The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Northamptonshire

Support Materials

An Exemplification of Pedagogy - Good Learning in RE

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Religious Education has a rich, broad and deep range of well researched and practical pedagogy. Learning methods are often allied to particular aims and outcomes in RE.

The Northamptonshire Agreed Syllabus supports teachers to use a wide and deep range of learning tools. If the pedagogical tools of RE are varied, then the learning experience of pupils can be varied as well, and the many ways of expressing aims in the subject can be carefully implemented. This material need not be intimidating to teachers: this guidance and support paper is written to introduce any teacher to a range of learning methods for RE in ways that are easy to grasp, well exemplified and clear.

There is a wide and extensive research literature on these different pedagogical methods, and some of them are tied to particular schools of thought about the purposes of RE. Teachers may find it interesting to explore the literature, but this brief guide can be a simple introduction to the material.

Page 2 gives a description of 6 kinds of learning approach for RE. All are useful to the teacher and can provide for good RE learning. They are, in this syllabus, seen as complementary rather than competing with each other.

### Six ways in:

1. **Seeing religions as they are** *(Phenomenological Approach)*
   Sometimes pupils need to build their understanding of the phenomena of religion. They gather information, learn about religious activities, and consider what symbols mean.

2. **Answering life’s big questions** *(An Experiential Approach)*
   Often the RE focus will be on religions as sources of answers to life’s great questions.

3. **Developing interpretation skills** *(An Interpretive Approach)*
   Interpretation is the key skill in one view of the subject: learning to see religion as it is lived and experienced, making sense of aspects of practice and the teachings and lived experiences of faiths in the light of observation.

4. **Concept development and religious literacy** *(Conceptual Approach)*
   RE teachers seek to clarify key concepts in religion with pupils. What does it mean to talk about celebration, revelation, sacred space or life after death?

5. **Experiencing the spiritual** *(A Humanising Approach)*
   Another set of learning tools emphasises the spiritual development possibilities of exploring learners’ own experiences in RE. Sitting with a candle lit in quietness and reflecting on inner thoughts in the light of a religious story or study of practice gives the pupil a route to their own insights.

6. **World view analysis and development** *(A World View Approach)*
   Another way of working is centrally concerned with the world views of the pupils, and developing their awareness of how they see the world in comparison to how others see the world: religions then become sources of viewpoints from which anyone can learn.
This outline shows how the Northamptonshire Agreed Syllabus can encourage a wide professional variety of pedagogy, and use excellent teaching and learning to make RE dynamic and challenging for all pupils. Further information on how to use these tools of pedagogy in your teaching can be found in the support materials and exemplar units of work.

Learning about religion and belief (AT1): The skills and processes of developing understanding of religious beliefs, practices, life styles, sources of authority and ways of expressing meaning.

Learning from religion and belief (AT2): The skills and processes of developing the ability to handle questions of belonging, identity and diversity, meaning, purpose and truth, and values and commitments.
Examples of different learning approaches in RE: Which of these approaches do you use? Which would you like to use?

1. **The Phenomena of Religion**
   A teacher plans to introduce a class to the Muslim religion for the first time and uses a selection of artefacts from the mosque. Children are asked to develop their understanding of what Muslims do, and what they say and think about their actions. Pupils make a selection of 10 artefacts, images and texts to sum up all they have learned about the Muslim faith so far.

   **A phenomenological approach** focuses on studying Islam through stories, moral behaviour, rituals, beliefs, experiences and community life and the art and architecture of the faith.

2. **Experiential religious education: educating the spirit**
   A teacher wants to enable spiritual development through RE so she uses stilling, guided story and creative imagination to explore religious and spiritual experiences, questions and beliefs increasingly deeply in the classroom. After a guided story on Pesach, pupils express their own spiritual ideas about concepts like love, sacrifice, submission or thankfulness in sculptures and poems.

   **An experiential approach** uses the idea that children have some spiritual capacities of their own, and develops these through curricular RE.

3. **Interpretive RE**
   Starting work on Hindu dharma, a teacher begins with four rather contradictory accounts of how Divali is practiced in Northamptonshire today. Emphasising religion as it is lived (not merely history, texts or beliefs); pupils become enquirers themselves into the varieties of religion and belief. The key skill of making sense or interpreting gradually extends pupils’ awareness of living communities of faith.

