed by telephone, again at their request due to convenience. Whilst the pros and cons of telephone interviews are debated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p206), their usage in this study was governed by the “criterion of fit for purpose” (ibid) and they proved an effective mode with all of the participants responding positively.

4.1.3 Ethics

Ethical issues are of concern at each stage of the research process, from the nature of the project itself, the context, the procedures of sampling and data collection and analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Alongside this is the ethical responsibility to the wider research community to properly conduct and represent one’s work. Whilst the nature of this research may not seem particularly controversial, the very act of questioning accepted practices in schools, or any institution is not a neutral endeavour. This is particularly so when, as in this research, the starting point is normative – that there is a need for change. Whilst normative, the research enshrines the broader ethical duty to benefit those researched (Bell, 1991) - it seeks to contribute to improving teaching and learning about religion and worldviews.

Ethical procedures were conducted in accordance with approval obtained from the University of London Research Ethics Committee at Goldsmiths, University of London. In each of the participating schools, permission was obtained from the Head Teacher. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were given the freedom to choose whether to participate and made aware of their right to withdraw at any time, having been informed of the scope and purpose of the study and the planned use of the data obtained. Respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. In the case of the pupils, written consent was obtained from

their guardians prior to conducting the focus groups and pupils gave verbal, informed consent themselves.

4.2 Analytical Approach

4.2.1 Thematic Analysis

The interviews and focus group data were transcribed and transcriptions entered into the qualitative analysis software, NVIVO. A first level of thematic analysis was undertaken using an inductive coding process. This stage drew on elements of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) in that codes were identified as they 'appeared' in the data. Further transcripts were then coded and new codes added until 'code saturation' was achieved. This inductive approach was taken in order to allow the data to speak for itself as much as possible. However, in a departure from Glaser and Strauss' classical grounded theory in which the unbiased researcher uncovers the correct meaning of the data, this analysis draws more on constructivist grounded theory. As in Charmaz's version "I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered...we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices" (Charmaz, 2006, p10). In keeping with later, Glaserian developments of grounded theory, "interpretation of meaning is based not only on the content of the text, but also on the context within which the text was produced and within which the researcher studies the text" (Bergman, 2010, p386). For example a participant's views on the purpose of RE that made reference to understanding and respecting difference was initially coded 'respect' and 'understanding difference', meanings that can be said to emerge from the text, or 'in vivo' codes. Initial codes were then grouped under thematic, or analytic codes. For example 'respect' and 'understanding difference' were grouped under the thematic code 'preparing for diversity' and 'cohesion', which takes consideration of the context in which community cohesion is high on the policy agenda of the UK government at the time and to which RE is seen as an important contributor (APPG, 2015).

In a departure from classic interpretivist, thematic analysis, a “quasi-quantification” (Bergman, 2010, p391) of themes was then conducted. For each of the research questions (purposes, content and structure), high frequency codes were identified and the frequency of occurrence noted. This was not intended, as is the case with much quantitative methodology, to provide generalisations. Rather, it was employed to highlight the characteristics of the groups within the sample, to bring to light the most common themes therein and to draw out the nuances in responses (See Appendix E).

The analysis of the interview data can be described as an example of thematic hermeneutic content analysis (HCA-T) (Bergman, 2010). Bergman describes HCA as a family of content analyses within a mixed methods framework with a shared focus on a three-step analysis consisting of: an initial content analysis, a quantitative analysis of themes and a recontextualisation of the quantitative results within the textual material (Bergman, 2010). Adopting such a framework to describe my analysis necessitates a word of caution however. As indicated above, this thesis is very much within an interpretivist framework. As Bergman asserts, HCA can be applied within a constructivist, interpretive or (post)-positivity framework (Bergman, 2010). The quantitative analysis does not seek to identify patterns of causation, nor make generalisations. Rather, my analysis involves what Bergman calls a “quasi-quantification” of themes (Bergman, 2010, p391), which was helpful to my analysis in highlighting key themes which are then recontextualised through processes of abductive analysis. As Bergman asserts, the results of the initial thematic analysis are of value in themselves and may not need further analysis. However, the second step complements the first by decontextualizing the elements identified and providing an overview of latent patterns. The recontextualising of the high frequency themes in the data constitutes the third step. In this project, with the high frequency codes identified, the interview data was re-interrogated in light of these, in turn recontextualising the high frequency codes in a back and forth process.

In another layer of recontextualisation, the findings from schools, families and workplaces were put into dialogue with an “Influencers’ Group” of key people in learning about religion and

worldviews from policy, practice and academia. These individuals were selected for their expertise in RE, sociology of religion and educational policy. The project was designed to contribute to the on-going debate around the future of RE in England and as such, sought to engage with those able to influence the future of teaching and learning in this area. Three sessions were convened alongside the research process to discuss the findings as the project unfolded. This process placed the initial analysis within the context of on-going debates and discussions around the purpose and future of RE. The inferences and insights gained from this process informed the on-going analysis of the data. As Bergman (2010) suggests, this analysis involved a back and forth process between the data and existing theories and debates.

The results of the above analysis are presented in the first article of this thesis (Dinham & Shaw, 2017). Articles 2 and 3 revisit some of the data from the RE for REal project in light of my overall aim – exploring how religious literacy translates into the classroom context. In these articles I recontextualise data on participants' aspirations for the purposes (article 2) and content (article 3) of learning about religion and worldviews in light of existing debates and theories. These address the sub-question: What kind of knowledge and understanding does religious literacy involve in a classroom context and for what purpose? In a final stage of analysis, Chapter 6 addresses my second sub-question: How might religious literacy relate to stakeholders' aspirations for learning about religion and worldviews? This chapter presents a reconciliation of stakeholders' aspirations and the wider debates to which they relate through a framework of religious literacy translated into the context of the school classroom. Whilst this analysis draws on the thematic analysis described above, it revisits this analysis and the themes therein, in light of broader debates and theories from RE research, sociology and religious studies. I suggest that this can be best understood as a process of abductive analysis.

4.2.2 The Interpretivist Framework and Abductive Analysis

As observed by Malterud (2001), all research is guided by theory: "failure to acknowledge the effect of theory might be a major threat to objectivity, since notions and models used in interpretation of data are always derived from a theory of some sort" (Malterud, 2001, p486).

Recognition of theory guiding research is crucial to the research process: “Clarification and declaration of the standpoints by a researcher, instead of denial or hiding of the frame of reference, will enhance intersubjectivity, in quantitative as well as qualitative inquiry” (ibid.). What is important in terms of the validity of the research is transparency around the researcher’s own subjectivity. In this research, the findings themselves were approached with an openness to understand the meanings as voiced by participants themselves, yet subsequent analysis involved my own theorising, based on my experience of debates around RE and ideas of religious literacy.

Whilst the project began with an assumption that there is a lack of religious literacy, this was not an *a priori* concept as found in positivist research. A lack of religious literacy was not then a hypothesis of this thesis, nor of the RE for REal research. It was rather an expectation in the sense of an “educated, provisional inference” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p53). In this thesis, the concept of Religion and Worldview (R&W) literacy for the classroom has developed through the research process. I did not ask participants about their understanding of religious literacy but about what they thought the purpose and content of learning about religion and worldviews in schools should be. These meanings were then analysed in light of broader conversations in the literature and national debates, which include ideas about religious literacy. The concept of R&W literacy is arrived at through my own theorising, moving back and forth between the data (participants’ meanings) and a range of theories in a recursive and reiterative process. It is in this sense that I describe my analysis as abductive.

According to pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce, abductive analysis “begins with a puzzle.... And then seeks to explicate it by identifying the conditions that would make that puzzle less perplexing” (cited in Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p27). This thesis explores the ‘puzzle’ of how religious literacy translates into the classroom context: what kind of knowledge and understanding does it involve and for what purpose? Schwartz-Shea & Yanow describe the “puzzling-out process” as the researcher moving back and forth “in an iterative-recursive fashion between what is puzzling and possible explanations for it” (ibid.). In this process, I have

moved back and forth between the empirical (data on stakeholders' aspirations) and the theoretical (from literature and my own engagement in national conversations around the future of RE). Participants' views on the aims and purposes of learning about religion and worldviews are analysed in light of debates around a perceived tension between intrinsic and instrumental aims of RE. Likewise, participants' views on content are analysed in light of debates around the representation of religion. These are drawn together in an attempt to puzzle out what religious literacy might look like in the classroom context. In doing so, I draw on Dinham's framework for religious literacy (Dinham, 2016). This process is not about examining the data through a pre-set theory as in the extended case method (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). As outlined above, Dinham's notion of religious literacy as *category, disposition, knowledge* and *skills* provides a framework for plural notions of religious literacy that will each be specific to the given context or setting. This thesis then presents an iterative-recursive abductive process of engagement between theory and lived experience in the development of an expanded theorisation of religious literacy in the context of the school classroom.

The process can be understood then as a series of abductions. Part of this is analysing participants' views on the purpose and content of learning about religion and worldviews in light of other debates and theories on purpose and content. Another is performed in populating Dinham's framework with these analyses. In doing so, Dinham's framework provides an analytical lens which lays the basis for an expanded model of R&W literacy for the classroom context that combines and attempts to reconcile stakeholders' aspirations for learning about religion and worldviews and wider debates around purpose and representation.

4.2.3 Overall Thesis as a Hermeneutic Spiral

This series of abductions operates in a spiral of analysis and inference. Indeed, there is a cyclical structure to my research design and to my analysis that can be described in terms of a hermeneutic spiral (Gadamer, 1975). My research started with the notion that there is a general lack of understanding and anxiety around religion and worldviews in society (a lack of religious literacy) and that this could and should be addressed by education. This standpoint

was set within an understanding from on-going national debates and my own literature review and experience, that RE in England is at a crucial point in its development, where stakeholders are questioning its purpose and its role in schools. As emphasised by Gadamer (1975), every act of understanding is conditioned by a pre-judgement or fore-structure. In this case, my understanding of the current debates around RE and my own views around the value of learning about religion and worldviews provide a fore-structure to the research. Whilst this 'fore-projection' is itself an important element in the process of understanding, Heidegger warns that the interpreter's gaze must be "on the things themselves" (cited in Gadamer, 1975, p269). In order for this to be possible, the researcher must be aware of the meaning he/she projects: "A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning" (ibid.). Rather than putting this fore-projection aside, it is a crucial part of the interpretation process.

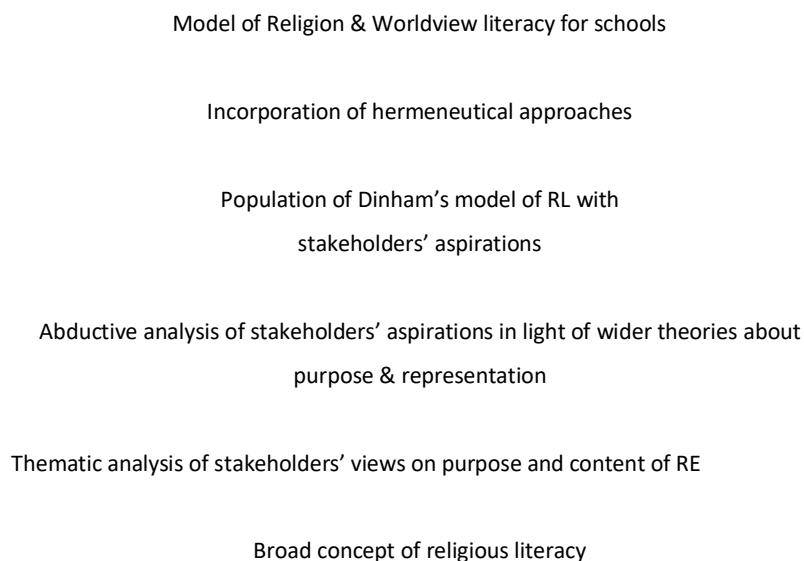
As with hermeneutical analysis of text, my own perspective was refined, and continues to be, through engagement with and in relation to the data. As such, the abduction that is my proposed model of R&W literacy has been arrived at through a tension between my prior knowledge and experience, and particularly my assumption that there is a lack of religious literacy and that schools have a role to play in addressing this, my observations in the field (participants' aspirations) and other educational and sociological theories and debates that have informed my own theorising.

The framework of value-bases presented in article 2 was developed through a hermeneutical process of dialogue between my own contextualised understanding of the purpose of learning about religion and worldviews, those expressed by participants and wider debates in the field. Likewise, my ideas on the conceptualisation of religion and worldview within a model of religious literacy for classrooms were developed through dialogue between participants' aspirations for content, my own assumptions about the importance of representing the real

religion and worldview landscape, and wider debates around the representation of religion in religious studies and sociology.

This framework of value-bases (article 2) and the sociological and contemporaneous turn in representations of religion and worldviews (article 3) inform my populating of Dinham’s model of religious literacy, to build an expanded model of Religion & Worldview literacy for the classroom. Thus the concept of religious literacy, a starting point for the research and part of my ‘fore-projection’ as a researcher, is developed through the research process. This has unfolded through a process of abductive analysis, exemplifying the way in which “interpretive research requires an iterative process of researcher sense-making which cannot be fully specified a priori because of its unfolding, processual character” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p53). As described by Gadamer, this dialogical process is central to understanding: “Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he [the learner] penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there” (Gadamer, 1975, p269). In this sense, my analysis can be said to exemplify Heidegger’s notion of the circular structure of understanding in a hermeneutic circle, as demonstrated in figure 1. (cited in Gadamer, 1975).

Figure 1. - My Analytical Process as a Hermeneutic Spiral.



5. Summary of Articles.

This thesis is presented in the form of three research articles and a commentary which includes final discussion chapter. The first article presents the findings of the RE for REal project as an overview of stakeholders' views and aspirations on the role and shape of learning about religion and worldviews in English secondary schools. The second and third articles re-contextualise this data in light of wider debates and theories drawn from RE research, educational studies, religious studies and sociology. In article 2 the focus is on the aims and purposes of learning about religion and worldviews and article 3 focuses on issues of representation. As such, the three articles provide the data and analysis that are the basis for an expanded theorisation in Chapter 6. My analysis of participants' views on the aims and purposes and on the content are used to inform my idea of how religious literacy translates into the classroom context. What follows is a summary of each article and of their contribution to my overall thesis.

Article 1: *Religious Literacy through Religious Education: The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief*, co-authored by myself as lead author and Adam Dinham, was published in *Religions*, 2017, 8(7). It is available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8070119>

My first article presents an open interrogation of the aspirations for the future of teaching and learning about religion and worldviews from the perspectives of teachers, parents, pupils and employers. It places the RE for REal project within the broader research around religious literacy, which, as outlined above, had until then focused on professional settings other than teaching. The article outlines the idea of a lack of religious literacy in society and its significance in relation to the changing religion and worldview landscape of the UK. Within this, teaching and learning about religion and worldviews are assumed to play a key role in two ways. Firstly, in relation to the policy muddle surrounding RE, which has contributed to a wider confusion over the role of religion in public life and our ability to talk about it. Secondly, RE in schools is a key site for the promotion of religious literacy. Religious literacy is understood here as relating both to knowledge about and engagement with religion and worldview diversity. At the time of writing Article 1, the framework of religious literacy as *category, disposition, knowledge* and

skills (Dinham, 2016) had not been explicitly formulated. Rather, Dinham developed this framework through engagement with this and other research. The RE for REal project asked if RE in England is up to the challenge of developing religious literacy, with the assumption that it is hampered in this regard by an outdated and reductionist representation of the religion and worldview landscape and by confusion over the aims and purposes of the subject. The research then set out to investigate the perspectives of key stakeholders on learning about religion and worldviews (teachers, parents, pupils and employers), across three key areas:

- Understandings of the purposes of RE
- Aspirations regarding content
- Views about what teaching and learning of religion and belief should look like, both inside RE and outside, in the wider school environment.

The presentation of the research data illustrates the lack of consensus around the purposes of RE and highlights the duality of intrinsic and instrumental aims; academic knowledge is valued alongside preparing pupils for engagement with diversity and personal development. Issues of representation are highlighted in the findings on content, with participants voicing an appetite to study a broader range of traditions and practices, including the non-religious and more informal modes. Also of interest is a focus on the controversial side of religion, its role in society and in the everyday lives of individuals. Such content is reflective of the changing religion and worldview landscape as evidenced in sociological research, an understanding of which is central to the notion of religious literacy.

Article 1 also presents stakeholders' views on the structures around RE, how it is and should be framed and the relationship between RE and school policy and wider policy relating to religion and worldviews. This raises important questions about the place of intrinsic and instrumental learning in relation to religion and worldviews - its place in the curriculum and in broader school life, which are inseparable from questions around the purpose of RE. The need for clarity over the purposes of learning about religion and worldviews are key to religious literacy, which

itself is understood as a response to an anxiety and confusion over the place and role of religion in society.

Article 2: *Values Underpinning Teachers' Practice in Religious Education – A values typology for RE*, single authored and under review with the Journal of Beliefs and Values.

Article 2 re-examines teachers' views and aspirations on the aims and purposes of learning about religion and worldviews in relation to wider debates within the RE community. This analysis seeks to contribute and bring clarity to debates as the basis for a more religiously literate understanding of the role of religion and worldviews in education. By analysing RE as professional practice and drawing out the values underpinning teachers' aspirations for the purpose of RE, I suggest a typology of value-bases consisting of the 'formational', 'instrumental', 'analytical', 'critical' and 'confessional'.

In considering RE as professional practice, this article draws on theories around practice and values to examine how teaching about religion and worldviews is shaped by structural (policy-driven) and pedagogical rationales. By going back to the research data on teachers' views on the purpose of RE, I draw out and try to make sense of the values that underpin their rationales. The proposed typology, is devised in order to bring clarity to the complex, multiple, overlapping and shifting purposes attributed to RE in the data. In line with the abductive approach to analysis, the typology of value-bases suggested in this article is both derived from the empirical data, and constructed. It was arrived at through the data analysis process, in which I 'dimensionalised' the views of teachers (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

As described in Chapter 4, the analytical process I have engaged in has been a hermeneutical back and forth process between data and theories. The analysis in this article involved re-examining the data on teachers' views in light of theories around the purposes of RE. This was an important stage in the overall analysis in terms of thinking about the values underpinning a model of religion and worldview literacy for classrooms. Having established a model of value-

bases, I was able to draw out and develop the points of convergence and contention with my own emerging model of R&W literacy. A particularly important aspect of this is the balance between intrinsic and instrumental aims. Within this, the importance of a formational (personal development) value to learning about religion and worldviews became a key component in developing my model of religion and worldview literacy with reflexivity as a central educational process.

Article 3: *New Representations of Religion and Belief in Schools*, single authored, published in *Religions*, 2018, 9 (11). It is available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110364>

Issues around representation are inseparable from those of purpose or values. If, as evidenced in the aspirations of participants, RE should provide young people with an understanding that equips them to engage positively with religion and worldview diversity, how that diversity is represented is of central importance. Yet, as the data from students' experience shows, the complexity of the real religion and worldview landscape is not easily captured or communicated in classrooms. This article engages with debates around representation to argue that the portrayal of religion and worldviews in classrooms is often hampered by a set of reductionist and misplaced assumptions about the nature and diversity of religion and worldviews. These are presented as problematic as they pose a barrier to in-depth understanding.

This article re-examines the data on participants' views on content and calls for new representations of religion and worldviews in curricula. Participants' views and aspirations for the content of RE are analysed in light of debates around the representation of religion in RE and in religious studies. The views of participants chime with the views of many scholars who argue that existing approaches universalise, sanitise and privatise religion. I argue that existing representations reflect false binaries of religious/secular, public/private, good/bad, fluid/static. In contrast, the research data reveals a thirst for the study of a broader range and a more nuanced understanding of religion and worldviews, incorporating a focus on religion and worldviews as identity as well as tradition, the study of the role of religion in global affairs as

well as the controversies and challenges it can pose for individuals and the exploration of religion and worldviews as fluid and contested categories. In this article I map out a new set of representations that reflect a contemporaneous and sociological turn, better reflecting the real religion and worldview landscape in all its complexity.

In much the same way as article 2, this re-examination of data in light of existing debates is a central part of the abduction process that has led to the model of R&W literacy proposed in this thesis. The analysis in this article particularly informs my theorisation of the *category* and *knowledge* strands of religious literacy when applied to the classroom context. The new representations suggested in this article form the basis of what an exploration of religion and worldview as 'category' might look like in the classroom. This in turn relates to the kind of knowledge envisaged in my model. The article draws attention to the construction of knowledge about religion and worldviews and suggests the need for situated knowledge and increased epistemic awareness.

6. Religion & Worldview Literacy –A Model for Classrooms

This section presents the final stage of analysis as described in the ‘research design’. Articles 2 and 3 recontextualise data on participants’ aspirations for the purposes and content of learning about religion and worldviews in light of existing debates and theories. This section further recontextualises these in light of ‘religious literacy’ in the production of an expanded theorisation - a model of Religion & Worldview (R&W) literacy for classrooms.

Before going further, it is important to the shape of the research design that the relationship between the concept or idea of ‘religious literacy’ and the RE for REal project is reiterated. RE for REal, which provided the data for my thesis is a project housed within the Religious Literacy Programme at Goldsmiths, University of London. As such, the project was designed with certain expectations about the level of religious literacy in society and the contribution schools currently do and might potentially make to religious literacy as a civic endeavour. As outlined in my research design, religious literacy as a concept was not explicitly researched. I did not ask participants about their understanding of religious literacy but about what they thought the purpose and content of learning about religion and worldviews in schools should be. These meanings were then analysed in light of broader conversations in the literature and national debates, including those about religious literacy.

It is important to note, as outlined earlier, that the concept of religious literacy is contested and usage of the term not homogenous. The understanding of religious literacy that framed the RE for REal research is that adopted by Dinham (2016). This thesis takes up the challenge posed by Dinham to develop the concept in practice contexts, in this case, the school classroom.

In exploring the application of this model in the context of schools, this thesis populates Dinham’s model with the views of key stakeholders, as voiced in the RE for REal research. In doing so, stakeholders’ aspirations on the aims and purposes and on the content of RE are re-examined in light of Dinham’s framework. This process has resulted in an expanded model of Religion and Worldview (R&W) literacy for schools. In this sense, the proposed model is the coming together of the findings of the RE for REal research, their abductive interpretation in

light of existing debates, and Dinham's framework. The model is presented as having potential to meet stakeholders' aspirations and to reconcile key contests in discussions around RE.

