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Religions and Education in England

Social Plurality, Civil Religion and Religious Education Pedagogy

Introduction

In England, religious groups have been involved since the nineteenth century in partnership with the state in the provision of schools and the curriculum subject of religious education. Institutionally, the Church of England holds a privileged place as the established church. Changes in society have led to more equality within education between religious traditions, initially for the Roman Catholic and Jewish communities and more recently for other traditions.

These changes included increasing secularisation in the 1960s and 1970s; and the pluralisation of society, mainly through migration. Britain has had long experience of migration and settlement of peoples, especially from former colonies in South Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. In the light of the 2001 census data, considered together with figures on regular church attendance, Britain might be described as a society combining various kinds of Christian, secular and multifaith elements.[1]

With regard to accommodating religious diversity in schools, some schools now provide prayer spaces and dietary diversity. Occasionally the wish to take pupils out of school, for visits to ancestral family homes, for example, has been seen as a problem in the press. Problems have arisen in locations where local demography has determined that some schools in poor areas have an almost entirely white population, while nearby schools have a predominantly Muslim population of South Asian origin.[2] The issue of wearing distinctive religious symbols in schools is discussed in a separate section below.

The educational structures and arrangements that produce syllabuses for religious education have evolved from those of earlier times. In the fully state-funded schools in

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1   The 2001 UK census was the first to include a question (optional) about religious affiliation, which respondents could choose to complete [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp ?id=954]. 71.8 per cent of respondents identified themselves as Christian, 2.8 per cent Muslim, 1 per cent Hindu, 0.6 per cent Sikh, 0.5 per cent Jewish, 0.3 per cent Buddhist and 0.3 per cent 'any other religion'. 15.1 per cent identified themselves as having no religion and 7.8 per cent did not state their religion. The figures raise interesting questions about religious identity since, in the case of Christianity, for example, only around 7 per cent of the population attended church during 2005 [http://www.christian -research.org.uk/res.htm]. Note that the census question was phrased slightly differently in N. Ireland, England & Wales, and Scotland. For good discussions of many issues relating to religion and the census, see Voas & Bruce (2004) and Weller (2004).

2   Fuelled by the attentions of extreme right wing pressure groups, riots took place in some northern English towns and cities in 2001 in which white and Asian (mainly Muslim) young men came into conflict. Religious organisations, especially national and local inter-faith groups, take great pains to alleviate such tensions.

England and Wales, religious education aims to foster knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other main religions represented in British society, and also to help pupils to form their own views and opinions on religious matters.[3] In certain types of mainly state-funded religious schools, however, it should be noted that religious education continues to be a form of religious instruction or formation.

Syllabuses for religious education (the name of the subject is often abbreviated to RE) in community schools in England are drafted at local level by a conference including four committees: representatives of teachers; the Church of England; other denominations and religions; and local politicians.[4] Conferences can co-opt further members (for example humanists and members of minority religious groups represented in the locality). Thus the interests of professional educators, religious bodies and politicians come together at a local level in determining syllabus content. There is also a trend towards a national pattern for the subject (see below on the National Framework for Religious Education).

Different pedagogical approaches to teaching religious education have been developed by researchers and curriculum developers. Some of these have influenced initial and in-service teacher education and particular curriculum materials (Grimmitt 2000b). For example, the interpretive approach, developed at the University of Warwick, aims to help children and young people to find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality (Jackson, 1997, 2004, 2005, 2006, forthcoming). Drawing on methodological ideas from social anthropology and other sources, it recognizes the inner diversity, fuzzy edgedness and contested nature of religious traditions as well as the complexity of cultural expression and change from social and individual perspectives. Individuals are seen as unique, but the group tied nature of religion is recognized, as is the role of the wider religious traditions in providing identity markers and reference points. Pedagogically, the approach develops skills of interpretation and provides opportunities for critical reflection in which pupils make a constructive critique of the material studied at a distance, re-assess their understanding of their own way of life in the light of their studies and review their own methods of learning.

The Warwick RE Project is a curriculum development project that applies the interpretive approach, converting ethnographic source material into resources for use by children in class (e.g. Barratt, 1994 a, b and c; Jackson, Barratt & Everington, 1994; Mercier, 1996; Wayne et al., 1996). In designing experimental curriculum materials to help teachers and pupils to use this approach, the project team drew on ethnographic research on children related to different religious communities and groups in Britain, and on theory from the social sciences, literary criticism, religious studies and other sources (Jackson, 1997, Chapter 5, 2006; forthcoming). The intention was to provide a methodology that was epistemologically open and, within the limits of using books as learning resources, conversational in tone. The framework for teaching and learning encouraged sensitive

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3   Many University and University College Departments of Education provide specialist courses in religious education for students training to teach in secondary schools. Short courses for students training to teach in primary schools are also offered as part of general teacher training. Students on any of these courses may be of any religion or none.