   **Interpretive approaches** take authentic account of the ways members of religions today practise their faith. These learning methods aim to enable pupils to draw meaning from the encounter with religion for themselves.

4. **Concepts for learning in RE**
   In a unit about Christian beliefs, pupils learn three concepts: incarnation, Trinity, resurrection. They enquire into the ways these concepts make sense of the Christmas and Easter narratives and festivities. They develop understanding of beliefs, and think about how beliefs can be tested by argument or experience.

   **Conceptual learning, for religious literacy**, takes key concepts from the religions and from religious studies as a discipline and enables pupils to be increasingly reasonable about religion.

5. **Ultimate Questions as a focus in RE**
   Pupils begin a unit of work by raising all the questions they would like to ask of God / the creator / the ultimate brain. With stimulus from religious texts and practices, the class use a ‘Philosophy for Children’ / ‘P4C’ method. A ‘community of enquiry’ for pupils explores their own questions. Afterwards, the class develops pieces of personal work using religious ideas about their ultimate questions.

   **A humanising approach** to RE uses ‘big questions’ of meaning, purpose and truth to explore the impact of religion on life, and challenges the learners to deepen their own ideas.

6. **Pupils’ world views in RE**
   During teaching about commitment and values, pupils begin with their own commitments, and generalise from these. Exploring the ways their everyday commitments can be structured into a view of what matters, a view of the world, is more important than gathering understanding of religion, as the aim of RE is to clarify the learner’s vision of life.

   **A worldviews approach** is about developing answers to human questions, using religious ideas and teachings as a resource for one’s own development.
Seven Ways Around Easter: A Pedagogical Fantasy.
How do you teach? RE uses a wide range of pedagogical tools to explore the gospel narratives and their connections with the lives, experiences and beliefs of children and young people and of the Christian communities. Here is a not-too-serious guided tour of the subject’s many tools of pedagogy. The article illustrates seven approaches to teaching the festival of Easter, all with their own merits and highlights.

The phenomenon of Easter
The new RE teacher Miss X noticed in her syllabus that she was to teach the ten and eleven year olds about the festival and stories of Easter this term, the beliefs associated with the celebration, and the impact of these beliefs in the Christian community. She had just been trained by some phenomenologists, and planned two lessons on the phenomenon of Easter. Using artefacts – a variety of crosses, some icons, some ‘He is Risen’ badges, and hot crossed buns - and a video of the Easter celebrations in an Orthodox and an Evangelical setting, she taught the festival, its terminology and its diversity. Pupils learned a good list of words, their meanings, and symbols and their reference points. They heard from believers about why Easter mattered to them.

Learning from Easter
After two lessons, Miss X read Michael Grimmitt’s seminal 1987 book on ‘RE and Human Development’. She realised she had neglected pupils’ learning from religion. She planned fresh activities: pupils were asked provocative questions. What if you were in charge of the Easter celebrations for the two churches nearest school? What music would you choose for Good Friday and Easter Day? What does the idea of ‘life out of death’ or ‘resurrection’ or ‘life after death’ mean to you? Can you explain an occasion when hope seemed hopeless, but you held on anyway? More good work emerged, relating the festival to pupils’ own experience, challenging attitudes through a real encounter with the Christian faith.

Cracking Easter Concepts
After these lessons, she went on a course with Dr Trevor Cooling, and learned about ‘concept cracking’. Inspired afresh to analyse truth claims, she planned two lessons of Biblical study in which the claims of the resurrection were presented to the class.
They responded to the challenge – some who thought it would be impossible discussed their view with others who thought it a miracle. Christian children in the class stayed at the end, thankful for the exploration of the truth claims of their own faith. Understanding of concepts was clarified.

Deconstructing Easter
During half term, she checked her notes from college and remembered all about the ways in which RE can facilitate the deconstruction of religion and its narratives for postmodern young people. The next two lessons were used to dissect how the Easter festival is sometimes used to keep people in their place – a heavenly reward for a life of drudgery. One child asked, ‘So, Miss, is religion just a way of keeping people in their place?’ She knew she was getting somewhere when a group of boys announced they didn’t believe in Easter and wouldn’t be bothering to wait till Easter Sunday before eating all their chocolate.