In the following analysis, I present an expanded model of R&W literacy, in which each phase of Dinham's Framework (*category, disposition, knowledge, and skills*) are presented as parallel and concurrent strands of an educational process. Firstly, below, each strand is considered in turn and their relationship to participants' aspirations and to wider debates in and around RE articulated. As outlined later on, I argue that in the context of the classroom these strands are interwoven in a model of R&W literacy as praxis.

6.1 An Expanded Model of Religion & Worldview Literacy

Category

"I'd want them [pupils] to think more broadly about what we class as religion too. There are people that dance round Stonehenge naked because the sun's up. Does that fall under the remit? Definitely it does of spirituality."

(Teacher)

The categorisation phase involves the "conceptualisation of religion and belief and why they matter.... It asks 'what do we mean by religion and how can we think about it?'" (Dinham, 2017, p261). As a theoretical model, religious literacy takes a starting point that there is a gap between religion and worldviews as imagined by the majority (and as framed in policy and some RE), and the 'real religion or belief landscape' that is out there (Dinham & Shaw 2015, 2017). As I have discussed, failure to get to grips with the growing diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews (Ofsted 2010, 2013; Barnes, 2014) and the dynamism of the landscape (Jackson, 2004) is a well-recognised critique of RE. As demonstrated in Article 3, my data reveals the desire for a broader representation of religion and worldviews that reflects the growing diversity between and within traditions, encompassing both formal and informal expressions, religion and worldview as identity as well as tradition, and the fluidity of the religion and worldview landscape.

A focus on category goes beyond encompassing diversity and demands consideration of what gets classed as 'religion' or 'non-religion' and the relationship between the two. In applying the framework to the classroom setting and in relation to RE, I use the phrase 'religion and worldview literacy' as opposed to 'religious literacy'. Although Dinham's usage of the phrase 'religious literacy' encompasses a very stretchy and broad definition of religion to include formal and informal and non-religious worldviews, I contend that 'religion & worldview literacy' makes this inclusivity more explicit. This foregrounds the importance of categories, placing religion within the broader framework of worldviews. As recognised by many (Jackson, 1997, Revell, 2012 Throbani, 2017) the 'world religions' approach that has dominated English RE in recent decades has promoted the idea that religions have a set of shared characteristics or themes through which they can be understood (founding fathers, holy books, doctrine etc.), thereby essentialising religious traditions and side-lining practices that do not fit into this framework. The phrase 'religion and worldview literacy' is used here in recognition of both the complexity of the religion and worldview landscape and of the reductionist way in which the term 'religion' has often been employed in RE.

Dinham contends that understanding the secular assumptions that frame most people's perception of the religion and worldview landscape, is as important as understanding the religion and belief within it (Dinham, 2017). The reductionist representation of religion in some RE and in society at large is influenced by broad assumptions about the nature and relevance of religion in society, rooted in the secularisation thesis (see Davie, 2015a). It is argued in Article 3 that RE in England has been shaped by such assumptions about religion that perpetuate a set of false binaries (religious/secular, public/private, good/bad, fluid/static) in the way that religion and worldviews are represented (Shaw, 2018). In the classroom setting, R&W literacy means challenging these binaries and the dominant secular, liberal epistemology that shapes them. As Goldberg suggests, "while many use a hermeneutic of suspicion when reading biblical texts, few apply the same hermeneutic of suspicion to text books, particularly those giving information about world religions" (Goldberg, 2010, p352). This criticality is central to the application of religious literacy to the classroom context, translating the "importance of a scholarly engagement with issues of identity, power and status" (Knott 2009, p245) to the classroom

setting. Within the context of the school classroom, such critical engagement with *category* is both essential to an authentic representation of religion and worldviews and to the development of epistemic awareness.

In a classroom setting, *category* refers to an understanding of religion and worldview at the conceptual level, a focus that is increasingly recognised as central to in-depth understanding in RE (CoRE, 2018; Earl, 2015; Freathy & John, 2019). This encompasses the idea that religion and worldviews can be understood as more than belief systems or sets of beliefs and practices, suggesting a much stretchier definition of religion. This broadens out the focus beyond formal traditions, to the informal, the lived, social, political and embodied nature of religion and worldview. Key to this is an understanding of religion and worldview as identity as well as tradition and the dynamic relationship between the two.

Promoting such understanding requires a more dynamic and fluid understanding of culture, religion and tradition than that often promoted in RE and indeed in the humanities more broadly. Firstly, it demands that we move beyond the bounded notion of religions as closed systems that can be learned about by studying their essential characteristics or ‘essence’. As I have argued in Article 3, this is not to suggest that religious traditions may not have ‘prototypical properties’ (Wright, 2008) but that any such properties feature as part of the process of interpretation that is lived religion. This is based on an understanding of tradition as being constantly modified through processes of interpretation and understanding (Meijer, 2006). Such an understanding draws on the hermeneutics of Gadamer and on Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of *historical consciousness* to understand how “traditions are developing and evolving historically – in and through the historical interpretations and actions of human beings over time, and of how the vitality of traditions depends on such constant reinterpretation” (Meijer, 2006, p12).

At the individual level, religion and worldview as identity is understood as similarly fluid. Identity is seen as a process of interpretation, which actively draws on and negotiates aspects

of tradition; “Like any interpretation, [this] personal identity is not unchanging and universally valid. It is, like any interpretation, tentative and open to deliberation” (Meijer, 2006, p8). Tradition and identity are then interwoven in the process of interpretation.

In this expanded model of Religion and Worldview Literacy, *category* speaks to the aspirations of stakeholders by including both the exploration of the categories ‘religion’, ‘secularity’ and ‘worldview’ as they are employed in the lived experiences of individuals and communities and the critical deconstruction of how these have been employed in representations and conceptualisations of religion and worldviews. It requires pupils to critically explore the construction of knowledge, in order that they develop epistemic awareness.

Disposition

“RE forces people to look inwards and I think that is an important part of education.” (Teacher)

As demonstrated in this thesis, alongside academic enquiry, personal development is perceived as a key aim of RE, although this is contested (Wright, 1993, White, 2004). I have argued that this reflects the longstanding duality of aims of RE and the debate over its intrinsic (academic) or instrumental (personal or civic) value (Jackson, 2015). Whereas some teachers and parents in my sample regarded RE as a space for the promotion of moral and spiritual development, the majority, and nearly all the pupils saw its value in terms of personal awareness. Some of this was housed in the language of overcoming stereotypes and promoting open-mindedness. Alongside this, pupils particularly focused on the idea of personal reflection.

The *Disposition* phase of Dinham’s framework for religious literacy asks “what emotional and atavistic assumptions are brought to the conversation and what are the effects of people’s own emotional positions in relation to religion and belief” (Dinham, 2017, p261). This is based on an assumption that people often have strong, often personal views on religion and that these are often influenced by assumptions made and stereotypes perpetuated in the media. Yet how people feel about religion is not often addressed and that this contributes to the “ill-informed and grumpy” conversation (Dinham, 2017, p262). Disposition is then the reflexive element of

R&W literacy. Whilst reflexivity is an essential element of religious literacy in any setting, it comes to the fore in the context of the school classroom and is key to my model of R&W literacy as an *educational* process.

Disposition is linked to the epistemic awareness nurtured through a focus on *category*, and applied at the personal level in terms of one's own position in relation to the subject matter under study. As with Jackson's Interpretive approach (Jackson, 1997), the disposition element of R&W literacy highlights the student's own perspective as central to the learning process. Rather than seeking to promote a set of normative moral or social dispositions such as tolerance and respect, the focus is on promoting a level of self-awareness through which personal attitudes and prejudices toward religion and non-religion are brought to the fore and challenged. This reflexivity contributes to both self-awareness and open mindedness, gained through the process of understanding.

The *disposition* element then highlights a hermeneutical process of understanding, drawing on Gadamer's argument that when encountering religion and worldviews as 'other', students can understand best when this 'other' is explored in relation to their own 'fore-meanings' (Gadamer, 1975). As Gadamer explains, "this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices" (as cited in Roy & Starosta, 2001, p16), a positive shift away from the "phenomenological agnosticism by which pupils temporarily suspend their judgement on the religious beliefs of others" (Ipgrave & Mckenna, 2008, p114).

Gadamer suggests a process of *Bildung*, "a core process of self-examination" (Roy & Starosta, 2001, p16). This is a process of personal development that also has social or civic worth in that it develops the character and sensitivity to "recognise(s), accept(s) and appreciate(s) the fundamental differences between people of different cultures" (Roy & Starosta, 2001, p16). A hermeneutical approach might be seen to promote humility, which is seen as central to intercultural competence (Paine & Sandage, 2016). Indeed, Gadamer's critical hermeneutics

have been adopted by scholars in relation to intercultural communication (see Roy & Starosta, 2001 and Dallmayr, 2009) and is influential in intercultural education, distinguishing the latter from multicultural, transcultural and some models of culturally responsive pedagogy. R&W literacy can then be seen as contributing to intercultural understanding and competency by developing the ability to talk well about and engage well with religion and worldview diversity, from a self-aware perspective, again reflecting the key aims of such learning as expressed by participants in my research.

Knowledge

“We need to look at religions and their core beliefs and practices, but then examine believer’s lives, their role in society, and religion’s role in shaping society.” (Teacher)

As Dinham’s framework suggests, the kind of knowledge involved in religious literacy is context-dependent. In relation to RE, the kind of knowledge prioritised relates to the aims of the subject, which as we have seen are multiple and contested. As outlined above, a key message from my research is the desire for knowledge about a broader range of religion and worldviews that reflects the growing diversity and fluidity of the religion and worldview landscape. This relates to key aims for RE as expressed in the data: Firstly, that of preparing young people for positive engagement with religion and worldview diversity, a rationale that finds expression in the proposed national entitlement (CoRE 2018) with an emphasis on preparing “young people for living in the increasingly diverse world in which they find themselves” (CoRE, 2018, p6). Secondly, the desire for curricula that represent the real religion and worldview landscape relates to the value placed on academic enquiry and the critical understanding of religion as a socio- historical phenomenon.

A broader representation in curricula is not, as some fear, a call for breadth over depth or more superficial knowledge about a wider range of religions and worldviews at the expense of a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of religions and religious belief (Lewis, 2017). What is suggested is that knowledge about religion and worldviews reflects the live nature of

tradition, identity, belief and practice as evidenced in contemporary research (see e.g. Davie 2015b; Woodhead & Catto, 2012). As outlined in Article 3, non-belief is widely recognised as an important part of this landscape. R&W literacy in the classroom requires a nuanced understanding of the complexity of ‘unbelief’ alongside that of religion - making sense of the religious and the secular and the complex relationship between them.

So R&W literacy does suggest knowledge about a broader range of religious and non-religious worldviews, but not simply as more propositional knowledge. Rather, a situated knowledge is suggested, one that is embedded in and forefronts the social context. This reflects stakeholders’ interest in lived religion - how individuals and communities make sense of and experience religion in their daily lives. Part of this is to do with the complexity of identification and the interaction between religion or worldview and society at the individual level. This also reflects the live nature of religions and worldviews and how they too change through encounter, as examples of transnational religion demonstrate (see e.g. Levitt, 2006; Pasura & Erdal, 2016)

The focus on *category* and *disposition* inform the kind of *knowledge* allied with R&W literacy in the classroom. As outlined above, R&W literacy requires young people to engage in critical enquiry around the construction of knowledge. As such R&W literacy seeks to problematise rather than reproduce the dominant discourse around religion and worldviews. The focus on the situatedness of knowledge as key to understanding the real religion and worldview landscape highlights the dialogical and reflexive nature of knowledge production. In R&W literacy the scholar and ‘object’ of study are engaged as co-participants in the dynamic formulation of a narrative about religion (Collins, 2002 as cited in Knott, 2009). As highlighted by Knott (2005), such a stance “invites us to step away from the imprisonment of [the] modernist position” (Knott, 2009, p255) – to delve into the insider/outsider debate.

Skills

“It’s important in terms of empathy and tolerance..... it raises awareness. It also gives you a global viewpoint of the world, beyond your own back yard.” (Teacher)

According to Dinham, “this is where clarity about religion and belief as a category, along with an open disposition, and *some* knowledge of *some* religious practices and beliefs, translates into what to *do* in practice, especially in practice and work places” (Dinham, 2017, p262). In the RE for REal research students, parents, teachers and employers all stressed the need for young people to be equipped with the skills to engage well with diversity. From a student perspective, this focused on day-to-day encounter and the desire to feel more at ease with difference, as well as the skills of intercultural navigation that are required in the workplace. Echoing Dinham’s argument for religious literacy in public professions, (Dinham, 2018) employers place great importance on the skills to engage positively with religion and worldview diversity as part of workplace readiness (Dinham & Shaw, 2015 & 2017). Surprisingly, this remains a rather neglected theme in discussions around RE and not one that is explored at length in this thesis¹⁷. However, the skills element of R&W literacy includes skills of encounter across difference from a self-aware perspective, skills that are then applied to any setting, including the workplace.

A specific skill associated with religious literacy is discernment (Davie, 2015b), echoing Gadamer’s notion that “the *gebildete* (cultured) person is not only learned in the traditional sense by having knowledge of the facts, but s/he also possesses the ability to discriminate between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, important and unimportant, and so on” (Roy & Starosta, 2001, p11). Within the concept of *Bildung* lies the notions of tact and judgment, and thus “combines knowledge about how to conduct oneself in the world with the tact to act appropriately in social situations” (Roy & Starosta, 2001, p11).

Here we see how *disposition* is entwined with *skills*; the R&W literate person, having gone through a process of self-examination in terms of their disposition toward religion and

¹⁷ This thesis does not have the scope for further analysis of employers’ perspectives but this is an area that would be valuably explored in future research.

worldviews, is able to practice discernment with regard to religion and worldviews with an openness to the wisdoms that may lie within. As Meijer argues, having an awareness that one's understanding is based on preconceptions (having historical consciousness) and having explored those preconceptions, allows for an open and questioning mind (Meijer, 2006). Quoting Gadamer, Meijer argues that "to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. A person skilled in the 'art' of questioning is a person who can prevent questions being suppressed by the dominant opinion" (Gadamer, 1989, cited in Meijer, 2006, p14). Thus R&W literacy incorporates an open-minded curiosity and the skill or ability to ask questions about someone's religion or worldview with confidence and sensitivity.

6.2 Religion & Worldview Literacy as Praxis

The model of R&W literacy presented in this thesis builds on Dinham's framework to develop a practical, educational process. The hermeneutic element of R&W literacy is key to recognising this as a process of understanding, interpretation and application, rather than a product of good RE, or any other education. As in the interpretive approach (Jackson, 1997), learning about religion and worldviews is not distinct from interpretation of others' and one's own beliefs. Neither is it distinct from application, as the very act of understanding is acted out in everyday engagement and encounter. It is through encounter with another's worldview that understanding happens.

Bernstein (1983) identifies three elements of hermeneutics; *understanding*, *interpretation* and *application*, highlighting Gadamer's assertion that these are not three separate elements, but that "they are internally related; every act of understanding involves interpretation, and all interpretation involves application" (Bernstein, 1983, p39). Through the learning process, the student develops the skills of critical enquiry and positive engagement with difference. Likewise, understanding and disposition are enacted and developed through the application of skills of encounter.

In this sense there are several key elements to R&W literacy, which are all interwoven:

The critical exploration of categories – the understanding of tradition and identity as dynamic - the development of epistemic awareness - the co-production of knowledge - reflexivity - personal awareness – open-minded curiosity – skills of discernment & positive encounter. In relation to Dinham’s four phases (category, disposition, knowledge & skills) these elements may sit more firmly within a particular phase but rather than a linear process, I argue that they are interwoven and interdependent, and operant in a continual process of learning. In the classroom setting, R&W literacy can then be thought of as educational praxis.

6.3 R&W Literacy and Religious Education

I propose R&W literacy as a model to shape learning about religion and worldviews in schools, both generally, across curriculum areas and specifically in RE. In relation to the latter, R&W literacy as an educational model speaks to some key issues and debates around the subject’s nature and purpose.

Firstly, through the *Knowledge* and *Category* strands, the model addresses the issue of religion and worldview diversity and how this is best represented in the classroom. Whilst calling for more breadth in the representation of religions and worldviews, the suggestion is not that curricula aim to cover every possible religion or worldview present in Great Britain or the world. As suggested in the recommendations of the RE for REal report (Dinham & Shaw, 2015) and in Article 3 (Shaw, 2018), the aim is to depict the ‘real religion and worldview landscape’ as evidenced in contemporary sociological research on religion. As such curricula should represent a diversity of traditions, both formal and informal and the diversity between and within traditions. There is a focus here on ‘lived religion’, on religious and non-religious worldviews as they are experienced by their adherents as well as on the dynamic nature of both traditions themselves and individual engagement with them.

This complexity and dynamism is embedded in the focus on religion and non-religion as *categories*. It is through this strand that R&W literacy contributes to epistemological discussions. Approaching religion and worldviews at this conceptual level means looking beyond the orthodoxies of representation that have dominated RE, the most obvious of which limits religions and worldviews to belief systems. A focus on category moves beyond the false binaries of religious/secular, public/private, good/bad, fluid/static that such representations reproduce (see Article 3, Shaw, 2018). Reflection on the categories ‘religion’, ‘secularity’ and ‘worldview’ and the relationship between them both at the level of the individual and as social, historical and political concepts, contributes to epistemic awareness. In this sense R&W literacy seeks to contribute to the insider/outsider debate through questioning whose knowledge about religion and worldviews the learner is faced with. The focus on *category* demands an exploration of knowledge construction and the power relationships embedded in representations of religion and worldviews.

Secondly, R&W literacy as a goal of RE may contribute to a reconciliation of the long-standing duality of intrinsic and instrumental aims (Jackson, 2015). The intrinsic aim of critical academic enquiry (*knowledge and category*) is combined with both formational (personal) development through *disposition* and the social or civic worth of *skills* in navigation as an element of intercultural competency. The reflective stance demanded by the focus on *category* is operant at the personal level through the *disposition* strand of R&W literacy. Here the focus is on the learner exploring their position in relation to religion and worldviews. It is concerned with a two—way process of encounter with religion and worldviews, and as such can be described in terms of an ‘I-Thou’ relationship (Gadamer, 1975). The *disposition* element of religious literacy asks that we explore our own prejudices, so that we might gain understanding of ourselves and the ‘other’ – a challenging of one’s own attitudes towards religion and worldviews. It is about an openness that “always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it” (Gadamer, 1975, p271).

The hermeneutic nature of enquiry suggested as core to R&W literacy demonstrates the “symbiotic relationship between knowledge and the knower” (Freathy & John, 2019). This move away from an objectivist approach brings the student into the learning process, allowing for the study of religion and worldviews that is “at once a form of self-discovery, no less spiritual than political, no less therapeutic than classificatory” (Mandair 2001, as cited in Knott, 2009, p255) and ties *category* to *disposition*. In such a model, understanding cannot be divorced from the formational. So too is learning entwined with the development of practical and social skills of intercultural competency.

R&W literacy can be seen then in terms of both personal and social or civic worth. Along with approaches to intercultural education, R&W literacy seeks to reduce prejudice and promote acceptance, and as such these approaches have a moral value base (although the extent to which this is an explicit learning goal may vary). This moral judgement is what separates praxis from *techne* (learned technical skills). The skills element of R&W literacy is more than *techne* – it is also about coexistence and discernment. Understanding another’s worldview is not just about understanding, but about “coming to grips with one another” (Roy & Starosta, 2001, p10). This is not to suggest that understanding automatically leads to empathy or respect. As highlighted by Hannam and Biesta (2019) understanding, care and respect are all laudable, but not necessarily connected aims for education. The understanding through application within R&W literacy, in which *phronesis* plays a central part, seeks to widen students’ horizons and experience and foster an open-minded curiosity, which is a good place to start.

7. Conclusion

My overall research question is:

How could religious literacy translate into the classroom context?

As a starting point I share with Dinham the premise that religious literacy is best thought of as a context specific framework, a way of approaching religion and worldviews rather than a didactic response such as Prothero's (2007). For this reason my research questions are exploratory:

What kind of knowledge and understanding does religious literacy involve in the classroom context and for what purpose?

What are the relationships to the aspirations of key stakeholders in learning about religion and worldviews?

I argue that as a theoretical model, Dinham's framework provides a useful analytical tool for understanding teaching and learning about religion and worldviews in the general sense. However, as a framework it is not, and neither is it intended to be, directly applicable to the classroom context. In translating religious literacy into the classroom context, I make some important adaptations:

- 1) The explicit extension of 'religion' to 'worldview' to better categorise lived reality and diversity
- 2) A focus on the construction of knowledge
- 3) The foregrounding of a reflexive element in understanding
- 4) Moving from a linear to a circular model of praxis.

These adaptations are expressed in an extended theorisation - a model of 'Religion and Worldview (R&W) literacy' that reconciles stakeholders' aspirations for the purpose and content of learning about religion and worldviews in schools as expressed in the data.

In relation to the **kind of knowledge and understanding religious literacy involves in the classroom context**, I argue for a particular focus on how religion and worldviews are categorised and an emphasis on co-produced knowledge developed through the interpretation process. Through the 'category' strand, my model foregrounds engagement with lived diversity. I agree with Dinham that religious literacy involves an understanding of the dynamic and fluid religious landscape, yet the terminology of 'religious literacy' does not fully reflect the reality it seeks to promote an understanding of. As argued in this thesis, the term 'religion' is often understood in a reductionist way. I therefore propose the name 'Religion and Worldview' literacy to better encompass that diversity. As discussed earlier, debates around terminology are complex and at times an unhelpful distraction. However 'religion and worldview literacy' explicitly broadens the scope **to reflect the aspirations of stakeholders that point to an overhaul of essentialist, reductionist representations**, and draws attention to the *concept* of religion as worthy of study. Borrowing from Goldberg (2010) and notions of critical literacy, I emphasise the categorisation of religion and questions over the construction of knowledge. In this regard, I agree with Freathy & John (2019) on the need for approaches to learning about religion and worldviews that highlight epistemological concerns and with Skeie (2015) on the need for strategies to support the maintenance of anti-essentialist categorisations of religion in the classroom setting. The model of R&W literacy presented here contributes to this endeavour by offering a critical lens through which to view religion and worldviews in their lived complexity.