4   Fully state funded schools that do not have a religious character, since 1998, have been called community schools (formerly, county schools). Voluntary schools are schools, funded wholly or partially by the state, that retain a connection with their founding religious group.

and skilful interpretation, opportunities for constructive criticism (including pupils' reflections on their own use of interpretive methods), and reflection by students on what they had studied. The interpretive approach has been adapted by others, to meet particular classroom needs and is in the process of development through the REDCo project.

Separate from religious education is the daily act of collective worship. In county schools from 1944, this had to be a form of non-denominational Christian worship. Since 1988, acts of collective worship have to be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character', a rather vague requirement that allows schools much latitude in interpretation. In 2004, the Chief Inspector of Schools expressed his reservations about daily collective worship, noting the many cases of non-compliance with the law found by school inspectors (Bell, 2004).

Religious Education

The Legal Framework

In the state-funded Board schools set up as a result of the 1870 Education Act, Boards could opt for Bible teaching without denominational instruction, in accordance with the so-called Cowper-Temple clause which stated: 'No religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught in the school'. This clause influences the legislation to this day. The Act also included a conscience clause by means of which parents could withdraw their children from religious instruction.

The 1944 Act made mandatory the use, by fully state-funded schools, of Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Instruction. Each English Local Education Authority (LEA) had to convene a Syllabus Conference consisting of four committees. Two represented religious constituencies: the Church of England and 'other denominations'. In practice 'other denominations' meant 'other Protestant Christian denominations', since the Roman Catholics confined their energies to their own schools, and no other religion was considered. It was not until the 1970s that some LEAs liberally interpreted the Act as allowing representatives of non-Christian religions on to the 'other denominations' panel. Between the publication of the City of Birmingham Agreed Syllabus in 1975, and the 1988 Education Reform Act, many new syllabuses included a significant amount of work on religions other than Christianity in addition to studies of the Christian tradition, reflecting both the social changes in Britain resulting partly from immigration, and the rise of a globally oriented Religious Studies as a secular subject in institutions of higher education.

The 1988 Legislation

Changes to religious education brought about by the 1988 Education Reform Act have to be seen against the background of the Conservative Government's introduction of a national curriculum, with compulsory core and foundation subjects. Some commentators saw the decision to maintain local arrangements for designing syllabuses of religious education as showing the Government's lack of concern for the subject. However, the

Secretary of State for Education believed that enforcement of the 1944 requirements, with RE as part of the basic curriculum (the national curriculum plus RE) – the entitlement of all pupils in state funded schools – was sufficient to guarantee its status, and to satisfy lobbyists, such as Church bodies (Copley, 1997, p. 135–6). Nevertheless, the churches would much rather have had a settlement which included religious education as part of the national curriculum, but retaining local determination with regard to the detailed content of syllabuses (Copley, 1997, p. 137–8). In retrospect, it has been observed that many schools concentrated on the core and then the foundation subjects of the national curriculum in the years immediately after 1988, to the detriment of RE. The National Framework for Religious Education (see below) is, in part, an attempt to focus attention on the subject at a national level.

The 1988 Education Reform Act retained many features of the 1944 Act (provision, withdrawal and Agreed Syllabuses), but introduced changes which strengthened RE's place in the curriculum and acknowledged some recent developments in the subject. A significant change was the use of 'religious education' to replace the term 'religious instruction' with its suggestion of deliberate transmission of religious beliefs. The subject now had to justify its aims and processes on general educational grounds.

Recognising the need for different interest groups to have a say in the production of syllabuses, and for local circumstances to be considered, the arrangements for producing Agreed Syllabuses were retained in a modified form. For the first time in law, representatives of faiths other than Christianity were 'officially' given a place on Agreed Syllabus Conferences, on what used to be the 'other denominations' committee. Also, Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) now had to be set up (post 1944 they were optional) with functions that include monitoring the use of Agreed Syllabuses and the power to require an LEA to set up a Conference to review the locally Agreed Syllabus. SACREs have a composition which parallels that of Agreed Syllabus Conferences, and they can co-opt extra members.