Interpreting Easter
There was another course – NQTs get out more than most – on interpretive approaches to RE, and Miss X learned the idea that RE can, through ethnographic methods, enable the pupil to be a researcher. And researchers are sometimes edified by their work. She planned a couple more lessons, the first on the diversity of Easter as Christian children describe it (she used accounts from 13 year old Catholics, Methodists and Quakers, from Bristol, Birmingham and Nigeria). Then she asked pupils to write interpreter’s notes on Handel’s ‘Hallelujah’ chorus, making sense of its origins, use today and impact within and beyond the Christian community. Lots of the children showed her their level 6 skills of interpreting. She was thrilled.

Experiencing Easter
As term wore on, Miss X was visited by the local adviser, who liked spiritual and experiential approaches to RE. She realised what was missing in the term’s lessons and used a guided fantasy based upon the appearance of Jesus to two disciples travelling to Emmaus. Pupils created works of art inspired by the fantasy on a choice of themes: ‘Back from the Dead’ or ‘My Hope for the Future’ They were wonderfully creative.
A gift to the pupil

Another primary teacher lent Miss X a copy of *A Gift to the Child, (Hull, Grove et al)* and she realised that reviewing all the lessons would be good. Pupils broke bread together, interrogated the artefacts for themselves, made and reflected on some palm crosses and sat still while they crystallised the learning in their own hearts and minds. Many of them agreed that even though they were neither Christian nor religious, there was a gift for them in their studies.

Come the last day of term, the class asked, ‘Please Miss, can we not do Easter next term?’
Development: Further description of RE’s pedagogic tool kits

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Learning methods: varieties of RE pedagogy</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Questions raised</th>
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</table>
| Phenomenology                             | Learning in RE is focused upon assembling, broadening and deepening understanding that takes each religion’s phenomena on its own terms. Examining the 7 Smartian dimensions of religion brings balance to the study. Aims are connected to a deep broad human engagement with the phenomenon or religion. A discipline of religious study is established here. | From the 1970s until now, this set of approaches has defined a baseline for RE: children should learn lots of information about the religions. Its best practice takes comprehensive account of religions as a whole, and brings the aims of learning with integrity and balance about the religions of the world into good focus. | • Is it supportable to argue that ‘dry factuality’ goes with phenomenology?  
• Can a phenomenological pedagogy which takes theologies and philosophies on their own terms be envisaged? Practised?  
• Is there a tendency to factualise and externalise the accounts of religion given in this approach? At what cost?  
• But does any other approach offer balance, integrity and depth in its account of the religions? |
| RE as human development                    | Pedagogy is guided by the need for RE to enable human development – the links between psychology and other social science disciplines, and philosophy and questions of meaning establish a creative tension. Educational aims are central, and the religions are there to be ‘learned from’ The place of religion as a distinctive human discourse, in flux and flexible, is defended even in relatively secular cultures like the UK. The place of RE in the curriculum is defended and established on educational grounds, not religious ground. | The term ‘learning from religion’ originates in this articulation of RE’s purposes, and has been highly influential as an ‘attainment target’. The focus on finding / making meaning through RE has become axiomatic for many teachers. The idea that pupils should engage so personally and deeply with the religious visions of others in educationally focused ways has been harder to establish, but personal and critical evaluation of the challenges of religion is recognised by many as a pinnacle of RE. | • Is this set of approaches tied to an existentialist philosophy (the idea of meaning making)?  
• How can the tensions between religionists and educationists be balanced or resolved? Does this approach marginalise the role of the religions in education?  
• If RE is a part of the curricular ‘meaning making’ then should religionists control what is taught at all? Or is it enough to ‘treasure the questions’? |
### RE for spiritual development

**David Hay, John Hammond et al:** New Methods in RE teaching, 1990

- Concepts of spiritual dimensions of life lie behind the intention to enable learners to access and tune in to their own spirituality. The psychological defence of the spiritual dimension is linked to the examination of spiritualities from various different religions and from non-religious ways of life. The focus on 'de-indoctrinating' young minds over influenced by e.g. secular consumerism makes this set of methods child-centred.

- The 1990 book: widely influential on some teachers, but momentum is slower now. Emphasis on spirituality and psychology leads to opposition from phenomenology, and little government interest! However, many teachers see these methods as effective in their own terms, and the methods have interesting connections both with contemplative of meditative religious practice and with the currently growing interest in well being and therapeutics.