Further, whilst Dinham's framework suggests a focus on category, and that this should reflect the fluid and dynamic nature of lived religion, it does not provide the concepts or process for developing such an understanding in the educational context. In my adaptation I draw on hermeneutical understandings of tradition as in transition or "historical consciousness" as employed by Jackson (2009) and Meijer (2006). As well as offering a way of conceptualising the idea of religion and worldviews as contested and fuzzy edged, the hermeneutic approach at the

heart of R&W literacy recognises the role of the individual in reshaping tradition through encounter.

In terms of the kind of understanding involved, this places reflexivity at the centre of the learning process. Whilst Dinham's framework suggests a challenging of one's disposition toward religion, these 'ways of thinking about religion' are not directly applicable to the classroom. I suggest that with R&W literacy, as with interpretive approaches to RE, the reflexive process is central to understanding, drawing on ideas of critical literacy or 'self-critical scholarship' (Goldberg, 2010) that land this in the classroom context.

I have highlighted the importance of this reflexive element in R&W literacy. The "hermeneutical realisation at the heart of RE" (Bowie, 2018, 243) has long been recognised and well explored (e.g. Jackson, 1997, 2004, Aldridge, 2011, 2015, p2018). Yet with rare exceptions (e.g. Lewin, 2017) reflexivity is understated in understandings of religious literacy. R&W literacy is presented here as a framework for learning about religion and worldviews that brings situated knowledge into critical dialogue with students' own perspectives. As outlined in Chapter 6, it is the hermeneutical approach underpinning R&W literacy that makes it an educational process.

In response to the question of the purpose of such knowledge and understanding, by drawing on such hermeneutical approaches the purpose of R&W literacy is explicitly educational. As an educational model, the emphasis on the reflexive element and on engagement with the construction of knowledge foregrounds the primary aim of understanding. That said, R&W literacy, like Dinham's model, is liberally normative in that it seeks to overcome prejudice and prepare young people with the skills for positive encounter with diversity. In this sense I agree with Grimmitt (2010) that learning about religion and worldviews can be aligned with a broader educational endeavour and with Jackson, that it is part of a broader Citizenship education and a key component of intercultural education (see Jackson 2003;2014). To those who are concerned that such an alignment may encourage the 'politically sanitised' portrayal of religion (Gearon, 2010; Wright, 2008) my model foregrounds the critical engagement with

representations of religion (including the politically benign/peaceful cliché) and a sociological and contemporaneous turn that embraces the lived reality of religion and worldviews in society. So whilst like Moore (2007) and Prothero (2007), I see R&W literacy as essential to positive engagement in society and my model adopts the functional literacy of these and Dinham's approach, R&W literacy is also explicitly critical and reflexive.

As argued by Skeie (2015) when knowledge about religion and worldviews is re-contextualised for the classroom context, the purpose shifts and pursuit of knowledge is combined with socialisation and preparation for adult life. Within the reflexive process described above there is a formational aim in the sense of *Bildung*. With regards to personal development, the idea that RE should provide pupils with a moral compass is not one I subscribe to. In this regard I agree with Wright (1993), that moral education is a whole school obligation and whilst it may be a by-product of RE, as it is of other curriculum areas, it should not be an explicit aim of the subject. As such, moral development is not an explicit element of my model, neither is the development of a personal worldview or personal identity an aim of R&W literacy. However, through the reflexive process of understanding R&W literacy includes the aim of personal development in that it promotes self-awareness and open-mindedness, which are both **key aspirations of stakeholders**, as expressed in the data.

As a model for learning, the purpose of R&W literacy presents a balance between the academic (in the pursuit of critical knowledge about religion and worldviews in society and epistemic awareness), the personal (through reflexivity leading to self-awareness) and the social (through the development of skills in intercultural competency). It is in this sense that my proposed model reconciles the often competing intrinsic and instrumental aims of RE as expressed in the aspirations of research participants and in debates around the future of RE.

Through my thesis, the question of **what kind of understanding religious literacy involves in the classroom context** is also addressed at the theoretical level and can be posed as; **what kind of understanding of religious literacy is applicable to the classroom context?** Through a

process of abductive analysis, I arrive at an expanded theorisation of religious literacy for the classroom context. In landing religious literacy in the classroom, my model shares Dinham's emphasis on the multi-dimensionality of religious literacy and I consider all four phases (category, disposition, knowledge and skills) as analytically useful and important. However, I challenge the linearity of Dinham's framework. I argue that the kind of knowledge and understanding involved in religious literacy in a classroom context requires a hermeneutical approach. I therefore present R&W literacy as a model of educational praxis in which four strands are co-dependent and internally related.

The model of R&W literacy presented in this thesis is a culmination of an existing framework (Dinham's framework for religious literacy) and abductive analyses of stakeholders' aspirations regarding purpose and content. As Danemark *et al* assert, it is not enough to ask what a theory says about events – the purpose of abductive analysis should not be to simply demonstrate how events could be interpreted and re-described with a ready-made theory. Equally important is “what do the events say about the theory?” (Danemark et al., 2002, p95). Central to this thesis is the dialectic relationship between my theoretical re-description of participants' aspirations for learning about religion and worldview through the lens of religious literacy and the development of my model of religion and worldview literacy for the classroom, itself informed by participants' aspirations and wider debates. It is a coming together of debates from the academic disciplines of sociology, religious studies and educational studies with the voices of stakeholders in schools in the development of the concept of religious literacy for the classroom context. In this sense it may be seen as an example of research in what Skeie (2015) calls the ‘third space’ where “theorising originating from academic practice meets theorising originating from school practice” (Skeie, 2015, p138).

In this sense, the theoretical and practical contribution of my thesis cannot be separated. The intention is that R&W literacy may provide a useful framework for planning curriculum content and pedagogical approach. It also makes a contribution to policy debates around the purpose of RE through a reconciliation of intrinsic and instrumental aims. However, the hermeneutic spiral

does not end and my model of R&W literacy is not a finalised, finished product. As Pierce argues on the nature of science, it “is not standing on the bedrock of fact. It is walking upon a bog, and can only say, this ground seems to hold for the present. Here I will stay till it begins to give way” (cited in Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p118). Like any theorisation, the model I propose is a way of revisiting or re-contextualising stakeholders’ aspirations and their relationship to broader debates – a way of making sense of the data. It is presented as a stage in an ongoing spiral. It is hoped that through dialogue with peers in a community of inquiry that this model will contribute to understanding of religious literacy and to the shape and role of learning about religion and worldviews in schools.

I ask how religious literacy could translate into the classroom context. In response I suggest an extended theorisation that meets stakeholders’ aspirations for the purpose and content of learning about religion and worldviews through a greater focus on the categories of ‘religion’ and ‘worldview’, an explicit focus on knowledge construction and the foregrounding of a reflexive element in a process of educational praxis. Through these adaptations, religious literacy translates into a theoretical and pedagogical model applicable to the classroom context.

Whilst my model is an expanded theorisation, and as such invites further abduction through dialogue, it is also intended as a practical tool to assist curriculum design and policy development. A challenge going forward is how R&W literacy might be integrated and exemplified in classroom practice and curricula. Equally pertinent is how R&W literacy can be best articulated at policy level and translated into teacher education and training.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Article 1

Article

Religious Literacy through Religious Education: The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief

Adam Dinham¹ and Martha Shaw²

¹ Faiths & Civil Society Unit, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW, UK

² School of Law and Social Sciences, London South Bank University, 103 Borough Road, London SE1 0AA, UK;
shawm7@lsbu.ac.uk

Abstract: This article reports on research undertaken between July 2014 and November 2015 in secondary schools (for young people aged 11–16) across England to ask what young people need to know about religion and belief in schools in order to increase ‘religious literacy’ when they go into the workplace and wider society. The research arises in the context of an urgent debate which has been underway in England about the future of Religious Education (RE), a subject which remains compulsory in England under the Education Act 1944, but which gives rise to widespread confusion about its purposes, content and structure, as reflected in growing criticisms of the policy muddle that frames it. The key findings are: that there is an appetite for review and reform of teaching and learning about religion and belief in schools, inside and outside the RE space, in order to clarify confusion about its purposes, content and structure; that the key perceived purposes which are emerging are the ability to engage with diversity, and personal spiritual (but not religious) development; and that stakeholders want to learn about more religions and beliefs, and ways of thinking about them, which reflect a much broader and more fluid real contemporary religion and belief landscape of England and the world than education has reflected.

Keywords: religious literacy; Religious Education; RE; education policy

In England and Wales, Religious Education (RE) is compulsory for all under the Education Act 1944, whose provisions are explored below. This research explores the contribution RE may make to religious literacy, by understanding it as only one part of a process which needs also to encompass what happens in higher education (see, e.g., (Dinham and Jones 2012) on this subject), as well as professional and vocational training (see, e.g., (Davie and Dinham 2016)).

The term ‘religious literacy’ extends and borrows from E D Hirsch’s notion of ‘cultural literacy’ (Hirsch 1988) and has grown in use and popularity in the UK and elsewhere (see (CORAB 2015)). It is a metaphor connected to the ability to read and write; like reading and writing, literacy in religion is about an understanding of the grammars, rules, vocabularies and narratives underpinning religions and beliefs. In our conception of it, it is also a response to a problem (see Davie 2015b). The religious literacy critique starts with the observation of a lamentable quality of conversation about religion and belief in the developed West, just as we need it most (see Davie, in Dinham and Francis (Davie 2015b), foreword). A century or so of secular assumptions has resulted in the West talking not very much and not very well about religion and belief, and the secular-mindedness which frames it is itself challenged due to a lack of precision in the face of the considerable contestability of the idea (Dinham and Baker 2017). Indeed, as Davie notes, Britain continues to be Christian, as well as more secular and more religious at once (Davie 2015c). Others observe a post-secular turn in which pervasive religion and belief find a new space in the public sphere (see (Dinham and Baker 2017)), though Beckford dislikes the term ‘post-secular’ itself for its focus on what it is not, rather than what it is. At precisely the time we have mostly been looking away, the religious landscape has changed enormously. In England, the proportion of the population who report having no religion increased between 2001 and 2011 from 14.8% to 25.1%. There is a massive internal realignment away from Anglicanism and

Catholicism, towards independent churches within Christianity alone (see (Woodhead 2012)). *What* we believe has also changed. Belief in ‘a personal God’ roughly halved between 1961 and 2000, from 57% of the population to 26%. But over exactly the same period, belief in a ‘spirit or life force’ doubled, from 22% in 1961 to 44% in 2000 (see (Woodhead 2012)). Others have observed non-religious beliefs that are deeply important to them, such as humanism, secularism and environmentalism (see (Lee 2016)). Yet as religion and belief come under renewed scrutiny now, under pressure from extremism, migration and globalisation, we find that the ability to talk well about religion and belief has largely been lost (see Dinham, in Beaman and Arragon (Dinham 2015)). The question this poses for every educative sphere is how can we equip people to get to grips with religion and belief, as it turns out to be pervasive and persistent after all? In England, and in varying ways elsewhere, schools play an important role in this. This research addresses what sort of teaching and learning about religion and belief can help.

1. The RE Policy Muddle

These are questions both for RE and beyond, in the wider lives of schools, and in society. It has been observed that state policy on religion and belief in schools, and on school RE, is in a confusing state and that this may be a major contributing factor to a widespread lack of religious literacy in wider society, often making the conversation about religion and belief ill-tempered and difficult (see Davie, in Dinham and Francis (Davie 2015b); Dinham, in Beaman and Arragon (Dinham 2015)). What young people learn about religion and belief in the confused environment of schools underpins how they handle it throughout their lives. Under the 1944 Education Act, it is a requirement in English law that learning about religion and belief must take place in all state-maintained schools, including those in reception classes and sixth forms (though not in further education colleges). The 1944 Act also made it mandatory for fully funded state schools to follow an ‘Agreed Syllabus’ for what it called ‘Religious Instruction’, developed within each of England’s 56 Local Educational Authorities by a ‘Syllabus Conference’, consisting of representatives of the Church of England and other Christian denominations. Reflecting this, during the period up until 1988, teaching was almost entirely based on a Christian, scriptural approach.

Though these provisions continue, the field, like society, has not been static. The 1988 Education Reform Act maintained the model of local determination of RE, rooted in the Local Education Authorities, but at the same time it shifted the stated purpose of RE from ‘teaching religion’ to ‘teaching *about* religion’, and indoctrinatory teaching was prohibited (UK Parliament 1988, Section 9). ‘Religious Education’ replaced ‘Religious Instruction’ and multi-faith ‘Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education’ (SACREs) replaced the Christian ‘Syllabus Conferences’. Agreed Syllabuses are now required to “reflect the fact that religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain” (UK Parliament 1988, Section. 8.3)—a situation which is at least questionable in relation to the real religious landscape.

In 1994, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) published non-statutory model syllabuses, which included six ‘main’ religions and used the two attainment targets of ‘learning about’ and ‘learning from’ religion. While this raises the unresolved question of what counts as a ‘main’ religion, these models were widely adopted in Agreed Syllabuses. In 2004, the successor Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) introduced another non-statutory national framework to support those responsible for syllabus development locally. The aim was to clarify the required standards in RE (see (QCA 2004)). The range of religions to be studied was further widened and it was recommended that students also have the opportunity to study “secular philosophies such as humanism” (QCA 2004).

The 1944 Act also mandates a daily act of collective worship in the Christian mode, which continues to be required, though in practice is widely ignored. At the same time, parents have a right to withdraw their children from the act of collective worship, as well as from RE itself. It has been suggested that collective worship and the right to withdraw further confuse the place of religion and belief in schools, both in the overall environment and within RE (see (Clarke and Woodhead 2015)). This draws the religion and belief perceptions of parents and young people outside of schools into the policy muddle within them.

Changes in school structure have also been important. The advent of new ‘academy’ schools after 2000 has introduced local curricular determination, giving schools new freedoms from national and local government

control over what to teach. The subsequent expansion of the academies programme since 2010 has led to a situation in which an increasing number of schools are not required to follow Agreed Syllabuses or the national curriculum. Free schools are also outside these requirements. This increase in free schools and academies has permitted more schools ‘with a religious character’ within the state system, and the ambition is for the majority (though not all) of schools to be academies or free schools by 2020 (Department for Education 2016). The impact on RE has been an increasing diversity of approaches in a context which was already complex. Whether this complexity helps or hinders the growth of religious literacy is a matter for debate.

Alongside this, the decision to exclude RE from the new English Baccalaureate Certificate (EBACC) has been widely acknowledged as having led to a reduction in teaching time devoted to RE (NATRE 2015). The introduction of ‘Progress 8’¹⁸ in 2016 has further contributed to the subject’s lack of status. Many schools have taken to delivering RE through tutor time, or occasional ‘RE days’, so RE is marginalised rather than preserved as a discrete regular subject on the timetable. Within this there is concern about a failure to clarify the relationship between the general aims of schooling, to which RE makes a contribution, and particular aims specific to Religious Studies (see (RE Council Religious Education Council of England and Wales 2015)). Another concern is that RE in England has increasingly been colonised by proxy themes such as ethics, citizenship and cohesion, which overlap with, but are not in themselves, religion or belief (see Gearon (2010, 2013)). The implication is that religion and belief learning is intended to perform a primarily social task—to form citizens who can connect across difference.

The 1944 settlement is now more than seventy years old and has been repeatedly amended, in piecemeal ways, usually in the direction of trying to keep up with a changing religion and belief landscape. But changes in the real religious landscape have far outpaced changes in education about it. The real picture is made up of more believing without belonging (see (Davie 2015a)), and more non-believing (see (Lee 2016)). It is a context that is Christian, plural and secular all at the same time (see (Weller 2007)). The requirement for RE of a ‘Christian character’, the notion of ‘six main religions’, the continuing mandate for a daily act of collective worship, the right to withdraw, and massive change in the real religious landscape suggest that, in relation to religion and belief, we have a mid-20th-century settlement for an early-21st-century reality. This is likely to both reflect and reproduce religious illiteracy among school leavers, who are confused by the religion and belief messages communicated in schools, and by extension, in wider society. In this sense, what happens in RE in England may be understood broadly as emblematic of how religion and belief are understood and engaged across European and Western societies.

This is set against, and results in, the growing vigour of debates about religion and belief across a range of public settings and sectors, largely driven by new laws against discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, and by anxieties about extremism. The question of how to generate religious literacy in general collides with the issue of how best to educate about religion and belief in schools. Is the current RE landscape up to the challenge? How might it be re-imagined, and what might the alternatives look like?

Methodology

The research is qualitative and indicative, conducted with a sample of teachers, students, parents and employers (N = 331) via semi-structured interviews ($n = 141$) and focus groups ($n = 190$). These took place in nineteen schools across England, selected to represent a geographical spread and a mix of rural and urban. This included five Community Schools¹⁹ and fourteen Academies. Of these, six are Church of England academies, one is ecumenical, and seven are academies with ‘no religious character’. We excluded ‘faith schools’²⁰ on the basis that the issues there are highly complex and specific in themselves and would best be handled via a separate study.

Each school was asked to select up to five teachers and up to five parents for interview, and to select ten students from Year Ten (aged 15) to take part in focus groups ($n = 190$ across 19 focus groups). The final sample from the

¹⁸ Progress 8 is a new measure of school performance. It replaces the previous measure of 5A*-C including English and Maths, and shows how well pupils of all abilities have progressed, compared to pupils with similar academic starting points in other schools.

¹⁹ State schools controlled by the local council.

²⁰ We use the term ‘faith schools’ here to refer to voluntary aided and free schools with a religious character.

schools consisted of 97 teachers of which 29 were RE specialists and 19 were members of senior leadership teams. There were 34 parents. Within the sample selection we wished to reflect the fact that RE is taught by a mix of specialist and non-specialist teachers, and hoped to explore the extent to which specialisation makes a difference. The main difference we discovered was in the confidence of non-specialists. We also wished to explore how the RE muddle plays out in relation to permeability with overlapping but distinct topics including ethics, philosophy and citizenship. Ten employers were interviewed, who were self-selecting from a list of seventeen potential participants in a purposive convenience sample, intended to reflect a range of organisations within the public and private sectors. In each organization, the participating member was working at Chief Executive/Director level, or with a lead responsibility for employing staff.

Participants have been entirely anonymised, including in reference to their school location or workplace, to ensure that their identities could not be revealed or deduced. Every interview and focus group was recorded and transcribed using NVIVO, and analysed using theme identification (see (Boyatzis 1998)). The research questions revolved around three key areas, and the findings are presented in relation to these three themes:

Understandings of the purposes of RE

Aspirations regarding content

Views about what teaching and learning of religion and belief should look like, both inside RE and outside, in the wider school environment.

Purposes

The key finding in terms of what this sample thought is the purpose of RE is that it is there to prepare young people for encounter with religion and belief diversity.

“I'd say as Britain is becoming more multi faith and multicultural, it's important to learn about it because it's becoming more and more relevant...I think it's important so you can understand what other people believe in life, in society.” (Student)

This was supported by parents, who agreed that “[young people] have to be aware of the kind of diversity there is now”, particularly in less diverse schools:

“When I was at school we were purely taught Christian beliefs, mostly Protestant. So there's little I know about any other religion. But my children have been taught lots of religions. And I think that makes diversity a lot easier.” (Parent)

Teachers, too, saw preparing for diversity as a key aim so that “[students] can be more sympathetic towards the multicultural society that we are in.” There was a widespread assumption among teachers that understanding develops a positive attitude to difference.

However, teachers in particular distinguished between instrumental and academic purposes, stressing the importance of knowledge and understanding about religions in more academic terms: “the objective analysis and discovery of a range of different world views.” Within this, specialist RE teachers particularly emphasised the intrinsic value of religion and belief learning as “the academic study of religion as a phenomenon in the world.” Conversely, non-specialist teachers of RE tended to emphasise its role in diversity and cohesion:

“Ultimately it's not about someone who can answer the pub question on Hinduism; it's about someone who can go out there and relate to someone of the Hindu faith.” (Teacher)

Among students this emphasis on cohesion was linked to concern about not offending others:

“It's for our future as well, because if you're not used to being around them sort of people now... when you're older and working and you come across one of them, you know what to say and what not to say... so you don't accidentally say something they could be offended by.” (Student)

Students also displayed a developed sense of how religion and belief diversity may manifest itself in the workplace, and saw RE as key to preparing them for this:

“Understanding why, if you’re an employer, why different people might have to do things slightly different to others, so when they have to take more time off for religious reasons, why they work a certain amount of hours, why they have to work differently, speak to people differently. And some Muslims have to pray a certain amount of times and people need to understand that.” (Student)

This reflects employers in this sample who also said that “education about religion serves a fundamental purpose—teaches tolerance and understanding.” This understanding was seen as crucial to the workplace:

“So I think that whole notion of diversity in the workplace, respect and ‘good working’ that understanding and awareness of other religious faiths in such a diverse society as we are becoming is absolutely what every employee needs to be equipped with.” (Employer)

Alongside these instrumental purposes, a second important strand sees RE as a space for ‘spiritual development’. While a few students talked about RE helping them find a ‘pathway’ or ‘worldview’, most saw it as a key area for exploring and forming opinions with respect to moral and ethical issues. Some of the teachers said they see RE as the only space in the curriculum for what they described as spiritual development:

“In terms of developing a moral view on something, I think that is unique to RE.” (Teacher)

However, there was also insistence that this should not be the responsibility solely of RE:

“I’d say that’s the purpose of all education actually. But not particularly religious education. I don’t think it has any special claim.” (Teacher)

Parents also stressed that ‘moral and spiritual development’ should be a key aim of religion and belief learning. Most saw the development of moral values as an intrinsic part of RE, but they wanted it to be exploratory, rather than dictating or determining a moral framework:

“I’m not interested in developing someone’s religious belief, I don’t want to convert them to any particular religion, but I want to enhance their spirituality, so that they know it’s okay if they want to go down that route, and to investigate that.” (Parent)

2. Content

As perceptions of the proper purpose of RE revolved around preparation for diversity, alongside moral and spiritual development, issues of content largely reflected this. Though the ‘world religions’ were the most referenced content among all cohorts, in every school the most prominent theme was the desire among students to study a wider range of religions and beliefs. This was not affected by whether the school was with or without a ‘religious character’. In line with the focus on the instrumental, students related knowledge about a wide range of religions and beliefs to real life encounters:

“We live in a country with loads of different religions and I think we should learn about each different one, so if you do come across them, you know what they’re on about, and you know who they are.” (Student)

In this context, teachers agreed that the focus on one or two traditions in learning from age 14 to 16, leading up to the examined General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE), is too narrow, but were concerned with how to deliver breadth with depth, particularly given time constraints.