**Are these approaches to RE dualist? Individualist?**

**Is there a danger for RE in being 'more spiritual but less religious'”? Is learning rigour set aside here?**

**Does the spiritual focus here draw RE too far from religions and their communities as found in the UK?**

**But if these methods are not used, or marginalised, does RE lose one of its main justifications for being for every pupil? ‘RE for all because spiritual life and alertness may be for all.’**

### Religious literacy – conceptual approaches

**Trevor Cooling:** Concept Cracking.

**Andrew Wright:** Prospects for Religious Literacy

- Since religion is about truth, the critical evaluation of claims and schemes for establishing the truth about religious propositions are the key skills for young people in their RE. These skills are especially necessary in a philosophical climate of relativism and postmodernity. Critical realism provides a philosophical background to this set of learning methods, and encourages aims that promote ‘being reasonable about religion’.

- Through teacher training and academic writing, these approaches, allied to ‘critical realist’ philosophical discourse about religion in a postmodern society, are popular with many teachers. It’s a bit less clear that resources support classroom work in this area. If this pictures RE’s closest disciplinary frontier in philosophy and ethics are the overwhelming flavour of RE 14-19 today.

**By focusing on the conceptual, and the ‘truth-claiming’ elements of religion, what is marginalised?**

**Are these approaches a kind of new version of older protestant Christian concerns about belief, that take religion as lived rather lightly?**

**Does a conceptual approach carry the danger of making too little space for communitarian, cultural and social aspects of religion?**

**Do these approaches set phenomenology and community cohesion too lightly aside?**

**But if truth seeking and truth claiming are not central, then what stands against ‘Cook’s Tourism’?**
### Interpretive Pedagogy

**Religious Education: An interpretive approach, Jackson, 1997**

In religious terms, the focus is on internal diversity as well as religious plurality, and on a serious engagement with the layering of religion, culture, community and philosophy. In terms of learners, the key skill is interpretation. Teaching method attends carefully to the processes of reflexivity, being able to see my view in the light of another view, my experience in relation to another experience.

### RE for Deconstruction and the ‘World View’

**Reconstructing Religious, Spiritual and Moral Education, Clive Erricker, 2000**

If the task of education is constructing the ‘self’, then pedagogies for religious (and spiritual and moral) education should facilitate this task with regard to the ‘philosophical’ or ‘spiritual’ self. To enable this, some prior (repressive?) practice must be swept away. Deconstruct the ideas of self that come from religions, to allow the growth of a new and individual sense of self for any pupil.

The national Framework and the lobbying interests of the BHA have created a climate in which ‘world views’ are part of the RE of the future. This tends to be on a competitive model though – linked to controversy. As yet, little curricular resource supports this, but the impact is likely to grow. Constructing the self is a human task, not just one for RE.

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<tr>
<th>What do these methods say about religion and philosophy, or religion and truth seeking? Do these methods stop short of engaging with this area?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Is it possible for teachers to grasp this set of methods with sufficient clarity to be effective?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do the subtleties of reflexivity suit the learning needs of all 5-16s? How can it be practical in the classroom?</td>
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<td>What is the place of ‘neutrality’ in the stances of teachers and learners, and in relation to ‘edification’?</td>
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<td>What effect would deconstruction in RE have for children whose family culture is evangelical Christian, traditional Islamic, or Humanist?</td>
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<td>Is it perhaps possible that deconstruction of RE makes the subject fragment and dissolve? Do we want to defend something in the heart of the subject even if fewer believers are found in the UK, perhaps at least because of the global growth and persistence of faith?</td>
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<td>What effects would follow if the deconstructionists’ tools were turned upon consumerism or soft agnosticism? Is this their commonest use? Should this happen?</td>
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Six Schools of Thought in RE

A somewhat lighthearted overview of some of the key pedagogical approaches available to the teacher of RE. The influence of these discrete academic strands of thinking is often rather subtle, to the point of invisibility, but most teachers can locate their own preferred teaching styles within the six offered here. Perhaps it’s worth looking carefully at what different pedagogies might confirm, within your own teaching style, and asking how you would like to extend the range of pedagogy in your classroom or research design, by taking on the some of the qualities of an unfamiliar or new pedagogical approach. Please don’t take the article too seriously!

Varied Pedagogy in RE

Religious Education in the last two decades has maintained a lively academic and professional discussion about its pedagogy. The aims of RE for some centre on the spiritual development of the individual; for others on the development of understanding of religions; and for others on the critical evaluation of truth claims. All these different focal points imply ways of undertaking RE in the classroom that may overlap, but are also informed by different research perspectives and by varied accounts of excellence in the subject. In this article, based upon a course handout I’ve been using for some years, I want to try to distinguish helpfully 6 different schools of thought and their related pedagogies available to the teacher of RE. There is a great deal of academic support and elucidation for these theoretical positions about RE in our professional literature – I am not seeking to add to this. In fact, if you called the article an “Idiot’s guide” to pedagogy in RE, you might not be far wrong - identify the author as the idiot if you wish.

So here they are: 6 approaches to ‘how to’ questions about the teaching of RE and learning in RE, all of which can be brilliant, and which can be teamed up in various different eclectic combinations by any teacher. I am suggesting that practice is often ‘mish mash’ (to coin a phrase) of pedagogy – that may be good for learning, but clarity for the teacher demands something different.

Lat Blaylock – RE Today Services
1. Unreconstructed Phenomenologists:

**RE as the examination of religions and their phenomena**

This school of thought argues that the key aim of RE is to enable learners to develop understanding of religions. It’s an academic discipline, like history or science, with its own set of approaches and its own frontiers with faith and with education.

People in this school of thought take their inspiration from Smart, Hinnells and Parrinder (acronym: ‘SHAP’ – no, really, the Shap Working Party got its name from a small Cumbrian village), and vigorously promote a pure ‘religious studies’ approach in the classroom. Their enthusiasm for enabling pupils to get a firm grip on the contours of religious studies is foremost. Understanding practice, belief and authority in different traditions, and promoting the ability to give accounts of the impact of religion personally and socially is built upon detailed knowledge of each tradition and its influence. Teachers in this ‘school’ want their pupils to develop increasing awareness of ~ and participation in ~ the academic discipline of religious studies and its ability to analyse both critically and empathetically. This school of thought has about 40 years of classroom history, and is rightly proud of every one of them.

On a bad day, the unreconstructed phenomenologist may suspect all other approaches of hidden persuasion, or neo-confessional agendas.

*Least likely to say:* ‘There are quite a few errors on these Judaism worksheets, but never mind, doesn't matter.’

- I take it as a given that phenomenology of religion provides some necessary apparatus for RE, but not a sufficient framework for RE as a discipline.
- I’d like to know what phenomenology of religion is good for, in 21st century RE and what must be added to it for RE to flourish.

2. Interpretives – may also answer to the name ‘Jacksonians’

**RE as a potentially edifying process of listening and interpretation**

This school of thought is developing from a fusion of phenomenological approaches to religion with methods from social anthropology, in the light of the critique that phenomenology has a bias towards the merely factual description of religion, and ignores or underplays the dynamism of religion in the life of the individual (an unfair critique of best practice phenomenology, of course).

Supporters describe the aims of RE in terms of enabling pupils to develop skills of interpretation and thus to make sense of the way religions are lived today, in the light of the traditions they come from. The teacher promotes ethnographic methods drawn from anthropology that emphasise listening to believers, insiders or adherents, being alert to the wide internal diversity of traditions, and the way ‘religions’ can touch each other and mingle. The ‘school’ draws attention to the ways academics can distort religion as lived by erecting a scaffold to describe it – after all ‘religion’ is a construct used by the academic (often non-religious) to box and possibly dismiss the phenomena and impact of ‘lived faith’. You can identify a member of this school: s/he carries Professor Bob Jackson’s ‘Interpretive approach...’ in their briefcase, and say on INSET courses: “But really you know, there are no religions: no Christianity, just some Christians, no Hinduism – just some Hindus”. If pressed, these teachers may take issue with all other approaches to RE for being open to inaccurate over-generalisation.

Anthropological guru: Clifford Geertz.

*Least likely to say:* ‘All Hindus are the same’

2 key concepts:

- Reflexivity – by which the learner and the subject permeate each other, or interpenetrate;
- Edification: by which the process of interpretation provides a ‘gift’ to the interpreter. When I’m involved in interpretation with another, I may be edified.

2 Questions:

- Must interpretive methods avoid theological aspects of religion, as they often seem to?
- In the practice of RE for all, how do these methods motivate and energise classroom practice?
3. Spiritual Experientialists

**RE as a space to explore pupils’ own spiritual dimensions**

Members of this pedagogical group are usually carrying a candle, box of matches and some multi-sensory stimulus materials. They think that the key aim of RE is to enable pupils to explore and express responses to the spiritual dimension(s) of life, so lessons should provide a rich diet of reflection, stilling, guided fantasy and experiential work to open the creative imagination. This school rejects other approaches as dry or distant and accuses them of failing to take the ‘secular indoctrination’ of today’s young people seriously. Bedside reading includes David Hay and John Hammond, Mary Stone, Anthony de Mello, Rebecca Nye and Veronica Williams.