“I’d learn the different sects and denominations but you can’t spend much time talking about differences between individuals because there’s not enough time.” (Teacher)

Across the sample, there was recognition of internal diversity within, let alone between, religions and beliefs, and students and teachers especially thought that RE should have more time to explore these complexities:

“I think it is important that they do obviously understand the ones that a majority of the people in the world follow but there are also other belief systems out there as well that they should be learning about.” (Teacher)

“I’d want them to think more broadly about what we class as religion too. There are people that dance round Stonehenge naked because the sun’s up. Does that fall under the remit? Definitely it does of spirituality.” (Teacher)

Parents, too, were broadly in agreement that the ‘main religions’ should be covered, but also supported the inclusion of informal forms:

“Obviously you can’t look at them all but I think it is important to look at how people have beliefs but they may not be within a formal religion.” (Parent)

Half of the overall sample thought that a wider range of formal and informal beliefs should be studied, because that reflects the real world. This included broad consensus in this sample that non-religious worldviews should be included:

“Giving some sense of the wonder of the variety of different beliefs and religions that there are throughout the world is quite important so children understand that there isn’t a belief system that dominates but an enormous range of beliefs, including spiritual, and informal religion, ‘spiritualism’ is a very widespread outlook on life and important part of overall description of pattern of religious belief.”

(Employer)

“People’s beliefs are mixed, whatever religion they may or may not have been brought up in, there are all sorts of issues, beliefs such as vegetarianism, concern for the planet, these are all ways that people may want to manifest the importance to their lives. It’s important that people are aware... the external impact is still the same... because you had a set of beliefs, whether is within a formal religion or a less formal belief system, you’ll want to act in a certain way and people need to understand that your motivation is legitimate.” (Employer)

Some employers took a different, more practical view, that “Ninety percent plus of the people they meet will be from the big six or none, that’s where the focus should be” (Employer). Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of respondents supported the inclusion of ‘non-religion’ in RE. Humanism and atheism were those most referred to.

The importance of learning about lived religion and belief in a diversity of manifestations was also stressed by teachers, who felt it crucial that students get beyond ‘beliefs and practices’, “grasping that that’s not always how it plays out.” (Teacher). Another said:

“You’re not really doing RE unless you lift up the rug. If we teach them Christians are all kind people, then they’ll get to history and hear about the crusades or slavery and go, ‘what?’” (Teacher)

Likewise, across the cohorts the contemporary was prioritised. Students were interested in learning about the reality of religion in contemporary society.

“I think it’s interesting when we look at the big disasters and the terrorists... then we look at why they did it, from their religion, what were their reasons, what we’ve done to them... I find that more interesting.” (Student)

Parents also emphasised learning that engages with current affairs, including controversies around religion:

“White girls have converted for their boyfriends. So students have seen that and asked questions about it. So to me that’s modern day religion.” (Parent)

“Why some groups choose a path of violence. They need to know where that stems from.” (Parent)

“There’s a lot of ignorance around Muslims. People don’t know the difference between being a devout Muslim and blowing people up.” (Parent)

Employers valued this, too, emphasising pragmatic and practical content, focused on lived experiences and manifestations of religion and belief.

“To understand the controversies about religion in modern life is an important part of RE in school.”
(Employer)

Learning about beliefs and practices was also seen as important in relation to what they mean for workplace practices:

“It’s important to learn the holy days and festivals and the implications for their lives. For example, it’s important for non-Muslims to understand the importance of Ramadan for Muslims.” (Employer)

“A very, very large number of beliefs are relevant to the workplace, e.g., if you work in education or health sector, understanding about religious beliefs in our society today is very important. The precise utility of religious knowledge will vary by occupation, activity and sector but there is no doubt that to a wide, wide range of sectors, knowledge about religion and belief is very important. And to put the contrary, not understanding about religious belief is a serious weakness.” (Employer)

This was seen as particularly important in regards to outwardly focused public services:

“Our staff will be delivering services within the community, within homes and different places so...it’s important people understand the rules, rituals and beliefs of those communities they’re going into.” (NHS Employer)

3. Structure

While purpose and content are crucial and complex, the question of structure connects to the moment of practical application. This relates directly to structures of policy and how they frame the practices of RE itself, but critically also to the relationship between RE and school policy and wider policy relating to religion and belief. While schools continue to teach and socialise religion primarily ‘in the Christian mode’, policy on extremism, migration and welfare focuses instead on religious plurality and diversity, and the challenges of violence. This perversity of policy intentions frames and confuses the school environment in relation to religion and belief. The mix of schools with and without a religious character, faith schools, increasing local determination of curricula, and the continuing requirement for a daily act of collective worship and the right to withdraw are all structural factors which produce a muddled public experience of religion and belief. So too does the allocation of study themes about religion and belief inside and outside the RE space: cohesion, prevention, ethics, practices and beliefs—where to learn what? This study reveals important questions about the boundaries between academic and instrumental learning, and about which should go where.

Almost all the teachers in the study felt that RE should be in something like a National Curriculum, though they also recognised that academies and free schools are in any case not subject to the National Curriculum. This presents a structural paradox. Nevertheless, of ninety teachers who expressed an opinion, 86% said it should be in the national curriculum, 4% said no and 10% were unsure. Reasons for this were about status and consistency:

“I think that like the rest of the national curriculum these are essential bits of knowledge and skills that equip someone to live in our modern world.” (Teacher)

“It’s very diverse, the youngsters’ experiences can be very different from class to class, or from school to school. Therefore if there was a National Curriculum and there was a requirement for these skills to be covered and these topic areas to be covered, at least you would know that youngsters have that basic knowledge.” (Teacher)

A third of parents were not aware that RE is not part of the National Curriculum, yet nearly all (94 per cent) thought it should be. The majority of the overall sample was also in favour of some degree of compulsory RE teaching and learning. Of those teachers who expressed an opinion, 99% favoured compulsory ‘religious

education' (of whom 11% specified to age 14, 72% to age 16 and a further 38% to age 18). Reasons given for compulsion were about the importance of religion and belief in the contemporary world:

"The level of importance that it has around the planet means we should keep it" (Teacher)

They also focused on the transferable skills and attitudes RE engenders in pupils:

"To the end of year 11 [aged 16] because it's important in terms of empathy and tolerance, and because people aren't naturally going to go away and explore a faith that is different to theirs. It forces you to do it in some ways but it raises awareness. It also gives you a global viewpoint of the world, beyond your own back yard." (Teacher)

Most employers too felt that the study of religion and belief should be a compulsory part of secondary education, although there were different views as to the age to which this should continue. Students themselves were also largely in favour of compulsory RE, although there was broad consensus that this could be non-examined and that the examined subject, GCSE Religious Studies, should be optional.

"For example PE, you can take it as a GCSE and sit an exam in it but also you have to take it to keep fit. You could have to take RE but not sit an exam in it just so that you are socially capable." (Student)

Nevertheless, some students were glad it is compulsory, saying they felt RE lacks status and many would not have chosen the examined GCSE Religious Studies had it been optional, because it is not seen as 'counting':

"While I really love RE, universities just see it as another GCSE...it's not necessarily one of the ones they are looking for... in reality to a person, RE doesn't just count as a GCSE." (Student)

At the same time, the Religious Studies GCSE was perceived by students as too narrow:

"There is so much you could do in RE and then we're like restricted by these boundaries and I don't think we should be restricted." (Students)

Amongst teachers there was also support for retaining an optional, 'academic' Religious Studies GCSE, alongside a 'vocational', compulsory strand for everybody:

"You shouldn't have to take an exam at GCSE. A choice, academic version as well as an awareness, social version." (Teacher)

Many teachers in this study favoured teaching religion and belief themes in a distributed way in other subjects outside RE, especially Citizenship, and Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE), and in History. But most teachers thought that there should also be a distinct specific space for learning about religion and belief:

"The ethical and moral side of it should be fostered across the curriculum and then leave the actual teaching about [religion and belief] to RE." (Teacher)

Students were also critical of the confusion of RE with PSHE, Citizenship or careers education:

"We're supposed to be doing RE and then we're doing global warming." (Student)

There was broad agreement that wherever it is taught, RE should be taught by subject specialists wherever possible, and a widespread recognition that it very often is not. In this study, there was significant anxiety amongst non-specialist teachers of RE who said they felt ill-prepared and lacking in confidence:

"I think we shy away from it because we don't want to get it wrong. I get that." (Teacher)

"You have that nervousness about saying it in the wrong way: Am I being racist or stereotypical or prejudiced?" (Teacher)

Teachers said they think this both reflects and perpetuates the low status of RE. Many teachers suggested changing the name of RE, observing that 'Religious Education' and 'Religious Studies' carry baggage from a more 'confessional' era, have low status, and are off-putting to students:

“They’ve got a very negative attitude because it is named RS.” (Teacher)

“Maybe it shouldn’t even be called religion.” (Teacher)

Some parents reinforced this:

“But what might help that is if they stopped calling it RE. Because for such a long time it was just Christianity and so people perceive it as that.” (Parent)

Many employers also disliked the name, which they felt was discredited. One suggested a ‘religious awareness’ subject. Another suggested a ‘religious literacy lesson’ to run alongside a more distributed learning about religion and belief.

4. Reflections and Conclusions

The findings in this study suggest a broad commitment among teachers, students, parents and employers to the importance of compulsory learning about religion and belief in some way in all schools up to at least age 16. There is also recognition of religion and belief as muddled in schools, and an appetite for review and reform in relation to the purposes, content and structures of religion and belief learning, with the goal of producing clarity on each.

5. Summary of Findings

In relation to its purpose, students in the study saw RE as preparation for encounters with diversity, including avoiding causing offence and building cohesion. Parents agreed with the students that RE should be for the purpose of handling diversity, and for developing a ‘spiritual but not religious’ identity. Students also saw RE as the single most important space to achieve spiritual development, as well as seeing it as the basis of readiness for the workplace. Among teachers, too, there was broad consensus that RE should play a part in developing students’ spirituality. At the same time, RE specialists emphasised the intrinsic academic value of RE and were troubled by the lack of clarity about purposes. They felt there is not time to do all that RE is asked to do. Non-specialists emphasised the role of RE in producing cohesion. Employers emphasised the purpose of RE for practical encounters with diversity, and assumed that encounters will result in tolerance and respect.

Regarding content, students in the study wanted to learn about a wider range of religion and belief, including traditions, informal forms, and non-religion. They also emphasized a focus on lived religion and religion as a world/society issue, prioritising the contemporary over the historical. Teachers also wanted the inclusion of non-religions, naming humanism and atheism most, and the inclusion of learning about lived religion and internal diversity within religions and beliefs. They too emphasised real-world issues and controversies, and learning about the social roles and significance of religion and belief. But they balanced this with the reality of how to find the time, within which they thought that the traditions should be prioritized. Parents also emphasised the importance of teaching via real-world encounters and therefore real-world issues. They wanted the ‘main’ religions covered but thought that emerging forms are also important, though most could name neither. Employers want a pragmatic, practical engagement which prepares young people for workplace issues.

In terms of structures, students perceived a colonisation of the RE space with themes they thought properly belong elsewhere, especially to PSHE, Citizenship and careers education. Students, parents and employers also thought that RE should be compulsory, though there was consensus that the examined GCSE should be optional. Students also expressed dissatisfaction with the GCSE for being too narrow. Likewise, teachers favoured compulsory RE, though not just to age 16, but to 18. They would also like RE to be in something like a national curriculum, while recognising its diminishing traction in a context of increasing local determination. They suggested the delineation of religion and belief learning into an academic strand (in an optional GCSE Religious Studies), and instrumental or vocational elements which are compulsory for everybody. They insisted that RE should be taught by subject specialists wherever possible and noted a lack of confidence among non-specialist teachers of RE.

6. Implications

These findings imply a wholesale reconsideration of the context in which religion and belief learning takes place in schools in order to clarify the muddles, especially in the relationship between learning inside RE and outside it, in other subjects, and in the wider life of schools, where the daily act of collective worship and the right to withdraw confuse the educational, confessional and formational. In the sense that this reflects the muddle in wider society, it is likely that it also reproduces it, socialising young people to think in confused or unclear ways about religion and belief as they leave school, because they have themselves experienced uncertainty in their learning about the boundaries between different purposes and issues.

This makes it critical to clarify which issues are core to the academic study of religion and belief, which elements are social, or vocational, which are about the personal religious or non-religious formation of young people, and which overlap and/or are not really about religion or belief learning at all. These findings suggest at least three possible responses: a distinct, separately timetabled, religion and belief subject which broadly equips everyone to recognise and understand religion and belief roles, identities and practices (specific learning); the incorporation of instrumental, social and citizenship aspects of religion and belief learning into other subjects, especially PSHE, Citizenship and careers education (distributed learning); and an optional, examined academic subject for those wishing to specialise in the study of religion (specialist learning). The question of the name or names of these elements arose across this study, and this is an issue which is also in need of attention.

Wherever religion and belief learning occurs, based on these research findings, content should reflect the breadth of the real religious landscape, as revealed by cutting edge theory and data in the study of contemporary religion and belief. It should include: the study of a broad range of religions, beliefs and non-religion; exploration of religion, belief and non-belief as a category; exploration of the changing religion and belief landscape and its impacts on contemporary society; a focus on contemporary issues and the role of religion and belief in current affairs and controversies; a focus on the relevance of religion and belief for workplaces and working life; and exploration of religion and belief as lived a identity as well as a tradition.

From the religious literacy perspective, this means that teaching and learning about religion and belief can be explored inside and outside the RE space, not solely or even primarily as an instrument for cohesion and citizenship, but concerned with preparing students for the practical task of engagement with the rich variety of religion and belief encounters in everyday, ordinary life outside of schools, whatever the challenge or opportunity at hand. It distinguishes between learning for a politically determined purpose (making cohesion) and learning for a task (encountering variety well), while recognising the importance of both. It seems important to model the distinctions through clarity of purpose, content and structure in schools with the goal of socialising young people to do likewise. This asks how to educate young people about religion and belief alongside the other school subjects and ethos in ordinary, un-anxious ways, enabling them to enter adulthood understanding the religion and belief in and around their lives, at home and at work; recognising the chain of memory in which they stand, most of the links of which were forged in the religious mode; and grasping the comings and goings of religion in time and place across the world.

Every subject has its quiet normativities, as recent reform of the teaching of History in England reveals (to make it more chronological and more 'British'). But the policy muddle and its implications, as revealed here, question whether RE bears too much of an instrumental responsibility, not only in England but across Western societies, where secular assumptions predominate but are largely only dimly thought through. The risk is that, by focusing on cohesion, extremism and personal spirituality, learning about religion and belief mainly reflects and reproduces individualistic understandings, alongside anxieties about religion and belief as forces for division, violence and oppression. At the same time, it risks failing to engage with the ordinary pervasiveness of lived religion and belief which evidence suggests looks nothing like these concerns. This raises the question of whether the responsibility for learning about extremism and cohesion should be concentrated in the RE slot at all. Clarification of religion and belief in RE and in the wider school environment may underpin clarification of the conversation about religion and belief more broadly, and as such getting it right in schools may be the basis of renewing religious literacy in wider society.

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Appendix B: Article 2

Values Underpinning Teachers' Practice in Religious Education – A Values Typology for RE.

Abstract

The future of Religious Education (RE) in England is a subject of much debate. A persistent challenge to both policy and practice in RE is a lack of clarity and consensus over the aims and purposes of the subject. Research from English secondary schools reveals a complex nexus of aims and purposes ascribed to the subject by teachers. These are explored alongside their embodiment within other narratives as the basis for a typology of values underpinning teachers' practice. This is proposed as a tool to help bring clarity to discussions over the future of practice and policy in RE and its relation to other curriculum areas.

Key Words: *Religious Education, Values, Religion & Worldview literacy, Practice*

Introduction

The future of Religious Education (RE) in England is a subject of much debate. A persistent challenge to both policy and practice in RE is a lack of clarity and consensus over the aims and purposes of the subject. The *RE for REal* project (Dinham and Shaw, 2014) made a key contribution to this ongoing debate by providing evidence from interviews with teachers, pupils, parents and employers on their aspirations for the purpose and structure of learning about religion and worldviews in English secondary schools.

This article draws on empirical data from the RE for REal project, situating teachers' views on the purposes of RE within a typology of values. Five categories ('formational',

‘confessional’, ‘instrumental’, ‘analytical’ and ‘critical’) are presented as interconnected and overlapping value-bases that underpin practice in RE. This is proposed as a tool both for practitioners as the basis of reflexive practice and to help bring clarity to discussions over the future of practice and policy in RE and its relation to other curriculum areas, as recommended in the RE for REal report (Dinham and Shaw, 2015)

The project

RE for REal – What do young people really need to know and understand about religion & belief? was undertaken between July 2014 and November 2015 in 19 secondary schools (for young people aged 11–16) across England. The project explored the views of teachers (n=97), parents (n=34), pupils (n=190) and employers (n=10) on teaching and learning about religion and worldviews in English secondary schools. The research examined participants’ views on the current purpose of learning about religion and worldviews, and their aspirations around purpose, content and structure. The research was set within an interpretivist methodology, and as such is indicative of the perspectives of key social actors engaged in the practice of teaching and learning about religion and worldviews in schools as well as those for whom the outcomes of this practice might have significance.

The schools were chosen to represent a mix of urban and rural settings as well as different ‘types’ of schools within the state maintained sector. The sample included five Community Schools²¹ and fourteen Academies. Of the Academies, six were Church of England academies, one was ecumenical, and seven were academies with ‘no religious character’. Each

²¹ State schools controlled by the local council

school selected ten Year 10 pupils (aged 14-15), five teachers who were a mixture of RE specialists (who had a teaching qualification in Religious Education) and non-specialist RE teachers, along with teachers in other humanities subjects and a representative of the senior leadership team. The interviews were carried out on an individual basis for the teachers, employers and parents and in focus groups of, on average, ten participants for the pupils. For a full discussion of the methodology, findings and recommendations, see Dinham and Shaw, (2014, 2017).

As Gadamer asserts, all understanding (and quests for understanding) begin with a set of assumptions or 'fore-projections' (Gadamer, 1975). The RE for REal project was prompted by the urgent conversation underway within the Religious Education (RE) community in the UK about the future of RE in schools, following both concerns over the quality of teaching and learning and growing criticisms of the policy muddle which frames RE (see Dinham and Shaw, 2014; Clarke and Woodhead, 2015). Based on analysis of the surrounding policy debates, academic literature and the ongoing debate within the RE community, the project began with the assumption that RE in English schools was in need of reform. This is based on two key tenets: Firstly, that the content of RE does not adequately reflect the contemporary 'religion and belief landscape' (Dinham and Shaw, 2017) and secondly that a lack of consensus over the purpose of the subject has weakened its status and impact in schools.

21st Century RE

A subject whose origins lie in the 'generous hospitality' (Holloway, 2018, 203) of the Church of England's mission, the history of RE in English schools is one of compromise and colonisation

within a sea of competing aims. The 1944 Education Act made Religious Instruction a compulsory subject in English schools with Christianity and the Churches providing the dominant framework for the subject until the 1960s when, along with changes in the population's demographics, the legitimacy of Christian confessionalism began to be questioned (see Loukes, 1961). The 1988 Education Reform Act saw a shift in the stated purpose of RE from 'teaching religion' to 'teaching about religion', and indoctrinatory teaching was prohibited. The Agreed Syllabuses for maintained schools were from this point (and still are) required to 'reflect the fact that religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (UK Parliament 1988, Section.8.3). Whilst RE in maintained schools without a religious character is no longer 'Christian education', Christianity retains its dominance in terms curriculum time within a 'world religions' approach. It is important to note here that a confessional approach remains the prerogative of many 'faith schools', which make up around third of state funded schools in England. Of these the majority are Christian with a small number of Muslim, Jewish and Sikh schools (Long and Bolton, 2017).

Its roots in a pastoral approach, RE as we know it today carries a longstanding duality of intrinsic and instrumental aims. Much debate remains centred on the 'intrinsic' (valuing understanding of religion and worldviews for its own sake) versus the 'instrumental' (understanding for social or personal development) aims of the subject. This is a tension enshrined in the two commonly held 'aims' for RE; 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion', which in a departure from Grimmitt's original aim that pupils explore the

juxtaposition between the two (Grimmit, 2000), were adopted in model syllabuses as separate attainment targets (SCAA, 1994a&b).

RE as personal development

In line with the Religious Instruction of the early twentieth century, the 1944 Butler Act intended that the subject teach Christian morality to unite a nation. Copley (2010) sets this in the context of previous legislation dogged by bitter denominational controversies, leading to a focus on shared morals rather than potentially divisive beliefs. Since that time, the idea that learning about (or from) religion and worldviews should have as its prime purpose the personal development of the child remains a key thread, from the experiential models of the sixties, 'designed to promote a form of RE which contributed to pupils' "personal search for meaning"', to the focus on 'human development' heralded by Grimmit and Read (Grimmit, 2010, 264). Grimmit, (2010) acknowledges that his focus on 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion, 'gave a new basis for the claim – increasingly emphasised ... by Government-related agencies like the National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) – that RE could contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural, and mental development and thus to society as a whole – as required by both the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts' (Grimmit, 2010, 264). This emphasis, retained in later curriculum documents (QCA, 2004; DSCF, 2010; REC, 2013) was seen by Ofsted in 2007 as the key strength of RE.

There is however much unease with the notion that RE should bear the sole or even primary responsibility for the cross curricular theme of moral education. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is a whole school responsibility developed through the

formal and informal curriculum. RE may indeed have much to contribute to these themes, but only in so far as they relate to the subject matter (Wright, 1993). Others are perturbed by the association between morality and religion, dating from RE's pastoral beginnings, recognising that morality is not only found in, nor derived solely from religion (see Gearon 2013 and White 2004).

Another concern with an over emphasis on the social and moral is that the study of religion and worldviews itself is side-lined and marginalised within the subject. In 2013, Ofsted reported an over emphasis on social, moral and ethical issues at Key Stage 3, extending into a focus on philosophy and ethics at GCSE and Key Stage 4, at the expense of learning about religion and worldviews themselves: 'In many of the schools visited, the subject was increasingly losing touch with the idea that RE should be primarily concerned with helping pupils to make sense of the world of religion and belief' (Ofsted, 2013, 14). Such criticisms have led to a renewed focus on knowledge and understanding in later curriculum documents.

RE as an instrument of policy

Policies framing RE highlight its instrumental role in holding society together. If the 1944 Act can be seen as an attempt to unite the nation in Christian morality, the 1988 Act was a nod to the increasing diversity in multicultural Britain and an acknowledgement that children should have some understanding of it. The study of world religions opened the door to teaching RE as a means of promoting tolerance and understanding (Copley, 2010). Today RE is seen as a key vehicle for schools meeting their duty to promote community cohesion, as prescribed in the 2006 Education and Inspection Act (Education Reform Act 2006, part 3).

In a context increasingly driven by anxiety about extremism, a growing concern is that RE in England has increasingly been colonised by themes such as citizenship, cohesion and security (see Gearon, 2010, 2013). This agenda is seen most explicitly in the requirement for schools to promote British Values as part of the British Government's Prevent strategy (DfE, 2015). The 'Fundamental British Value' of 'mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith', whilst positive in its own right, can be seen, given its housing within Prevent, as contributing to anxiety around the place of religion in public life.

The cohesion driver draws RE closer to Citizenship Education, a union that is promoted in curriculum and policy documents within both fields (REC, 2007; DCSF, 2010; DfES, 2007) and widely valued (CiCe, 2008; Grimmitt, 2010; Jackson, 2003 Miller, 2014). This is despite troubled beginnings in which Citizenship education side-lined the study of religion and worldviews (Jackson, 2003) based, according to Jackson on a flawed understanding of RE, a misunderstanding of the nature of religion and worldviews and a narrow view of citizenship as 'a set of duties and rights related to one's place in the state rather than as a wider debate about the relation of the individual to a broader range of collectives including global responsibilities and rights' (Jackson, 2003,77).

The alignment of RE and Citizenship promotes teaching and learning about religion and worldviews that rests on the values of democratic citizenship and human rights. This approach, promoted by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2008) is taken forward in Jackson's *Signposts* (2014) and subsequent work with the Council of Europe and the Wergeland Centre, for which the 'fundamental rationale relates to human rights, citizenship and intercultural

education' (Jackson, 2016, 6). Many however are critical of the use of RE as a vehicle for Western liberal values. There are ideological concerns about 'comprehensive liberalism' (Wright in Grimmit, 2010), with tolerance as an end itself, and concern that Human Rights or liberal, democratic frameworks present a restrictive, secular political vision which is reductionist in its understanding of faiths (Thompson, 2010, 148).

Whilst an understanding of religion's political role is widely accepted as important, of major concern is that a focus on instrumental value belittles the intrinsic value of the academic study of religion and worldviews. Ofsted (2013) called for a deepening of pupils' understanding of religion and worldviews and this increased focus is evident in the recently updated criteria for GCSE and A-level and in the 2013 National Curriculum Framework for RE, observed as a 'slight but perceptible shift in RE thinking away from instrumental outcomes, such as community cohesion, towards a sense that the object of RE is worthy of study in its own right' (Chater, 2014, 258).

A Values Debate in RE

These policy threads are entwined with a diversity of pedagogical approaches to learning about religion and worldviews, themselves underpinned by a set of values that relate to the purpose of learning in this area. RE is shaped by a range of disciplines; theology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and more, that are practiced to varying degrees in any setting. Gearon (2017) identifies the range of approaches appropriated by RE and their pedagogical aims thus;

philosophical models see the object lesson of religious education to make thinkers and proto-philosophers; socio-cultural models see the object lesson of religious education as creating ethnographic, cultural explorers; psychological models see the learner as a seeker after personal meaning and fulfilment, 'spirituality' more preferable to 'religion'; phenomenological models see the object lesson of religious education as creating a detached observer of religion who is perpetually distanced from it; ever more prevalent political models, emphasizing the public face of religion, see teaching and learning in religious education as concerned with the creation of citizens and even activists; aesthetic models see a role for the arts in religious education, not simply the noting of art in religious contexts but also religious education classrooms as forums, through the expressive arts, for creativity as spirituality, the artist as spiritual seeker (Gearon, 2017, 15).

This pedagogical diversity is seen by some as contributing to an identity crisis in RE (Teece, 2015), a key feature of which is a lack of consensus among the RE community in England over the main purposes of the subject. This article draws on interviews with teachers about their aspirations for the future of teaching and learning about religion and worldviews in schools to examine the values that teachers attribute to their practice. As 'practice', teaching and learning about religion and worldviews is taken as having an underlying 'framework of thought in terms of which its practitioners make sense of what they are doing' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, 113).

The lack of consensus over aims and purposes of RE is an uncomfortable fit with understandings of teaching as a profession with a common identity. Hughes argues that professional identity is characterised by 'common experiences, understandings and expertise, shared ways of perceiving problems and their possible solutions' and suggests that a shared background and training results in a normative value system that is reproduced through practice (Hughes, cited in Evetts, 2006). The values underpinning practice in RE cannot be normative in that they are not homogenous. However, practice in this area does sit within the wider profession of teaching and as such is subject to the new 'professionalism', in Fournier's sense of the control of professional practice 'at a distance' by those in power (Fournier, 1999 cited in Evetts, 2006). The professionalisation of teaching situates learning about religion and worldviews within a wider, normative system based on accountability. The accountability framework around teaching in England, driven by a neoliberal agenda has seen control of the profession increasingly centralised. This can be seen as an example of 'organizational professionalism' based on hierarchal structures, standardization of work practices, target settings, and performance review (Evetts, 2006). As with all professional practice, the practice of Religious Education is 'maintained, developed and regulated' by institutions and policy (Kemmis, 2009). Learning about religion and worldviews in schools is practice that is situated and embodied (Kemmis, 2009), informed by the economic, social and historical context in terms of; the legislation and policy that frames it, the historical role of the Church of England in education and the changing religion and worldview landscape within which it is enacted.

Rather than one main aim for learning about religion and worldviews, teachers in the RE for REal project expressed a range of rationales. The meanings an individual attaches to action

may be multiple and exist within a complex nexus of purposes, some of which will overlap and which will certainly shift and be nuanced by the action itself and the background and context of the actor. At the risk of oversimplifying this complex nexus, the purposes attributed to learning about religion and worldviews are categorised into a values typology. In many qualitative studies, typologies are employed to make sense of complex social realities (Kluge, 2000) and propose ideal types that highlight key characteristics of phenomena. These characteristics are grouped together into categories that are intended to support understanding of the action. They seek neither to impose a restrictive dimension, nor to represent every possible form of action. The value-bases suggested in this article are both derived from the empirical data, and constructed, their properties 'dimensionalised' through the data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

A Values Typology

The three main threads apparent in teachers' responses on the aims and purposes of RE were 'knowledge and understanding', 'personal development' and 'preparing for diversity'. Drawing on these responses I suggest a 'teleoaffective structure' (Schatzki, 2012) made up of, 'formational', 'confessional', 'instrumental', 'analytical' and 'critical' value-bases that underpin practice in RE.

Formational

Many teachers emphasized pupils' personal development as a key rationale for RE. Here learning is shaped by value placed on the formation of the child. Often religious and/or non-religious worldviews were seen as a basis for self-exploration, spiritual or moral development.

Amongst teachers there was both acknowledgement of the special contribution RE makes and is called upon to make to SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural) development and focus on challenging students to explore and reflect on their own spirituality and morality, for which they see the RE space as unique;

'It's one of the few subjects you can delve, beyond academia...how [young people] think and how they feel and allow them also to have a spiritual response' (Teacher).

Here the nature of the subject is considered suited to pupils' personal exploration of their own responses to phenomena and their own inner spirituality. Spiritual and moral development are understood in terms of Ofsted's definition of SMSC in which spiritual development includes pupils' 'ability to be reflective about their own beliefs' whilst engendering, 'respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values' (Ofsted, 2015). The development of moral dispositions (such as respect) is implicit here and is to be nurtured alongside pupils' own, 'moral development' that focuses on 'investigating and offering reasoned views about moral and ethical issues' (ibid.).

Some teachers particularly highlighted the relationship between morality and religion, seeing the role of RE as being to *'promote values in young people that are common to all religions, so things like integrity, honesty'* (Teacher). Here learning about religions is linked to the development of certain virtues which are seen as 'good' in themselves, an end goal akin to Aristotle's 'telos'. Yet in terms of Weber's dichotomy, this can be seen too as an example of 'instrumental' rather than 'value rationality' (Oakes, 2003) in that value is attributed to the study of religion as a means of broader personal (spiritual or moral) development.

As suggested above, the formational value placed on RE is reminiscent of its pastoral origins. Some teachers however adopted an alternative view that sees pupils' moral and social development as ancillary to 'good RE'; *'I'd say [moral development] that's the purpose of all education actually. But not particularly religious education. I don't think it has any special claim' (Teacher)*. Whilst the formational value of education is seen as paramount, it is not uniquely, nor specifically attributed to RE.

Confessional

This category describes knowledge and interpretation determined and shaped by the language, meanings and explanations inherent within religious traditions. Here the faith itself is of prime value and its nurture a key aim of teaching and learning. In this sense the value is also formational, yet personal development is understood in terms of development within a faith. Faith-based education was not a focus on the RE for REal research and as such this category does not relate directly to the findings outlined above. However, given that schools with a religious character make up around a third of state funded schools in England (Long and Bolton, 2017) any attempt to untangle the aims and purposes of RE as part of policy development requires careful consideration of the existence of faith-based education in the English system.

Instrumental

The development of dispositions ties the 'formational' in closely with the 'instrumental'. The 'Instrumental' category emphasises learning in which there is an end goal of social or civic worth, such as intercultural harmony or good community relations. This category is the most

obviously influenced by policy, as in the case of community cohesion or the promotion of 'British values'. This category would also include socio-economic drivers manifest in accountability frameworks, which result in priority being given to 'passing exams'. Another socio-economic value illustrated in the RE for REal research (Dinham and Shaw, 2015) is the benefit perceived by employers to students having an understanding of lived religion and worldview diversity. Although not the focus of this article, employers attributed great instrumental value to religious literacy gained through RE.

The most common theme in the data is teachers ascribing value to learning about religion and worldviews as a means of preparing pupils for positive engagement with diversity - delivering 'good' in social terms. Many of the teachers interviewed reflected the policy –driven legitimisation of RE as lying in its positive contribution to community relations (Ofsted, 2010 & 2013, APPG, 2013); *'Ultimately it's not about someone who can answer the pub question on Hinduism; it's about someone who can go out there and relate to someone of the Hindu faith'* (Teacher).

Value was placed on learning that helps pupils to understand and manage difference that they will encounter; *'for them [students] to develop awareness of other people, their views, how they might be opposed and how they might resolve differences'* (Teacher). 'Respect' was often highlighted as a virtue, contributing to positive community relations that could be delivered through learning about religion and worldviews: *'It is important for students to understand why they are there and why they have their practices and beliefs, so they can respect it when they go out into the real world'* (Teacher).

However, as with personal development, for some teachers, the promotion of cohesion was seen as a by-product of good RE, rather than its *raison d'être*; *'if you develop religious literacy, in a way you are developing cohesion because people have the right understanding. It's far more important going to a lesson with a purpose that they have the correct information than that they're going to be cohesive. But certainly it is something I am aiming for'* (Teacher).

Analytical

Whilst the personal goal of a growth in spirituality or morality and the social goal of good community relations are given value within teacher's responses, for many, such benefits are seen as a by-product of the learning process, the ultimate aim of which is increased knowledge and understanding. The 'Analytical' places value on learning about religion or belief as an objective area of interest and academic enquiry. As noted, pedagogy in RE is influenced by a range of academic disciplines such as theology, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, geography and cultural studies. Whilst these disciplines may differ in terms of the essential knowledge they prioritise, there is a shared assumption of a strong knowledge base to learning about religion and worldviews that is of inherent worth. RE specialists in particular emphasised the intrinsic value of knowledge and understanding about religion and worldviews, of *'the academic study of religion as a phenomenon in the world'* (Teacher).

Here, value is placed on in-depth understanding religion and worldviews: *'I prefer going in the direction of theology and understanding where beliefs and values come from and the nature of God – rather than knowing the 5 k's in Sikhism'* (Teacher). Academic understanding is seen as valuable in itself, an example of Weber's 'value rationality' (Oakes, 2003). Many such

responses were driven by both the importance placed on understanding the concepts related to religion and worldviews and on understanding fellow-humans; *'Educating young people about the concept of there being a higher deity, which affects the way people organise themselves in terms of established religions'* (Teacher).

On the one hand, knowledge about beliefs and practices was commonly referred to as being of importance, reflecting the dominance of a world religions, thematic approach to RE. This might be understood as an *etic* approach in that it focuses on an impartial interpretation of phenomena, best exemplified in the phenomenological approach to RE. Yet, the 'analytical' also incorporates an 'emic' approach - seeking to understand meanings from an insider's perspective. Participants stress the need to understand what religion and belief mean to those who believe: *'We need to look at religions and their core beliefs and practices, but then examine its role in believers' lives'* (Teacher). Thus the 'analytical' encompasses rationales for RE that combine the *etic* and the *emic*.

Critical

Teachers placed significant emphasis on the value of criticality and for this reason the critical has been identified as a value base in itself. Yet the 'critical' is arguably the category that overlaps most obviously with and permeates other value-bases – certainly criticality is a necessary component of analysis. Where value was placed on knowledge and understanding of religion and worldviews as phenomena, there was an accompanying concern that understanding should reflect their true nature, in terms of their impact in contemporary society and their controversial or contestable aspects. This focus on controversy was mostly expressed

in relation to current affairs and geo-political debates; *'Although it won't come up in their GCSEs, it's (Charlie Hebdo attack) really relevant. That will have far more impact on their lives than what Christians think of divorce'* (Teacher). Teachers saw this as particularly important in terms of overcoming stereotypical representations of religion in the media; *'The whole Islamophobia issue needs to be explored in the sense that people grow up to have certain opinions and views from what they've learnt on the news'* (Teacher).

This reflects wider pedagogical concerns around the kind of 'religion' that often gets presented in classrooms – that which is compatible with liberal values, resulting in the representation of religion as liberal and benign (Chater and Erricker, 2014). Such a representation can be seen as the result of placing the instrumental value of learning (for tolerance) above the academic (for knowledge and understanding). Emphasising the common ground between religious faiths and suggesting that all religions are equally worthy of respect and tolerance risks avoiding the controversial aspects of religion and religions that many teachers feel are crucial to understanding.

Teachers' focus on controversy illustrates the value placed on a thorough, critical understanding of religion, 'warts and all'. In terms of rationale however, there also remains the notion that such an understanding is instrumentally valuable in that it helps overcome stereotypes and thus lead to better community relations or avoid conflict: *'Just because something's uncomfortable doesn't mean you shouldn't teach it... Because they're most likely to be inflammatory areas, they're the most important to cover'* (Teacher).

Overlap with the 'instrumental' category is also evident in that exploring the controversy within and around religion can help avoid an essentialising representation and thus contribute to

overcoming stereotypes. The cross over between the critical and the formational is also apparent in hermeneutical approaches in which students explore their own assumptions and pre-judgments in relation to beliefs.

Another area of criticality raised by teachers relates to the analytical understanding of religion as a category. A key theme in participants' responses was around the representation of religion and worldviews in and outside curricula, which was often seen as essentialised and reductionist (see Shaw, 2018). There is broad consensus that pupils should learn about a broader range of religious and non-religious worldviews, with an appetite for exploring the informal as well as formal traditions. This raises questions around what counts as 'religion' and how RE might reflect the wider, changing religion and worldview landscape. Here the 'critical' is valued in terms of an analytical understanding of religion and worldview as categories, demonstrative of the value perceived in a sociological turn in RE (Shaw, 2018)

The importance of the critical was also emphasised by teachers in relation to beliefs and truth claims. Teachers underlined the importance of RE as a site of philosophical, critical enquiry: *'It should be able to question the beliefs of major religions and to place them in an historical context'* (Teacher).

'The way they've been interpreted over time, how they were interpreted when they were written, truth claims about those. So year 7s have already looked at 'what would a literalist Christian say about genesis and how would that be opposed by somebody who had a figurative or metaphorical approach?' (Teacher)

The critical then incorporates the analysis of competing truth claims, as found within a critical realist approach. The crossover with the formational is found here in the rationale that pupils engage in critical enquiry in the pursuit of truth as part of their own quest for meaning.

Overlapping values bases

There are several accepted goals or rationales for the practice of teaching and learning about religion and worldviews, operating in different hierarchies. These examples of overlapping values suggest that rather than seeing these influences as each being aligned to conflicting value spheres as in a Weberian understanding (Oakes, 2003), the values underpinning practice are drawn from and shaped by a complex, fluid nexus of political, economic, social, legislative and theoretical concerns.

The value-bases proposed here are then neither all inclusive, nor mutually exclusive and often overlap in practice, with variety of emphasis in different ‘teleological hierarchies’ (Schatzki, 2012). For example the purpose of a learning activity such as exploring the concept of sin within Christianity may be viewed in a number of ways; for pupils to understand a key aspect of a majority religion, to understand the wider notion of good versus evil, to reflect on their own life, or to pass an exam, all of which may be accepted goals for the practice of RE. These ‘general understandings’ are the ‘senses of the worth, value, nature, or place of things, which infuse and are expressed in people’s doings and sayings’ (Schatzki, 2012, 16). Whilst one teacher may prioritise the end goal of passing an exam or being able to get on well with someone from a different belief background, another may feel it is more important to understand the chain of memory within which our society operates and thus value learning

about the key tenets of Christianity. Indeed any one teacher may attribute value to each of these rationales. Equally, any one goal, for example, understanding how a particular religion is lived, may be attributed value as part of academic enquiry and also as the basis for positive engagement with religious diversity.

The divergence of rationales for RE is often blamed for its insecure status and a shared vision seen as central to RE claiming a meaningful and valued role in all schools. It does not follow however, that for the subject to have a clear rationale it need be underpinned by complete value consensus. As the data presented here suggests, such a consensus may be an impossibility. Given the diversity of approaches and the shifting playing field of the schools system and the wider religion and worldview landscape, this is perhaps neither attainable nor desirable. As Iversen suggests in relation to divergent views in the RE classroom, the wider discussion around RE might see this diversity of values underpinning practice as contributing to a constructive “community of disagreement” (Iversen, 2018) from which innovative practice is born. It is hoped that framing the values underpinning teaching and learning about religion and worldviews will contribute to a process of critical praxis (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) and as such help to provide the clarity of purpose essential to discussions over the future of practice and policy in RE.

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Appendix C: Article 3.

Article

New Representations of Religion and Belief in Schools

Martha Shaw

Education Division, School of Law & Social Sciences, London South Bank University, 103 Borough Road, London SE1 0AA, UK;
shawm7@lsbu.ac.uk

Abstract: Discussions around the future of Religious Education (RE) in England have focused on the need to address the diversity of religion and belief in contemporary society. Issues of the representation of religion and belief in Religious Education are central to the future of the subject. This article draws on research into key stakeholders' views and aspirations for RE to map an alternative representation of religion and belief to that found in existing approaches that universalise, sanitise and privatise religion. The data reveal a thirst for the study of a broader range and a more nuanced understanding of religion and belief. This incorporates a focus on religion and belief as identity as well as tradition, the study of the role of religion in global affairs as well as the controversies and challenges it can pose for individuals and the exploration of religion and belief as fluid and contested categories. What may be described as a contemporaneous and sociological turn, moves beyond the existing binaries of religious/secular, public/private, good/bad, fluid/static that shape much existing representation, towards a representation of the 'real religion and belief landscape' in all its complexity.

Keywords: Religious Education (RE), representation; misrepresentation; sociological turn; categories

1. Introduction

Changes in the religion and belief landscape of the UK over recent decades have been significant and are well documented in contemporary sociological research (see for example, Catto and Woodhead 2012a, 2012b; Davie 2015). Yet, as Dinham and Francis observe, there is a growing gap between this real religious landscape and that imagined by the majority (Dinham and Francis 2016). This gap is related to the diversity of beliefs, diversity within traditions and the nature of 'being religious'. The complexity of this landscape and its implications for society and its individuals is not easily grasped and poses a challenge to educators seeking to promote an understanding that prepares young people for engagement with religion and belief diversity in their everyday encounters, in communities and work places.

Religious Education (RE) in England has been widely criticised for failing to get to grips with the diversity and complexity of religion and belief (see for example, Jackson 1997; Barnes 2012; Ofsted 2013; REC 2013). Much critique has focused on the issue of representing the diversity of and within traditions and the 'nature' of religion (see Jackson 1997, 2004a, 2004b; Wright 1993, 2008; Barnes 2014). Attention has been focused on the shortcomings of various pedagogical approaches, in particular the phenomenological approach, that universalises, sanitises and privatizes religion within a secular liberal mould. This is mirrored in policy too, where a narrow, static representation is apparent (Revell 2012; Jackson et al. 2010). These debates raise key questions about how we frame religion and belief in policy and practice.

This article draws on findings about the views of key stakeholders in learning about religion and belief in the *RE for REal* study (Dinham and Shaw 2015). Participants' views on the content of school RE are analysed in relation to existing debates around the representation of religion and belief to ask what kind of representation meets the aspirations of key stakeholders.