These teachers attend INSET days hoping for seminars on ‘relational consciousness and defining the spiritual’, and wish RE lessons were more like such seminars.

The criticisms that pupils don’t learn much about actual religions, or that they spend time navel gazing, or that they are dualistic are countered like this: “What RE needs to be now is different to the past, and a forward looking connection to emerging non-religious spiritualities is essential for the subject to appeal to the pupils of the 21st century.”

A sequence of lessons on ‘RE and the imagination’ or on ‘sensing your own spiritual dimension’ are more likely than a sequence on ‘47 interesting facts about Sikhism’.

*Least likely to say:* ‘Blow that candle out, we’ve got notes to dictate. Get your books open for some real work.’

- Hay, Hammond call their approach new **methods**, not new aims, or pedagogies – but all three are actually implied.
- Do these methods make sufficient space for religions, and for the minorities that all religions are (globally or in the UK)?

4. Humanisers

**RE as a unique contributor to human development in the curriculum**

This school of thought sees RE as a part of an education in liberal values and streams of thought; the aim of RE in the end is about developing learners’ ability to respond for themselves to questions about the meaning and purpose of human life. RE’s place in the curriculum is firmly related to the overarching purposes of ‘Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development’ – though not limited to these. Teachers in this school of thought swear by Grimmitt and Hull, and build their curriculum around ‘life themes’ or ‘questions of meaning’, to be relevant and to connect both ‘learning about’ and ‘learning from’ religion(s). Humanisers reject purist phenomenological approaches, thinking they are too much centred in the religions, not enough centred in the experiences of pupils in RE classrooms or in life. And they reject ‘experientialism’ as over emphasising the inner and spiritual, rather than the human whole. The philosophical shadow for this kind of pedagogy is existentialism, with human life seen as a quest for purposes and meanings, religions as tea and doughnut stands along life’s path at which you can refresh yourself with the sustenance of philosophy.


Key test for weighing up a new textbook: “Does this make religious treasures and understandings relevant to the pupils in my class?”

*Least likely to say:* ‘Meaning of life? You’re asking about the meaning of life? Shut up and copy out that table of information about world religions.’

- This vision is holistic, comprehensive and brilliant – it’s all there. As philosophy is footnotes to Plato, so RE’s pedagogy is a set of footnotes to Grimmitt in a way. What does it marginalize, and what does it strengthen? How does the emphasis he places on PSE work, 15 years on?
**5. Concept Crackers (Coolingites)**

**RE as the examination of religious truth claims**

In this view of our subject, religions are seen primarily as competing accounts of the truth about human life. The purpose of RE is chiefly to give every young person access to life's key task: find out what's true about God and life after death, so that when the trolley of destiny approaches the checkout of doom, you'll have chosen the best brands of beliefs available to you. This 'school of thought' might see the main purpose of RE as providing opportunities to examine the truth claims of different religions, and therefore concentrate on the conceptual framework of a religion, its status as a living belief system.

'Truth or twaddle?' is the key issue. The emphasis on taking belief statements seriously as truth claims, and analysing evidence and arguments around them, means that lessons aren't finished until the question 'And is it true?' has been broached. While Trevor and Margaret Cooling write superbly about Christianity in these terms, there are multi-faith Coolingites too (does Andrew Wright's concept of 'religious literacy' fit in here? I guess so). Concept crackers are more interested in whether the sacred texts are historical than in the leather bindings or ritual actions associated with them. They like to promote RE skills such as debate, discussion, evidence - weighing and conceptual analysis. The philosophical shadow of critical realism falls from this view of RE.

In this view, experiential RE is too subjective; world religions phenomenology is an uncontroversial festival of factuality; postmodern approaches to RE sell the idea of revealed truth for a mess of pottage.

*Least likely to say:* 'Well, we're all relativists now, aren't we?'

- This connects, perhaps surprisingly, with P4C and thinking skills as methods.
- Is this open to the criticism that it's constructed out of evangelical modernist Christian concerns about truth claims?
- Isn't it better to connect RE with truth seeking and tentativeness?

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**6. Postmodern relativist deconstructers and reconstructers.**

**RE as the vehicle for constructing your own free floating meaning for the spiritual life of the future.**

Religion is seen as a tool of oppression from a passing age. Postmodern young people don't want, and don't need to know about the modernistically told story of the history of religions. This 'school of thought' sets aside the teaching of facts and concepts about religions, suspicious of the shaping of young people via the curriculum as a form of mind control. It urges a radical departure from religious study as an induction into an academic discipline, and concentrates instead on eliciting world views, seeking small personal meanings in experience and making space for the spiritual (however you may understand it). For the deconstructors, the purposes of RE are about creating a child-centered, liberating and equalizing future-orientated opportunity to construct meaning! The emphasis of any lesson should fall on the children's own perceptual narratives, and against absolutism in religion. This school of RE is critical of most other forms of RE as manipulative at a conscious or unconscious level. Followers use any text by Clive Erricker as a tool to deconstruct any other RE text.

In the classroom, these lessons look a lot like chaos, but subtly free learners up to take control of their own stories. Summerhill School, with no rules except those taken up by the pupils, is the sort of place where this RE could flourish.

*Least likely to say:* 'Which metanarrative is the true one then Sharon?'

- It's yet to be seen if this vision can grow strong within RE, or whether it is so 'loose' in regard to religions themselves that it might destroy RE from within, involve a roll-over to turn RE into a wholly secular vision, if that's where the majority of pupils place themselves.
- Does the highly positive account of relativism in RE commend itself widely to the profession?
Conclusions
At the start of this article, I asked the reader not to take it too seriously. Of course, setting out these pedagogies as distinctive and opposing each other is unfair in one way. But in another way, it’s possibly helpful to note that RE’s tools for learning come in rather separate tool bags, and those which I use – or you use – as a matter of course may not be the preferred spanners of other (excellent) teachers. That should be taken seriously. In the end, it pleases me professionally very much that the small discipline of religious education has so many schools of thought, which all contribute to the subject’s vibrancy. And it interests me that all (except possibly the first) of these schools of thought see RE as in some sense transformational, as making a difference to the learner beyond the accumulation of information. Whichever school of thought is home territory for you, I suggest your practice, even your own life, will be enriched by learning from one of the others. So if your pupils’ RE diet has been mostly phenomena, then get out the candle, the matches and the incense. If it’s been mostly truth questions, then plan a lesson that surfs a relativist wave. If you’ve been overdoing abortion in the life themes GCSE, then why not try a bit of ethnographic listening and interpretation for a change?

Discussion Points:
- What do you like or dislike about this classification of 6 schools of thought in RE?
- What did you notice in relation to your own teaching – which ‘schools’ do you draw upon most?
- Do some RE teachers fit into just one of these schools?
- Are some RE teachers ‘eclectic’, fitting into all or most of these?
- Would you like to boost your understanding of one of these approaches? Which and why?
- Is it true that academic work in RE can refresh and renew classroom work? How can teachers be helped with this important task, in the midst of ‘urgent’ work?
- A fusion approach to these schools of thought will be organized around one or two. Which, and why?
- All the pedagogies can be questioned, and must be.

Four questions for any RE pedagogy
1. In what sense is this pedagogy transformational?
2. How does this pedagogy connect religion and education, balancing the ‘ownership’ and interests of the two?
3. By what learning tasks is this pedagogy illustrated and inspiring to learners and teachers?
4. In relation to other available pedagogical tools, what does this pedagogy make central and make marginal in RE?

A wish list with regard to RE and pedagogy.
1. Teacher training and CPD which produces confident handlers of the diversity of RE’s pedagogy in classrooms.
2. Reflective practice that examines our own assumptions
   a. That ‘hot’ religious commitment is in tension with the ‘cool’ discipline of RE (referring to Ed Hulmes book ‘Commitment and Neutrality in Religious Education’)
   b. That religion needs to be made more interesting – as if it is not interesting in itself
   c. That ‘decline’ is a normative pattern for religion in the UK
   d. That we already know enough about methods and pedagogies to do RE well
   e. That curriculum (like the Framework) is separate from pedagogy.
3. Research to test the hypothesis that a vigorous inter-religious theology energises RE like nothing else.
4. Research to test the hypothesis that varied pedagogy enables deeper and more textured learning.
5. Research to examine the links between method – e.g. thinking skills, P4C – and religious understanding.
Select Bibliography