These findings reveal an appetite for a much broader and nuanced understanding of religion and belief. A piecemeal understanding of some aspects of some religions provides only a partial window on the complex

realities. How can education prepare pupils more adequately to engage with this complexity? This article suggests the need for a contemporary and sociological turn in the representation of religion and belief in curricula in order for pupils to gain a more nuanced understanding of their complex role and nature in society and in the lives of its members. The importance of representation lies therefore in both the intrinsic value of such understanding and its instrumental purpose of preparing young people for engagement in the global society of which they are part.

2. Methodology

The initial research that underpins this paper is a national project, *RE for REal*, undertaken in England between July 2014 and November 2015. This was a qualitative study seeking key stakeholders' views on learning about religion and belief in schools. This research comprised semi-structured interviews with teachers (97), parents (34) and focus groups (9 with 10 pupils each) with Year 10 pupils (aged 14–15) across 19 secondary schools. The schools were chosen to represent a geographical spread and a mixture of urban and rural settings. Five are community schools²² and fourteen academies²³. Of these, six are Church of England academies, seven have 'no religious character' and one is ecumenical. Voluntary aided and free schools with a religious character were not included. Due to the complexity and specificity of their context within the English schools system, they are more likely to teach RE in accordance with a faith tradition. It was therefore decided that they would best be handled via a separate study. The sample of 97 teachers was made up of 29 RE specialists, 49 non-specialists in RE and 19 members of senior leadership teams. This sample sought to reflect the situation across most secondary schools, in which more than 50% of RE teachers have no qualification in the subject (APPG 2014). It also sought to explore views from across the humanities and related subject areas such as Citizenship.

Ten employers were also interviewed. These were self-selecting from a purposive sample drawn to represent a mixture of organisations within the public and private sectors. In each organization, the participant held a position at Chief Executive/Director level, or had responsibility for employing staff. Participants' identities have been entirely anonymised, including in reference to their school location or workplace.

Interviews were transcribed and coded using NVIVO. Thematic analysis (see Boyatzis 1998) was undertaken in relation to three areas listed below. A full discussion of the methodology and findings of the project are reported in Dinham and Shaw (2015, 2017).

The research centered on three questions:

How do stakeholders understand the purpose of RE?²⁴

What are stakeholders' aspirations regarding the content of RE?

What do stakeholders think the teaching and learning about religion and belief should look like, both inside RE and outside, in the wider school environment?

The results presented in this article relate to the second theme: aspirations regarding content and as such, are part of a much larger data set, which looks at learning about religion and belief inside and outside the classroom in other spaces such as the act of collective worship and school ethos. Issues of representation have implications in these spaces too and connections between these and the RE space are discussed elsewhere (Dinham and Shaw 2015, 2017). The focus of this article is on issues of representation within the RE classroom. This article asks what kind of representation of religion and belief meets the aspirations of key stakeholders for the content of RE? Participants' views on content are analysed in relation to debates on the representation of religion and belief in curricula to suggest a new set of representations that better prepare pupils to engage with the real religion and belief landscape.

²² State schools controlled by the local council.

²³ Academies are publicly funded, independent schools, run by Academy Trusts. They receive their funding directly from the government, rather than the local council and do not have to follow the National Curriculum.

²⁴ The RE for REal research asked participants about "learning about religion and belief" rather than specifically about Religious Education (RE). However, due to the structure of the English curriculum in which RE is a discrete subject area, responses (unless otherwise specified) are taken as relating to RE.

3. Aspirations on Content

3.1. More Breadth

Since the late 1970s, a ‘world religions’ approach has dominated RE in England. The 1988 Education Reform Act, reflecting the multiculturalist policy of the time, requires RE in England to reflect the “fact that the religious traditions are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain” (UK Parliament 1988, Sct. 8.3). Despite the ‘other principle religions’ not being specified, this has led to syllabi focused on the ‘big six’—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism, with other religions generally omitted. This lack of breadth is further consolidated at GCSE²⁵, where pupils studied one and more recently two major traditions. Despite the increased religion and belief pluralism in the UK, much RE and many RE text books still refer to the ‘big six’, an idea that is largely unquestioned (Revell 2012). That RE needs to get to grips with the diversity of religion and belief has been a longstanding criticism of the UK’s Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted 2010, 2013) and one recognised by many in the RE community (see REC 2013; Barnes 2012; Jackson 2004b; Revell 2012; Thobani 2017).

The RE for REal research found that whilst the ‘big six’ mantra remains evident, particularly amongst some teachers and parents, many others, particularly pupils, wanted to learn about a broader range of beliefs. An overarching theme in participants’ views on the content of RE was that it should better reflect the religion and belief diversity that exists in British society today. Many in this sample felt that an understanding of diversity must go beyond a superficial knowledge of the major faiths, either those represented in Britain or the ‘world religions’ and must include non-religious worldviews. Amongst all participants, this was most often expressed in terms of pupils being prepared for the diversity they will encounter:

“We live in a country with loads of different religions and I think we should learn about each different one, so if you do come across them, you know what they’re on about, and you know who they are.” (Pupil)

“They don’t learn about minority religions and I think they should.” (Teacher)

This appetite for breadth was voiced most strongly by pupils. Although it was an aspiration for teachers too, who held an ideal of “breadth meeting depth”:

“I think in order to get enough depth in the subject you need to study a few main ones...then bringing in some non-popular denominations, not just Christian ones...for example the Amish people... or Branch Davidians.” (Teacher)

Many however, felt that such an ideal was compromised by structural pressures:

“I’d say as wide a range as possible within the constraints of the curriculum.” (Teacher)

This reflects the lack of curriculum time allocated to RE²⁶ and, particularly the constraints of the GCSE specifications.

3.2. Including the Informal

The focus on world religions is underpinned by the phenomenological approach to RE developed by Ninian Smart in the 1960s. This approach has been widely criticised for its reductionist and universalist portrayal of religions. For Wright (1993), it makes all religions culturally relative traditions embracing a universal theology and common universal religious experience. Wright argues that the liberal/phenomenological approach to RE perpetuates a myth that the variety of world faiths have a common nature and structure that can be studied in a thematic way,

²⁵ The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is an academic qualification, taken in various subjects at age 14–16 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

²⁶ The 2013 NATRE survey reports reduced curriculum time devoted to RE since the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc)—the performance measure for schools through which Government determines the subjects most important to study as GCSE, from which RE was excluded (NATRE 2013).

which does not do justice to the complexity and true nature of the faiths concerned (Wright 1993). The idea that all belief systems are characterised by a set of shared dimensions has resulted in the development of schemes of work shaped by themes such as ‘founding fathers’ and ‘holy books’. The effect is that religions and belief systems that do not fit neatly into such a framework are side-lined. This perpetuates the myth that other traditions (Confucianism, animism, shamanism etc.) are not ‘real religions’ because they do not fit the paradigm (Revell 2012): “When asked to explain why a practice like animism, which is found in every continent, is never normally covered in RE lessons, students often explain that its lack of structure or core rituals, the absence of sacred texts, priesthood or places of worship mean that it is too amorphous to be included in a curriculum and too disparate a practice to be considered a discrete body of knowledge” (Revell 2012, p. 7).

This leaves little room for exploring more informal, non-institutionalised beliefs and practices which, as documented in contemporary research, are a growing part of the religion and belief landscape in the UK. A wealth of sociological research points to the demise of ‘old style’ religion characterised by national, hierarchical structures, passive membership and formal practices and the increasing dominance of ‘new style’ religion, with less structured forms of practice, participation and authority (Woodhead 2012a). Many participants in the RE for REal sample expressed an interest in the informal:

“Obviously you can’t look at them all, but I think it’s important to look at how people have beliefs but they may not be within a formal religion.” (Parent)

“It’s like a mind map of religion because within that you’ve got religions that aren’t necessarily religious but are spiritual.” (Teacher)

These responses suggest the need to challenge the orthodoxies apparent in much existing representation of religion and belief in curricula. They suggest the need for the consideration within RE of the rise of spirituality (see Woodhead 2012a, 2012b, 2014) and sociological concepts such as Davie’s *believing without belonging* that capture the complexity of personal faith and the relationship between the formal and the informal (Davie 1994).

3.3. Non-Religious Worldviews

The phenomenological approach emerged from a context of ‘secular education’ (Thobani 2017) within which the secular was considered the neutral, logical position from which religions could most effectively be studied. In a rejection of the confessional approach that had dominated RE up until the 1960s, the world religions approach encouraged an impartial, secular, objective study of religions. Although, as noted by Thobani (2017), Smart’s later work does suggest the study of secular alternatives such as Humanism, Marxism and Maoism, the application of the phenomenological approach in schools, in line with the existing legislation, often ignores non-religious worldviews. Thus, secularity, set in opposition to religion, has been the lens, not the object of study. Yet, as might be expected in a context in which over half the British public do not identify with a religion²⁷, this sample indicates overwhelming support for the inclusion of non-religious worldviews:

“I think they (non-religious worldviews) are just as important to learn as like Christianity because it’s still a form of belief.” (Pupil)

“They need to know about all the major ones plus Humanist, secular religions, ones that don’t actually believe that there is a god but still want to have an ethical base.” (Parent)

“That’s (non-religious worldviews) important too, because not everyone you meet is religious.” (Pupil)

The near universal consensus amongst this sample that pupils should learn about non-religious worldviews suggests that the representation of religion and belief in curricula should better reflect the society in which it operates and the diversity of encounters that pupils experience.

²⁷ According to the British Social Attitudes Survey, 2017, more than half (53%) of the British public now describe themselves as having “no religion”, up from 48% in 2015. (<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2017/september/british-social-attitudes-record-number-of-brits-with-no-religion/>).

3.4. Exploring Categories—The ‘Religious’ and the ‘Secular’

When non-religious worldviews are included in curricula, these are most often limited to recognised belief systems such as Humanism or Atheism, which fit more easily into a systematic, dimensional, phenomenological approach (Thobani 2017). These are often presented as in opposition to the religious. This is apparent in the responses from parents who tended to be supportive of the inclusion of non-religious worldviews in curricula to “balance” the religious:

“Yes definitely [include non-religious worldviews]. That’s the flipside.” (Parent)

As recognised by Barnes “the concept of religious diversity, if it is to be both meaningful as a descriptive term and relevant to curriculum planning and pedagogy, needs to include some reference to the different varieties and degrees of religious skepticism that exists within the United Kingdom” (Barnes 2012, p. 68). Rather than presenting beliefs or worldviews as either religious or secular, the reality is often less clearly defined. Some teachers’ responses questioned an uncritical employment of the categories ‘religious’, ‘secular’, ‘spiritual’ etc.:

“I’d want them [pupils] to think more broadly about what we class as religion too. There are people that dance round Stonehenge naked because the sun’s up. Does that fall under the remit? Definitely it does of spirituality.” (Teacher)

There is recognition here of the nuanced intersection between religious and non-religious beliefs, that the reality is more complex than often assumed. Understanding the nuances of non-belief is an area gaining increasing importance in the sociology of religion and non-religion. Whilst there is an increase in those who claim no religion, this does not indicate a simple rise in atheism. For example, amongst the ‘fuzzy nones’ identified in Woodhead’s research, 43% are atheist, 40% are agnostic, and 16% believe in God (Woodhead 2014). Research into the growth and experiences of Britain’s ‘nones’ (see for example Lee 2015) presents alternative ways of understanding the secular—looking at different aspects of so-called secularity as ‘insubstantial’—involving merely the absence of religion—and ‘substantial’—involving beliefs, ritual practice, and identities that are alternative to religious ones. This includes the growth of the more prominent movements like New Atheism and Sunday Assembly as well as more individualised ways of being secular. This body of research suggests that making sense of secularity, irreligion, and the relationship between them is crucial to our understanding of contemporary society. A critical engagement with the categories ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ would both present pupils with more breadth in terms of representing the religion and belief landscape and more depth in terms of understanding how religion and belief operate and are experienced.

3.5. Lived Religion

The dominance of a world religions approach encouraged the systematic study of the major traditions through their ‘shared characteristics’ and as discrete belief systems in which, in line with the ideals of multiculturalism, each religion is given equal treatment (aside from the dominance of Christianity) and studied in the same, objectified way. This approach was bolstered by the creation of Standing Advisory Councils for RE (SACREs) through which representatives of the major faiths sought to ensure that their tradition was given equal footing and valid representation. A result of the systematic, abstracted and objective study of religions within this framework is that religion (and non-religious worldviews where included) are represented as static blocks of belief and practice. This approach is reinforced by an ‘accountability agenda’ in English schools in which high stakes testing is used to hold schools publicly accountable for pupil achievement. Fancourt (2015) argues that the separation in policy of Grimmitt’s widely adopted, interdependent aims for RE—‘learning about religion’ and ‘learning from religion’ (Grimmitt 2000)—and their framing as ‘attainment targets’ within a neo-liberal culture of scrutiny and accountability leads to narrow and competing conceptions of religion in RE as either blocks of belief and practice that can be objectively studied or as sources of pupils’ personal development. Fancourt outlines how RE’s omission from the national curriculum and consequent accidental marginalisation led to the development of new non-statutory syllabuses (SCAA 1994a, 1994b), which, in seeking to align RE with national curriculum subjects, adopted knowledge and skills-based, measurable, assessment-linked learning objectives (Fancourt 2015). Within this

system, knowledge of beliefs and practices as isolated, monolithic, 'objective facts' becomes the measure of pupils' learning—a process that obscures the complexity of the subject under study.

Whilst the study of beliefs and practices was seen as important by pupils in this sample, they are more interested in how individuals and communities make sense of and experience religion in their daily lives;

"You're not going to meet a Christian and start talking about how Jesus was born, or Adam and Eve, which is something we cover a lot in RE... you should learn more about what people do in everyday lives." (Pupil)

"I think that while we should be taught about ceremonies and things like that in religion, I don't think it should be the main topic because I find I know more about ceremonies than I do about everyday life. I'd rather know how they lead [their life] rather than just what happens once a year...because that's not everything about the religion. What they do in their day to day lives, that's the religion." (Pupil)

This sample recognises that experience of being religious is complex. Rather than the study of belief and practices as monolithic blocks, participants are interested in 'lived religion'; how religion and belief is experienced by individuals and communities. The responses present a challenge to the homogenisation of religious traditions, demonstrating an awareness of the importance of internal diversity. Pupils particularly challenged the way in which religions are presented and stressed the significance of individual interpretation resulting in a diversity of rule following:

"It's such a broad thing, so to say, like, Christians believe that like, having women Bishops is wrong... is a really difficult thing to say...there could be some people who are Christian who completely don't think that". (Pupil)

"They should teach you different points of view within a religion". (Pupil)

"It's not something you can just learn as a block. It's individual what you believe." (Pupil)

Many such comments were made in relation to Islam, revealing a particular, recognised tendency in curricula to overlook diversity among Muslims (Thobani 2017; Revell 2012):

"You need to cover the fact that not everyone that comes from that religion actually acts and thinks in that (extremist) way You need to know how different people interpret their religion." (Pupil)

As well as individual interpretation of traditions, responses indicate an interest in the nature of religious adherence. There is recognition within this sample that 'being religious' can mean different things for different people:

"It's important for pupils to know that there are lots of people that would tick a religious box but not practise it, and that that doesn't make their religion any less valid than those following it more closely... There are spectrums everywhere." (Teacher)

This acknowledges the increase in 'nominal religion', a growing trend, particularly within Christianity for people to self-categorise as religious, without strict, or indeed any adherence to ritual or practice (see Day 2011). Participants are wary of putting people in boxes, recognising too that religious adherence can change throughout the life cycle, rather than presenting it in terms of set, static categories:

"You have people who convert because it's fluid. There are people who stick, people who quit and people who wander in between..." (Teacher)

Participants' focus on 'lived religion' suggests the need, as recognised by Barnes, for curricula to embrace all forms of diversity, from "highly eclectic versions of spirituality, to personal appropriations of particular religions and to traditional forms of the different religions." (Barnes 2014, p. 239).

3.6. Change and Fluidity

This tendency in curricula to focus on religions and non-religious traditions as discrete belief systems, suggests that they are static, unchanging entities that can be objectively observed from the outside. Such a focus denies the

dynamic and fluid nature of traditions and the consequent changes to the religion and belief landscape, both in relation to demographics and the evolution of traditions through encounter. As identified by Jackson, the view of cultures taken in the 2004 non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education, in “using the language of separate bounded cultures and downplaying the contested and challenging cultural forms and syntheses that are the reality across the generations” (Jackson 2004b, p. 220) provides pupils with a narrowed understanding of the complex landscape.

Participants in the RE for REal study thought that curricula should better reflect this dynamism:

“Religion has adapted...with (the) times...when Sunday trading laws came in half my grandma’s family were outraged because they’d rather have a cup of tea without milk than go to the shop and get it. Times have changed, Things have changed. People believe in Karma nowadays.” (Teacher)

“I think it lives and breathes. It’s the same with language, it’s eternally changing. We should teach it as that.” (Teacher)

This suggests the need for a more dynamic understanding of culture and of religion such as that embraced in Jackson’s Interpretive approach to RE (Jackson 1997) and models of intercultural education (Council of Europe 2008; UNESCO 2006; Jackson 2016). The above models are influenced by an understanding of culture as ‘demotic discourse’ (Bauman 1999), recognising internal diversity, inter-generational difference and fusion and bringing representation closer to the empirical data and to the experience of learners (Jackson 2004b, 2016). This does not imply ruling out the study of ‘prototypical properties’ of religious or non-religious traditions (Wright 2008) but does question the relevance of a focus on religions as discrete belief systems and the presentation of beliefs and practices as static.

Analyses of transnational religion present illuminating examples of everyday, lived, blended religion (see Levitt 2006), characterised by hybridity and fluidity as individuals improvise new religious blends from cultural materials available to them (McCloud 2017, p. 17). Likewise, Pasura and Erdal (2016) provide examples within the Catholic faith of the creation of hybrid religiosity intersecting with a variety of identities and understandings of nationhood. Such examples highlight the importance of paying attention to everyday lived religious experience and the complexity of religion as identity, of the relationship between religious and national identity and importantly, demonstrate the two-way process of change—that “practices are being transformed in both sending and receiving contexts” (Pasura and Erdal 2016, p. 7). In our globalised classrooms, this sends an important message too about integration—that it is a two-way process; “The circulation of religious practices and beliefs across borders, as migrants travel back and forth from their adopted country and homeland, shape the transnational religious field in both sending and receiving countries” (Pasura and Erdal 2016, p. 6).

These examples of bricolage (Hervieu-Léger 2000) reflect both the changing nature of religious belief and practice, and highlight the need to move beyond a bounded representation of traditions:

“Beliefs and practices are important, but it needs to be coupled with the sociological; the changing nature of religion. Religion is clearly changing very rapidly. From a sociological point of view, is there even such a thing as Christianity anymore?” (Teacher)

3.7. Tradition Versus Identity

The focus on fluidity enjoins a shift in understanding religion and belief as primarily tradition to understanding them as identity. Hybridity and ‘religious bricolage’ (Hervieu-Léger 2000) play out at the level of individual identity too. As Jackson notes: “Personal world views might mirror particular religions or secular humanism, but are often more eclectic, for example, combining elements of more than one religion (e.g., Buddhism and Judaism), or features of one or more religions and Humanism (e.g. bringing together an atheistic stance with elements of Christian ethics and spirituality)” (Jackson 2014, pp. 67–75).

Young people, particularly immigrants, are increasingly defining their identity in terms of their faith. The 2001 disturbances in the Northern English towns were perhaps a marker in the discourse around identity from one based on ethnic to religious grounds as, after 9/11 ‘race riots’ became redefined as ‘faith riots’. Indeed, peoples’

experience of 'faithism' matches and compounds racism. Yet the intersection between religion or belief, ethnicity, nationality and other identity markers is complex—"religious identities are never only 'religious'" (Sheedy 2017, p. 39) and they are fluid. As Moulin and Schirr demonstrate in their study of young Muslims in London, self-identification is a complex nexus of multiple, shifting markers, demonstrating the "complexity of Muslimness as a contested and minoritised category with ethnic, racial, national, and political features, as well as religious ones" (Moulin-Stozek and Schirr 2017, p. 582). Their study illustrates the fluid nature of self-identification, and "disidentification" in relation to essentialised representations of religion (in this case, negative assumptions about Islam), as the authors demonstrate that "no one minority identity, such as 'religious', is solely appropriate to account for the subtle agency of Muslim adolescents' self-understanding and self-representation" (Moulin-Stozek and Schirr 2017, p. 581).

As Revell (2012) has argued, lived religion for many Muslims is a process of marginalisation and hostility and to understand Islam necessitates a critical understanding of the political and policy contexts in which it is perceived and lived. Participants in the RE for REal study are interested in how religious identification is understood and shaped by societal assumptions and prejudices:

"Why is it embarrassing to say you're a Christian, and what does that say in a "Christian country", that it's not embarrassing to say you're a Muslim?" (Teacher)

"The whole Islamophobia thing needs to be explored." (Teacher)

These quotes suggest an appetite for an exploration of identity as 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988), that considers the social context and the power of dominant discourses. Moulin-Stozek and Schirr (2017) employ the concept of 'disidentification' to emphasise this flexibility of self-identification, recognising too that often it is not a question of drawing on one or more distinct identities, be they 'religious' or otherwise. Rather, disidentifications can place actors in-between solid identity poles, in sites of "creative production" (Moulin-Stozek and Schirr 2017, p. 583). An understanding of the fluid and contested nature of identity that is the experience of young people is a huge shift away from the universalizing and simplistic representations often found in materials used to teach about world religions (Jackson et al. 2010). A shift in understanding that incorporates this complexity can help pupils to understand the real nature of religion and belief. Such intercultural models can also support RE to fulfil its much-cited role in helping to overcome stereotypes.

3.8. Engaging with Controversy

RE is often seen as a powerful vehicle for community cohesion, with potential to break down stereotypes and promote mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society (DSCF 2010; REC 2013; Ofsted 2010, 2013; APPG 2014). In suggesting that all religions are equally worthy of respect and tolerance, curricula often emphasize the common ground between religious faiths, drawing out points of similarity, or reducing them to a universalised essence. The effect is to side-step difference and risk avoiding the controversial aspects of religion, paradoxically perpetuating essentialised and stereotypical representations of religion (Moulin 2011; Revell 2012; Thobani 2017). Many are critical of this instrumentalisation of RE as a vehicle for the promotion of Western liberal values (Chater and Erricker 2013; Barnes 2006, 2014; Thompson 2010) resulting in the misrepresentation of religion as liberal and benign, which is "at best partial and at worst misleading" (Chater and Erricker 2013 p. 59). This "safety first" representation obscures the reality of religion in society and denies its controversial nature (Wright 1993, p. 65). In seeking to overcome the stereotype that religions are violent, such representations risk falling into another cliché that claims all religions are inherently good or peaceful (Sheedy 2017).

The focus on commonality is perpetuated by recent policies, such as Prevent and the duty to promote Fundamental British Values through which a security agenda impacts particularly upon representations of Islam. There seems to be a tendency to compensate for negative images perpetuated in the media, and in a desire to breakdown stereotypes, to stress the positive side of Islam, to avoid controversy or anything that could be deemed illiberal. Pupils, however, are aware that this is not the full picture and are keen to study 'real' religion, 'warts and all':

“I don’t think you can just learn the good stuff in RE, you’ve got to look at the downsides, I’ve never learned about that.” (Pupil)

“I think it’s interesting when we look at big disasters and the terrorists.” (Pupil)

“They need to know about Jihadi John and that kind of thing.” (Parent)

A far cry from relativist, phenomenological approaches that decontextualise and sanitise religion, this calls for the study of the role of religion in global affairs as well as the controversies and challenges it can pose for individuals. Participants are interested in ‘religion in society’, ascribing more relevance to the controversial role of religion in current affairs than is given emphasis in current curricula:

“Although it won’t come up in their GCSEs, it’s (Charlie Hebdo attack) really relevant. That will have far more impact on their lives than what Christians think of divorce.” (Teacher)

3.9. ‘Contemporary Religion in Society’

The focus on the positive side of religion relates to the idea of religion as private, an individual concern based on personal beliefs (Sheedy 2017). This misconception is often seen when acts of violence or terrorism are described as having nothing to do with the ‘real’ religion. Walsh contends that the concept of religion as belief is a Western construct (Walsh 2017), with its roots in the ideology of political liberalism in early modern Europe (Stoddard and Martin 2017). The roots of a public/private binary and its entrenchment in representations of religion and belief in RE are summarized by Thobani thus:

“Secularism in post-Enlightenment Europe, as a political doctrine, has entailed the privatisation of religion through its exclusion from the public domain. This socio-historical transformation is foregrounded by the critics of the phenomenology of religion as explaining in part its conception of religion as having more to do with the transcendent, other worldly realm than with the affairs of this world. It has led to the study of religious and secular belief systems in a reified form, detached from their political and social matrix in which there exist intricate webs of connections between orientational beliefs and social institutions” (Thobani 2017, p. 617).

This divorcing of religion from social and political contexts is apparent in public discourse and demonstrated in a recent ComRes survey in which 64% of respondents agreed that “most religious violence is really about things like politics, socio-economic issues, or Western foreign policy.” (ComRes 2018) The representation of religion as private does little to promote understanding of religion, not least in shielding it from “rational scrutiny and criticism” (Barnes 2012, p. 71). Neither does it align with the ‘lived religion’ that interests participants:

“I think it’s important to link religions to what’s actually going on in society.” (Pupil)

“We need to learn about how it [religion] mixes into politics.” (Pupil)

“We need to look at religions and their core beliefs and practices, but then examine believer’s lives, their role in society, and religion’s role in shaping society.” (Teacher)

These responses illustrate an appetite for thinking about religion, not just in terms of belief, but as ‘a collection of ‘variously linked social practices’” (Walsh 2017, p. 81). Participants are interested in the social nature of religion as well as the private/individual negotiation of religious and non-religious identities and how these two intersect.

4. Conclusions

The data presented in this article reveal an appetite for learning about a broader range and a more nuanced understanding of religion and belief. Yet the kind of religion and belief found in much existing curricula in the UK falls short of representing the complex reality with which pupils engage. These data suggest the need for a new set of representations that challenge old orthodoxies. Dominant representations can be seen as rooted in a set of false binaries that restrict understanding: religious/secular, public/private, good/bad and fluid/static. These binaries are

reflected in research on how religion and belief can be re-represented in policy more broadly (Baker et al. 2018) and are particularly pertinent to RE. The challenge apparent at policy level is reflected in practice in the RE space.

A key part of this challenge is a re-examination of the category of religion and its relation to the secular. The universalising, privatising and sanitising of religion in curricula, shaped by pedagogical and policy concerns, is based on a foundational understanding of religion as in opposition to the secular. Yet the relationship between religion and secularity is complex and nuanced. Drawing on the sociology of religion to critically examine the nature of religion in society exposes the need to re-examine these categories, to examine the “manifestations of the secular in a complex of relations with the religious—from the collaborative to the oppositional” (Thobani 2017, p. 616).

This religious/secular divide is fundamental in laying the ground for a series of misconceptions and false binaries that shape the misrepresentation of religion and belief. Consideration of these binaries and the conception of religion of which they form part are key to understanding the ‘real religious landscape’. A *good/bad* binary is expressed in the promotion of tolerance through the representation of all religions as good and peaceful at the core and the bracketing out of controversial aspects as ‘not real religion’. In seeking to highlight shared values or ‘common ground’ between different religions, difference and controversy are side-lined, resulting in a partial understanding and one that is at odds with the experience of pupils.

This is interwoven with a *public/private* binary that sees true religion as being about beliefs, a private affair, free from the messy, secular world of politics. Yet as a glance at any newspaper tells us, religion and politics are intrinsically bound. Likewise, identities, including the religious, are inherently social. A focus on religion as identity invites consideration of the negotiation between the public and the private that is part of ‘lived religion’.

Another misconception lies in a *solid/fluid* binary. Religions and non-religious worldviews are often presented as static blocks of belief and practice that can be objectively studied. Yet, as examples of identity politics and transnational religion demonstrate, encounter in our globalised world generates a fusion of experiences that change the nature of self-identification, belief and practice, emphasising the fluidity of religion and non-religion. There are indeed doctrines that can be labelled ‘typical’ of traditions, just as there are practices that are traditional within certain communities, yet these are constantly negotiated and new constructions of belief, practice and identification developed.

Challenging these binaries broadens the remit of what is classed as ‘religious’ or ‘secular’, opening the space for a representation of religion and belief that is reflective of the real landscape and the lived reality. This includes the consideration of the changing nature of religion and belief, a focus on religion as negotiated identity as well as tradition and the role of religion and belief in current affairs and controversies.

The need for a more nuanced understanding of ‘religion’ and ‘non-religion’ has gained recognition in the Commission on Religious Education’s national plan for RE (CoRE 2018). Here, specific focus is awarded to the category ‘religion’ as a crucial object of study, and an acknowledgement that “the distinction between religious and non-religious worldviews is not as clear-cut as we might have thought” (CoRE 2018, p. 32). The report heralds the emerging shift away from essentialised understanding of the six ‘major world faiths’ and promotes emphases underpinning the sociological study of religion; the varied and fluid nature of worldviews, the diversity in modes of practice and the importance of interactions within social, political and cultural contexts (CoRE 2018, pp. 36–37).

The findings presented here suggest that a turn towards the contemporary and the sociological is essential to the kind of knowledge and understanding that RE seeks to promote—whether viewed as preparing pupils as rational, autonomous subjects to make informed choices with regard to their own worldview, or as preparing pupils for interaction with diversity in society. Too reductionist an approach does pupils a disservice in either regard. The role and nature of religion and belief in society is complex and fluid—this article argues for a contemporaneous and sociological turn that helps pupils get to grips with that complexity. Such a turn is necessary in terms of the intrinsic value of understanding the world in which they live and in preparing young people for encounters with the religion and belief diversity of which they are part. This has begun to be recognised in emerging literature, for example on religious literacy of pupils (see Dinham and Shaw 2017) and in the proposed national plan for RE in England (CoRE), but has yet to be realised. This presents us with a pressing agenda for ongoing research and practice.

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Appendix D: Interview Schedules

Parents & Teachers

Before we begin, all responses will be anonymous and confidential.

Are you ok with this being recorded?

The interview will take no more than 30 minutes.

Age:

Gender:

The first few questions are about you and your religion or belief:

What 3 words first come into your head when you think about religion?

Would you describe yourself as any of the following:

Religious/Not religious but spiritual/Not religious or spiritual/ other/ not sure²⁸

Do you identify with a particular religion or worldview? If so which?

Would you say that you practise your religion?

If yes, do you practise in any of the following ways?

a) Worship

b) Volunteering

c) Prayer (private)

d) Prayer (communal)

e) Other?

How important is your religion or belief to you?

(1 = not at all, 2= not very, 3= slightly, 4=quite important and 5=very important)

Can you say in a sentence what do you think RE should be for?

Prompts:

To bring up children in Christian/religious values

To develop moral values

To provide students with knowledge about world religions

To help develop students' own spirituality

To help students explore their own identity

²⁸ Typology taken from Guest.M, Aune.K, Sharma.S, Waner.R eds (2013)

To help students explore each other's identities
To help foster cohesion
To prepare students to engage with religious diversity
Anything else?

What do you think is the purpose of current RE?

8. In terms of content, what do you think students should learn about religion and belief?

Prompts:

Beliefs
Practices
How religion is lived by individuals
History
Controversies – the places where religion bites in the contemporary world e.g. Terrorism/Arab Spring/Extremism
Sociological context – how religion operates in society –
Contemporary religious landscape
Engaging with ultimate questions and truth claims
Anything else?

9. What range of religions and/or beliefs do you think students should learn about in schools?

Non-religion?

Prompts:

The 6/9 major world religions
Contemporary informal religion, e.g. spiritualism
Non-religion, e.g. humanism, atheism
Secularism,
Legally defined beliefs, e.g. veganism, environmentalism
Anything else?

10. Do you think learning about religion and belief can foster specific skills which other learning does not?

11. What sorts of knowledge about religion and belief do you think school leavers should take with them into their workplaces?

12. Do you think RE should be compulsory for all students? To what age? Why?

13. Did you know it's not part of the NC? (NOT TO TEACHERS)

14. Do you think RE should be part of the national curriculum?

13. Is RE the best or only place to learn about religion in schools?

Focus group questions

Before we begin, all responses will be anonymous and confidential.

Are you ok with this being recorded?

1. The following are some categories that might fit your position in relation to religion and belief. Please raise your hand to say which of the following you identify with;

Religious/Not religious but spiritual/Not religious or spiritual/ other/ not sure²⁹

2. Raise your hand if you identify with a particular religion/worldview

Can you say which. (Note faith/worldview and numbers)

3. On a scale of 1-5, one being not very and 5 being extremely, how important would you say your religion/worldview is to you?

1	2	3	4	5

4. What 3 words first come into your head when you think about religion?

5. What do you think RE should be for?

Prompts:

To bring up children in Christian/religious values

To develop moral values

To provide students with knowledge about world religions

To help develop students' own spirituality

To help students explore their own identity

To help students explore each other's identities

To help foster cohesion

Anything else?

6. What do you think is the purpose of current RE? Does it match with your views on its purpose?

7. In terms of content, what do you think you should learn about religion and belief?

Prompts:

Beliefs

Practices

How religion is lived by individuals

History

Controversies – the places where religion bites in the contemporary world e.g. Terrorism/Arab Spring/Extremism

Sociological context – how religion operates in society –

²⁹ Typology taken from Guest.M, Aune.K, Sharma.S, Waner.R eds (2013)

Contemporary religious landscape

Engaging with ultimate questions and truth claims
Anything else?

8. Which religions or belief systems do you think you should learn about in schools?

Prompts:

The 6/9 major world religions

Contemporary informal religion, e.g. spiritualism

Non-religion, e.g. humanism, atheism Secularism,

Legally defined beliefs, e.g. veganism, environmentalism

Anything else?

9. Do you think learning about religion and belief gives you specific skills which other learning does not?

10. What sorts of knowledge about religion and belief do you think you'll need when you leave school and enter a job?

11. Do you think RE should be compulsory for all students? To what age? Why?

12. Is RE the best or only place to learn about religion in schools?

Appendix E: High Frequency Code Analysis

HIGH FREQUENCY CODES

	CODE	VALUE	Teachers	Employers	Students	Parents
	AIMS AND PURPOSES					
	RE should be for:					
001	Religions as useful for understanding values but not confessional	19	17 Whilst confessionalism is far from most teacher's views on what the aims of RE should be, it should be aiming to teach the core moral values (e.g. tolerance, kindness). Some emphasis on the distinction between understanding values and inculcating them		2 Students shared some teachers' feeling that key values should be understood, not 'learned' (Q)	A sense that all religions have good values that are beneficial to a child's personal growth.
002	Cohesion	89 – but not sole responsibility of RE = 26	52/21 'I don't think it has a privileged position in that regard but I think it has a role to play'.(SCH4S2) Also seen as part of PSHE & Citizenship but RE a good space - increased understanding of different faiths can facilitate cohesion – helps overcome stereotypes, break down fear and mistrust (esp in less diverse areas) and leads to tolerance: With understanding you don't get agreement but acceptance. So as a result of studying RE you're more likely to have cohesive people (SCH17S1) Cohesion seen by many as natural by-product of increased understanding (partic by specialists): "If you develop religious literacy, in a way you are developing cohesion because people have the right understanding. It's far more important going to a lesson with a purpose that they have the correct information than that they're going to be cohesive. But certainly it is something I am aiming for'	6. See RE as being well placed to facilitate understanding and respect between cultures and therefore better community relations; "Part of RE should facilitate understanding, harmonious living, and respect for different religions to your own" Yet – not just RE: These things don't sit solely in RE. RE is an explicit space, but the whole notion of spirituality and how one leads and good life and how one is a good citizen should be generated and fostered across the whole school ethos	7/3 About understanding and respecting difference within diversity –Cohesion not so much aim as by-product 'When you're young, if you're taught to respect each other, and taught about Muslims and things like that, if you're taught to work together, when you're older, that generation will work better together than, say, our generation now, because we haven't been taught it straight away. But now we're being taught it, we're all sort of learning how to respect each other'.(SCH11FG)	Don't really see the connection

			(SCH153) See SCH14S4 Breakdown by Re Specialist/non			
003	Develop moral values	97 but not sole responsibility of RE 36	33/31 – Amongst RE specialists there is both acknowledgement of the special contribution RE makes and is called upon to make to SMSC and focus on challenging students to explore and reflect on own morality, for which the RE space is seen as unique. Also focus on understanding morality and its relationship to religion (SCH4S5, SCH4S2) Other teachers focus more on borrowing values from religion to help teach students right & wrong – equipping them to make good moral choices (SCH5S3, SCH2S1, SCH19S3) Many underlined whole school resp – not just RE (SCH14S3, SCH5S5)	5/3 – Mixed - when prompted, may be a part but mainly seen as not central to RE, more an overall school responsibility	6/1 – When prompted most agree but emphasis on idea of exploring own moral compass through exploring religion & oral issues, rather than being taught right & wrong (SCH8FG, SCH7FG, SCH1FG)	20/1 – Very mixed between those who see learning about religions as providing moral framework (SCH1P1) and those who see importance in exploring moral and ethical issues, with learning about religion being key (SCH5P4)
004	Develop spirituality as OFSTED defines it	102 + but not solely RE 20 - have to capture how people are using it, given that it is a vague proxy in most people's hands, eg SCH16S1	66/18 – About self-exploration, personal development but in rel to place in the world and deep responses to it (SCH7S1, SCH9S4). About widening perspectives and making choices but not indoctrination and not into one or any religion . Providing space for personal reflection added value of RE.(SCH6S4, SCH17S1, SCH15S1, SCH6S1). Less resistance to this than dev of moral values, as long as not indoctrination. Some see as by-product rather than aim.	1 – Not a priority for employers. Only one and that in sense of exploring place in world and contrib to largely secular society (EMP8)	15 – very much focus on dev of own opinions, justifying and expressing them and exploring possible pathways and decision making processes (SCH8FG) Linked to PSHE and RE seen as better place for this	20/2 - Similar to students, exploring pathways, opinions but ore focus on idea of RE providing range of options. Also RE seen as only space in curric to do this. But some feeling that job of whole school or home rather than RE (2)
005	Explore own identity	72	52 – Important part of RE and not happening elsewhere. There is some understanding of the complexity and fluidity of identity and religion's relationship to it. Mostly about self-understanding and broadening what are often blinkered horizons SCH4S1, SCH15S1, SCH14S2, SCH7S1 Again, it is pointed out that this is something that should be implicit throughout the curriculum.	6 – when prompted – but seen as tangential or in sense of place in world (as above)	14 – seen as same as spirituality – about making choices and forming opinions – RE should provide understanding of options and exploration of own views.	Agreement when prompted but no exploration of idea – some think more general thing.
006	Knowledge and understanding	112	70 - Generally seen as key aim – to understand the different religions	8 – knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices in	18 – Should be about knowledge. They recognise the relevance &	26 – importance given to

	about R&B		<p>and their importance to indivs and to society. Seen as essential knowledge in diverse society. Also important because develops positive attitude to difference. SCH4S3</p> <p>Amongst RE specialists more focus on knowledge for own sake and imp of understanding complexity of traditions and how these inform values and practice. SC3S2. See 'understand religion' node for quotes on importance of understanding concept of religion.</p> <p>Some concern amongst some teachers that new GCSE will be B&P knowledge heavy at expense of P&E exploration.</p>	<p>multicultural society is seen as key, both in terms of their importance to individual people and to society.</p>	<p>importance of religion in the world and feel it is something they need to know about – and understanding how people live with religion. SCH5FG, SCH7FG</p>	<p>understanding different faiths - practices and philosophies – in diverse society</p>
007	Others identities	72	<p>44 – mostly so they can relate to others, and understand diversity. Some see importance of belief to identity and its fluid nature but not a common theme expressed.</p>	<p>6 – Importance is placed on understanding what religion means to people and the implications for action and interaction. EMP6, EMP9</p>	<p>5 – agreement when prompted but no discussion here – appears elsewhere (?)</p>	<p>17 – when prompted. No discussion just mention that to build mutual respect.</p>
008	Prepare for diversity	132	<p>77 – Important preparation for encounter, particularly in less diverse areas – seen as prep for life in city or uni (SCH19S2). For some about awareness of diversity itself, but also prep to communicate and co-exist with others. Understanding leads to respect. Not just about having info/understanding of others' religions/beliefs – also about learning how to relate to others – being open minded and thoughtful, how to dialogue SCH13S3, SCH8S1. Few comments that RE not only place and that religion not only type of cultural diversity.</p>	<p>10- Key aim of RE – preparing for engagement in the workplace – understanding and accommodating colleagues and in context of job – managing and dealing with people. EMP8, EMP3</p>	<p>20 – forward looking to life outside school and feel RE should prepare them for interaction. Understanding & awareness important, in terms of overcoming stereotypes and not offending people. SCH1FG, SCH5FG</p>	<p>25 – Seen as main reason for gaining K&U – particularly in less diverse schools. Also helping them to deal with different opinions</p>
009	Develop tolerance and respect	66 – inc. overcoming stereotypes (20) = 86	<p>48 Should foster a healthy attitude to diversity, esp in less diverse areas. Job to do to overcome stereotypes gained from media. About broadening perspective & increasing respect and understanding. Also focus on understanding what belief mean to people and that increases</p>	<p>4 – fundamental purpose. Understanding = tolerance. RE should facilitate understanding & respect. EMP1, EMP5</p>	<p>23 –Most focus on overcoming stereotypes through gaining understanding. SCH1FG, SCH6FG RE should teach respect and acceptance of others regardless of faith. Also idea that if you know about someone's religion, you respect it. SCH5FG, SCH2FG</p>	<p>11 – should lead to appreciation of other peoples' faiths.</p>

			empathy & acceptance			
	RE IS... ³⁰					
010	Confessionalism	10– but need to split the code into ‘not confessionalism		2- Too strong a Christian bias in C-of-E school – lack of objectivity Fear that will become more Christian focused with new GCSE	6 - Concern in C-of-E school that being pushed into religion	2 – One struggles with heavy Christian focus in C-of-E school!
	Confusion about purposes	18	16 – diversity of approaches seen as hindrance by most, but not all. Tension b/w personal development and academic - can’t be both – clarity of purpose in each school important. Conflicting aims (knowledge, community cohesion) SCH1S1, SCH14S5, SCH5S5			2 – some awareness of multifaceted aims of RE
011	Exploring others identities	26	16 Depends on LAS		7	3
012	Exploring own identity and spirituality	48	37 –Even when not explicit its there. Focus on self-reflection. Popular with students. Hangover from pastoral religious instruction? (SC1S1)		5 – a lot of agreement that about personal development. Spiritual dev limited by focus on 1 religion (Christianity)	6 - As much disagreement over whether the personal dev side prominent as there is over whether it should be
013	Knowledge and understanding about religion	44	22 - Some concern over limitation to 1 or 2 faiths SCH19S5		20 -Limited by 1 or 2 religions	2 -Feel students getting much better understanding of religions than they did.
014	Moral development	33	21 – through exploring moral issues and values from religions		5 - Most agree – some that it teaches directly right and wrong, others that it teaches values and own sense of morality developed through discussions	7
015	Preparing for engagement with diversity	30	18 – some feeling that could be doing more of this		6 – Re helps students to understand other people and therefore makes interaction with difference easier SCH6FG	6
016	Promoting cohesion	24 but 8 cannot promote cohesion	26 – about making students more open to diversity. Scepticism over RE’s ability to promote cohesion due to focus on 1 religion and presentations of religions as static.		2 – echo scepticism of ability as only study 1 religion	4
017	RE as something else	26 = doing something other than RE in the	15 – Responses indicate the range of non-religious content dealt with in RE lessons. The Philosophy & Ethics		4 -Some like the inclusion of PSHE content in RE as makes it more relevant (SCH11FG) - would suggest	7 – some see RE as general studies/Citizenship

³⁰ The way this question was asked became if current RE espouses the aims you’d have for it so generally the answer was yes – important elaborations or contradictions are outlined here, but not necessarily widely held views.

		RE space, eg careers, PSHE	side is popular with students and seen as important, partly because there is nowhere else on curri this is done. Also, RE teachers seen as good at dealing with sensitive/controversial issues. Seems to indicate lack of good quality, stand alone PSHE. SCH15S3, SCH14S5, SCH18S3, SCH3S5, SCH14S3, SCH18S4		religion on own not being made relevant? Some dislike PSHE focus (SCH4FG). For others RE is better at personal dev side of things than PSHE (SCH8FG) Again – suggests failure of PSHE	
	CONTENT					
	Ability to compare religions	24 inc spotting commonalities				
018	beliefs and practices	104	67 14 leadership: Important to know about beliefs and practices in context so as to overcome prejudice 20 RE specialists: important to move from abstract ideas (like peace) to concrete, livedness. Importance of “grasping that that’s not always how it plays out” Also, “to know what to do in a mosque” for example, or when “in a job position with someone who is a Muslim or a Catholic” 33 general teacher: “I want to get away from the primary school approach of focusing on ceremonies, dates and storybook approaches” “If someone got their prayer mat out, you’d know why”	6 “It’s important to know the holy days and festival and the implications...”	25 We can see what they practice but we don’t necessarily know what they believe” “learning the rules: you know what not to do around them” There is an anxious quality to the learning – what NOT to do. Also “I don’t want to accidentally offend a Muslim or something and get a whole Mosque or Church after me” “Beliefs and practices...but also how people live with their religion...what they do every day”	6 “There are no Muslims down here so I don’t think they’d be turned on to it” “Yes, because that would stop bullying” There’s lots of difference and young people need to know about it for life These concerns are very child-focused
019	focus on major world religions	70 = they think these should be covered	12 teacher l’ship– “six major world religions? You’ve got to stop somewhere” “At the moment Islam is key...but you’ve got to look at...all of the six” “It would be remiss not to be familiar with the major five” “No more than four or five because it gets too thin and watery” SO – just everybody do the big 6; or get context specific “you could look at those that have			17- The main ones but confusion about which they are

			<p>the most impact in your cultural situation, and then look at the world context after that” “Start with local faiths then faiths in the UK. A number of students will move out of this area so we’d be doing them a disservice if we didn’t teach them about others”</p> <p>15 – RE spec: again, focus on the big 5/6 – tradition based. “They need to have a basic understanding of the six major world religions but a more in depth knowledge of two or three” Focus on the big 6, with preference for Abrahamic traditions 26 Teacher general – “all the major ones plus humanist, secular” “Two is just not enough” “Given the time constraints organised religion is what we should focus on”</p>			
020	history	88	<p>11 (l’ship) “It’s got intrinsic value but the main priority is focusing on what’s happening now” “the big picture...but I wouldn’t call that something you’d want to progress over several lessons”</p> <p>“There is a fascinating history behind where the religions develop from, but I wouldn’t want that to be an overriding factor”</p> <p>16 – RE specialists: “That’s more for A Level”</p> <p>31 – teachers general: “...know how religion can change and manifest through time” “Understanding how they have changed and developed – but a bit of a mammoth job. So I don’t know how fully that should be taught in RE” “It’s important to be aware but</p>	8	<p>11 “It’s good to know but better to learn how they are now” “History is history so we don’t need to know about that” “It is important. But you learn that more when you’re younger. Whereas here it’s looking more at how it’s affecting people in the world today” “Judaism has such an interesting past and I don’t really know about it” “You can’t understand contemporary debates unless you have a good background knowledge”</p>	<p>11“Could that be done in history?” “With so little time they shouldn’t focus too much on the history” “I think they do need to know some of it. But I do, personally, think that its sometimes focused on far too much”</p>

			getting a modern context is probably more important" "May be that's for a higher level"			
021	Issues about informality	105	<p>66 15 Teacher (l'ship) – "understanding that you can have your own belief that might not be mainstream but would still be recognised and valued" "Just because it has less followers doesn't make it less important" "I wouldn't want it to be information overload" "knowledge of the major religions is key" "within the confines of the curriculum you have to be selective" "...not too much time; just having an awareness"</p> <p>15 RE specialist – "my knowledge about these...isn't as strong" "I think a good way of approaching it is how many people believe in it on the planet" - reveals a 'proper' religion approach "I think it becomes a very grey area if you do that" "The issue for me is time really"</p> <p>36 Teacher general – "Yes but again it's timing" "I'd want them to think more broadly about what we class as religion too" "When I think of RE, I think of traditional RE" "It's not just a debate between Dawkins and evangelicals. There's a huge diversity of understanding of what we mean" "You've got to cut some things out. I wouldn't put those things on the top of my list"</p>	<p>8 - RE should include full spectrum beliefs Although there was not consensus of the extent of that range. Half felt that both formal and informal belief should be explored, for example new religious movements, spiritualism, belief in angels " The main traditional ones, later religious movements, informal practice and particularly cults- I think pretending that it's only the main religions isn't true anymore and the growing religions , for example, the Mormons, draw people, look at charismatic movements ... there are different attraction for example to young people these days and I think they need to be explored and looked at" (EMP8) "Giving some sense of the wonder of the variety of different beliefs and religions that there are throughout the world is quite important so children understand that there isn't a belief system that dominates but an enormous range of beliefs. - including spiritual, informal religion - 'spiritualism' very widespread outlook on life and important part of overall description of pattern of religious belief" (EMP10) For the other half, the main world religions were prioritised, although it was felt by some that a wider range should be accessible at a higher level (beyond Key stage 3)</p>	<p>11 "I wouldn't say it's important but it's interesting" "I think maybe we could do a one-off lesson on new religions, so you have an awareness of them" "It would help you to understand real people more"</p>	<p>20 "Put the Start Trek people in there too" "I think so because nowadays people find themselves being more spiritual than religious" "I would probably want them to cover them in one lesson or something, and talk about 'there are people that do this'" "...if you're going to draw a line somewhere you could include it great, but if you found the curriculum being packed out it would be one of the first things that might have to go" "I think that is important....I just don't think all religions are equal. So more weighting to the established religions"</p>
022	internal diversity	41	<p>24 12 RE spec – "they need to know that in any group there are extremists"</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>12 – "There are different Muslims...and if we didn't learn that we'd just think everyone was the</p>	<p>6 "While I can understand why you wouldn't want to go in to the</p>

			<p>"They should learn that everything's not black and white" "diversity within religions is really important"</p> <p>12 Teacher general – "these are the common threads but they are different ways in which they are celebrated" "there are a lot of people that believe that the Qu'ran is full of 'kill the infidels. That is not the case and understanding the diversity within religion would really help" "Every Muslim person in the UK is not against homosexuality and we need to understand that"</p>		<p>same" "religions think this but not all people in the religion might think that" "It's not something you can just learn as a block. It's individual what you believe"</p>	<p>differences between a Methodist and a Baptist, but to completely ignore it and pretend that the CofE is the only Protestant religion is madness."</p>
023	more breadth needed	78	<p>10 – teacher general "I think they should do quite a wide spectrum" "I think it would be better to be a little less content and a bit broader" "They should learn about all religions. I suppose the issue would be fitting everything into the curriculum" "I'd say as wide a range of religions as possible within the constraints of the curriculum" "As many as they can fit into the curriculum"</p> <p>8 – Specialist "It shouldn't just be a few. The world is so broad now" "Perhaps Christianity is getting to much coverage to the detriment of the other faiths" "It would be nice for them to have a broader sense than just two"</p>		<p>40 "I think we should have a look at quite a lot of them to get an understanding of loads of different religions because then we have more of an open mind" "We should be taught some of the little ones too as that would give us more information" "We need just to learn about all the religions, not all of them, just the ones we're likely to encounter" "In this school we only do the Christian side. It should be about learning loads of different sides" "We only learn about atheist and Roman Catholic views...but I'd like to learn about every religion" "I'd like a wider variety" "I think it should be broader" "I think we should learn about as many as possible...because there are a lot of religions at school that you don't actually learn about" "when we leave school it's not just like one or two religions we're going to encounter"</p>	<p>12 "They should be learning about other faiths and beliefs as well...we are a multicultural society" "the more they know the better" "It's not as broad as I'd like it to be" "I'd like to see more religions covered"</p>
024	more depth	25	<p>8 Teachers general</p>		<p>17</p>	

	needed		<p>"We start off with more and then decrease and go into depth"</p> <p>"That shouldn't lead us to RE that teaches 17 religions because one day you might be invited to someone's house for shabbath dinner"</p> <p>"if you're going to do Christianity do it properly" – more depth, less breadth</p>		<p>"You'd have a wider understanding of all the religions but you wouldn't know a lot about each one"</p> <p>"I feel like learning the main ones does open our eyes to other religions"</p> <p>"I didn't come to a Christian school to learn about Sikhism"</p>	
025	non-religion legally defined beliefs.	119 49	<p>19 teacher (l'ship)</p> <p>"In terms of RE I think it should be about people who do have faith and nonreligious things should be in other parts of the curriculum"</p> <p>'Humanism? It's not a religion. Once you go there you should start looking at political belief systems too"</p> <p>Not legally defined beliefs – 'they're not religions. They don't have a metaphysical element"</p> <p>"It comes in PSHE"</p> <p>"Yes, but not in RE. It's for PSHE"</p> <p>"Not RE but I don't know where else you'd put it"</p> <p>33 RE specs:</p> <p>'Everybody believes something"</p> <p>"It's important that they know they have a spiritual self that is not necessarily religious"</p> <p>"I haven't got much time to fit it in!"</p> <p>"We don't do it here but I wish we did"</p> <p>"if you haven't got a standard set of beliefs it's hard to teach it"</p> <p>"I don't think legally defined beliefs should be the responsibility of RE"</p> <p>40 Teacher general:</p> <p>"I do really want to emphasise learning about non-religion as well"</p> <p>"it's difficult to learn about one without the other"</p> <p>"making students aware that</p>		<p>17</p> <p>"I think they are just as important to learn as like Christianity because it is still a form of belief"</p> <p>"the crossover between Atheism and religion...that could be quite interesting to study...I'd like to explore why people don't believe in God"</p>	<p>21</p> <p>Yes, overwhelmingly, but...</p> <p>"That's' taking things too far. That's not religion"</p> <p>"yes, for a more balanced approach"</p> <p>"Should they learn about them in class? Well, they go together"</p> <p>"Atheism is the flipside of Christianity, so again it's all part of the same big subject"</p> <p>TENDE TO INTEPRET NON RELIGIOUS BELIEF AS ATHEISM</p> <p>'Yeah, that's the flipside of the coin"</p> <p>"well its belief isn't it"</p> <p>"Yes, the rejection of God doesn't mean that you are amoral"</p>

			whatever people believe they can still be a moral person with core values" "My father's funeral was humanist so for me that's very important"			
026	big questions	51	10 RESpec "It's what young people think about anyway so yes, absolutely" 15 General "I think they need the opportunity to discuss questions of ultimate belief because where else are they going to do that?"		15	11
027	controversies	138	81 16 – Teachers l'ship -Young people need to separate out causes from excuses so "better understanding of that religion, they'd be able to separate it out" "Totally. You need an understanding of why are ISIS beheading people, why did Lee Rigby get stabbed?" "we're reliant on getting further training on those really controversial things like radicalisation and FGM" 15 RE specs: "RE needs to say there's a difference between being a terrorist and being a Muslim" "The whole Islamophobia issue needs to be explored" "You have to bring in things that are topical" – but note that most people spoke about Islam when they thought about controversies Though one teacher said "Muslim terrorist is their instant reaction. We try to break that" 50 teachers gen: headscarves Charlie Hebdo Extremism Twin Towers	9 "important to cover extremism and...religious tolerance...and equality"	15 "I think it's interesting when we look at the big disasters and the terrorists... then we look at why they did it, from their religion, what were their reasons, what we've done to them... I find that more interesting."	33 "I probably would have said no years ago but I do now" "You've got to look at the good and the bad" "The whole Islamophobia issue need to be explored" "A lot of teachers need training in that" "We shouldn't be frightened in offending fundamentalist Christians or whatever" "The kids see all the news..."

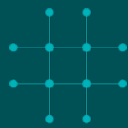
			Syria Homosexuality			
028	lived religion	111	<p>58 11 Teachers (l'ship): "if you have these beliefs, what does that mean, not just how you behave but what role does that faith play in your public life?"</p> <p>22 RE spec: "we need to get them to see it from the point of view of a person who actually lives that faiths" "how beliefs and actions are lived and how they are important for those religious people" "When they learn about a Muslim, they're not learning about a Muslim as an abstract religious concept. They're learning about a person who chooses to follow a path" "we have lots of people come in and it will often be so shocking for them if they ask a question they've read in a textbook and they say 'do you do this' and they just say 'no'" "You can look at as many scripts of beliefs and style of worships and festivals, places of pilgrimage and worship as you want but in order to understand that you have to understand how belief acts upon the ones who view it"</p> <p>25 Teachers gen: "...that's more realistic than a text book. I think children find that kind of thing interesting." "You need to bring it back to the here and now and their experience" Role of social media – "Children are all on Facebook all of the time, and Twitter, and all of those different websites...I think they need to be able to talk about that in school"</p>	10 "Cultural context is really important – especially in a time of fundamentalism" "Lived experience is most meaningful"	22 "You're not going to meet a Christian and start talking about how Jesus was born, or Adam and Eve, which is something we cover a lot in RE...you should learn more about what people do in everyday lives"	21 "They need to know the basic laws and the moral values, but don't need to know that some people call themselves Muslims but go and get drunk every night" "I think they need to understand the reality" "White girls have converted for their boyfriends. So pupils have seen that and asked questions about it. So to me that's modern day religion"
029	real religious landscape	111	82 17 teachers l'ship	5	7	17 – when prompted

		<p>“My grandma’s family were outraged because they’d rather have a cup of tea without the milk than go to the shop on Sunday. Times have changed, things have changed. People believe in karma nowadays” Secularisation is an important part of the landscape to learn “Things develop and progress. These things are not set in stone”</p> <p>23 RE spec: “with social networking they are engaging with current affairs in a way my generation never did” “RE could transform itself to try to develop a narrative so there’s an idea of where these kids are” “To raise up with children in 1960 three quarters of the population were Christian. Now one in eight are.”</p> <p>“I teach that in sociology – you know, believing without belonging...I think that RE should touch upon that but that’s probably not a major content of RE” “Beliefs and practices are important but it needs to be could with the sociological” “It lives and breathes. It’s the same with language. It’s eternally changing and we should teach that” “that is something that I would like them to be interested in, talking about church numbers and things, but realistically we aren’t”</p> <p>41 Teacher general: “It needs to be more than here are the six world faiths. It’s far more weird and wonderful and fragmented than that” “I think it is incredibly important to look at the more sociological side...its not about Muslims believe this and Buddhists believe this, it’s about</p>			
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			where are they in our society and how are they portrayed?"			
030	religion and media	17	5 "I think that's a good piece of work to do within RE, is to look at news websites, newspapers and how it's portrayed in tabloid press" BUT – teachers see media as a resource to teach from	2	8	2
031	religion on social, moral and ethical issues	40	14. Women Homosexuality Abortion Contraception Cloning Euthanasia Death penalty Drugs War and peace		11 – feel important they know what religious responses to ethical/social issues are. Part of developing own opinion	15
	Truth claims	14	See above on Big questions			
BENEFITS OF RE						
032	human development	67 (need to unpick what this means)	36 – spiritual, moral and ethical development often mentioned, particularly in relation to self-exploration, that not found in other lessons. Even when not in relation to own place in the world (spirituality), the formation and expression of opinion is seen as key benefit. SCH7S2, SCH2S3	1 - EMP9 – Developing and expressing own views	24 –really value the space to develop and express their own opinion. Develops confidence in own views and in self-expressions - SCH10FG, SCH3FG, SCH8FG	6 - Helps decision making process Triggers curiosity Develops softer skills & values eg respect
033	preparing to engage with diversity and avoid offence	28 Not asked as direct question so can be seen in other areas below	2 – linked to dev of tolerance. Particularly imp for schools in less diverse areas SC6S1		22 – about understanding people in order that they feel more at ease around difference. SCH6FG. Need to understand peoples' perspectives and day-to-day manifestations so that don't cause offence – bog emphasis on this. SCH5FG, SCH4FG	4 – RE can help prepare those moving from mono-cultural to diverse areas SCH3P1
034	developing values for interpersonal behaviour	35	10 Mostly about tolerance , Eg. SCH10S5	5	17 - Mention of tolerance and respect but mostly talk about acceptance of difference brought about through understanding. SCH8FG.Likewise, learning not to judge, particularly in relation to Muslims SCH5FG, SCH8FG	3 –Mostly about tolerance
035	provides a safe	14	6 – RE provides safe space for asking		7 – Re seen as safe, non-judgemental	1

	space for exploring		questions, expressing own views and having them challenged. SCH4S5		space to ask questions, develop and express own opinions. SCH8FG. Space where can make mistakes and learn from them. Linked to worry about causing offence. SCH9FG	
036	communicate, engage and debate	50	30 – all see RE as key place for learning to structure informed and respectful argument, to communicate developed responses to questions. SCH13S3. Verbal literacy seen as lacking across curric and focus in RE where often extended talking involved. SCH2S4, SCH19S5. Also listening skills		14 – Place importance on expressing their own opinion and learning to construct an argument. SCH1FG, SCH10FG. Provides opportunity to engage with others outside immediate friendship groups, so engaging positively across difference	6 – Structuring arguments and listening skills
037	critical thinking (& interpretation, evaluation skills)	40	25 – Across board, all recognise RE as developing higher order thinking skills. Many see this as special to RE - or to humanities. RE teachers particularly emphasize evaluation & interpretation		9 – identify RE as requiring a deeper level of thinking than other subjects due to its content and personal focus. SCH3FG. Self interpretation (SCH1FG) & evaluation (SCH5FG)	6 – Recognised as developing critical thinking and evaluative skills due to nature of questions asked in RE
038	empathy	24	15 – Most strongly expressed by RE teachers but ,many non-specialist also think RE is uniquely placed for development of empathy. SCH1S\$, SCH11S5	3 – RE thought to develop insight, which can harness collaboration	4	2
039	widening perspective + understanding of the world	27	10 – Focus on understanding other peoples' perspectives. Also mention of being reactive to what's going on in the world.		14 – Value opportunity to hear a wide range of views. Think helps them become more “well rounded” individs, with better understanding of the world. Also think develops their common sense which then transfereble. SCH5FG. Value that it offers alternative, spiritual perspective on life SCH8FG	3
040	Knowledge for workplace					
	General	Lots of quotes on managing rel & belief in workplace context and how important K&U is	Suggestions of jobs where partic relevant: medicine, police, nursing, army, social care	EMP1 &EMP10 under 'managing rel in work context node' but can get this from employers finding paper.		
041	Accommodation in the workplace (& how not to offend)	33	11 – Need to know about major beliefs and practices so can understand and appreciate manifestations in work place.	5 – Need to know the most common and acceptable manifestations - behaviours and needs of the workforce. EMP9	12 – Wide awareness & acceptance that religion & belief needs to be accommodated in workplace. Understanding of possible	5 – Understanding that Muslims might be fasting Knowledge so can avoid causing offence

			SCH8S3, SCH18S1. Suggestion of element of RE cuuric tailored for skills & knowledge in workplace (SCH6S4) NB: In school where mixed with careers & citizenship did cover equal law, R&B	Where potential sensitivities lie, but not much more than that. EMP7, EMP8 Want workers who respect all difference (equalities)	manifestations too and interest in relation to lawSCH6FG, SCH9FG, SCH1FG, SCH16FG Need to know how to act appropriately, not cause offence SCH11FG	Not really thought about: SCH1P5
042	Awareness & understanding ** Take in conjunction with existing presentation on employers views	66	37 – Need knowledge of and respect for the practical things that matter to people but also to understand why. (Beliefs behind actions)SCH15S3, SCH17S5 Need to understand and value diversity - to enable educated conversations and positive interaction with others. Amongst all there is focus on K&U for tolerance as prerequisite of positive interaction. SCH5S5, SCH7S6 RE specialists put more focus on understanding beliefs	8 – Equalities – need sympathy to equal opps, and rel part of that. Focus on managing rel & belief in work based context, partic service provision – K&U essential. EMP1, EMP10 Need empathy to importance of rel in peoples’ lives and practical understanding of how some of that can manifest itself in workplace.	9 – Feel its important to know motivations behind peoples’ actions so that you understand them – don’t want to be ignorant or cause offence SCH9FG, SCH10FG	12 – Mostly about having an awareness of diversity & understanding other people and where they come from so that they are comfortable and confident in their interaction with difference. SCH6P2
043	Dialogic disposition	70	40 – about attitude of tolerance, respect and acceptance for difference generally and specifically understanding, tolerance & empathy for how beliefs important to some and have impact on way act in workplace. SCH10S5 Confidence to engage, ask questions but also to critically engage SCH13S2, SCH3S3. This partic strong from RE teachers (SCH2S4, SCH2S5) who stress open and critical engagement, not blind acceptance – includes interest, healthy curiosity, SCH5S4. They also only ones to mention understanding of self in rel to others & work SCH7S4	4 – Need to have understanding and respect for traditions that need to be supported in the workplace. Awareness and respect for difference an important principle – rel one aspect of that EMP3	7- Need respect for different beliefs and need to be able to communicate positively across difference	19- largely to do with tolerance and respect. SCH11P2. Need to be educated so that they are accepting of difference but attitudes prioritised over knowledge SCH1P5 Need to be able to communicate in positive way SCH3P2 and embrace difference SCH6P3 Parents stress moral compass and understanding of humanity SCH15P1
044	transferable skills	13 – Skills that identified as being useful/imp in workplace	9.RE seen as building all cognitive & academic skills, partic to evaluate, investigate, analyse, listen, argue & communicate. SCH7S4 Also highlight skill of expressing developed opinions SCH4S5 Social and interpersonal skills also highlighted – partic empathy	3 =- Range of skills that important to employers identified that gained through learning about rel & belief: Insight, collaboration, analysis, discursive, awareness EMP3 EMP4		1 – SCH5P4 Critical thinking applied to workplace



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