Because of its position outside the national curriculum, religious education stayed out of nationally agreed assessment arrangements and did not become a foundation subject. The Department of Education and Science's non-statutory guidance stated that Agreed Syllabus Conferences could decide to include assessment arrangements in syllabuses that paralleled those established in national curriculum subjects.

The Reform Act requires that any new Agreed Syllabus 'shall 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). This says nothing about instruction in Christianity, and the Act specifically prohibits indoctrinatory teaching. New Agreed Syllabuses needed both to give proper attention to the study of Christianity and, regardless of their location in the country, had also to give attention to the other major religions represented in Britain; this was no longer an option for Local Authorities.

The Education Reform Act also sets religious education in the context of the whole curriculum of maintained schools which 'must be balanced and broadly based' and must promote 'the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society...' (UK Parliament, 1988, 1 (2) para 2). Religious education then, as

well as being broad, balanced and open, should not simply be a study of religions but, like the rest of the curriculum, should relate to the experience of pupils in such a way that it contributes to their personal development.[5]

A disturbing feature of the debate about religious education during the passage of the Education Reform Bill through Parliament was the lack of attention by politicians to the research and thinking done about religious education since the early 1960s. The debate in 1988 was often reduced to a crude wrangling over whether the content of RE should be 'Christian' or a multi-faith 'mish mash' (Alves, 1991). One effect was to produce a spate of statements from certain politicians supporting a form of religio-cultural exclusiveness, demanding the teaching of confessional Christianity as a means to preserving 'British culture' and ordering society morally (Jackson, 2004, Chapter 2).

Quite apart from the dismay felt by RE professionals that a vital area of the curriculum should be used as a theological and political football, the debate obscured the real crisis for religious education in England and Wales, namely the chronic shortage of resources in terms of staffing, training and materials identified by successive surveys (REC, 1988; see also REC 1990) and inspection reports (Orchard, 1991; OFSTED, 1994, 1995).

The most positive feature of the 1988 legislation, although a compromise, was that it confirmed the educational nature of RE and ensured that all the principal religions in Britain would be studied as part of the programme of all students in fully state-funded schools.

National initiatives: The Model Syllabuses and the National Framework for Religious Education

In 1994, two model syllabuses were published by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA), including material on six religions in Britain (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism) and produced in consultation with members of faith communities.[6] The two models (SCAA, 1994a, b) were non-statutory; they were for the use of Agreed Syllabus Conferences, who could choose to ignore them or could edit or borrow from them. The process of producing the model syllabuses was dictated by very tight deadlines prescribed by politicians. Thus there were weaknesses in the ways members of faith groups were selected and consulted, and in the limited number of models produced by SCAA.

The model syllabuses had some influence (OFSTED, 1997), with some LEA Agreed Syllabus Conferences using them creatively. The key achievement of the exercise was the involvement of different faith groups at national level, but the way in which the tradi-

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5   Schools are free to choose their own textbooks for religious education. There is no requirement by the state or the local authority that particular texts should be used.

6   Humanism was not included on the grounds that there had been an earlier court ruling (not in the context of RE) that it was not a religion. Many SACREs and AS conferences have co-opted humanist members or have ensured a humanist presence on the committee including representatives of teachers.

tions are represented in the models tends to the essentialist and raises some serious issues of interpretation (Everington, 1996; Jackson, 1997).

Further work took place at national level in 2003–2004. The Department for Education and Skills commissioned the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to produce a new national framework for religious education, for use by Agreed Syllabus Conferences and others. The framework, which is non-statutory, was completed in draft, following consultation with faith communities and professional RE associations, and sent out for public consultation. The final version of the document was published in October 2004 (DfES & QCA, 2004). This framework, which has received the approval of all the professional associations and faith communities (Gates 2005a), aims to clarify standards in religious education, promote high quality teaching and learning, and recognize the important contribution of the subject to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by supporting local SACREs and local Agreed Syllabus Conferences. The Framework is intended to ensure that local syllabuses meet the needs of pupils, and to facilitate the development of more national support materials for RE. It is also intended to increase public understanding of religious education by providing clear guidance on what is covered in the subject. The framework also explicitly permits the study of non-religious philosophies such as humanism, in addition to the religions, and explains how religious education can contribute to intercultural understanding and citizenship education. The structure of the framework closely follows that of national curriculum requirements. A further development possibly could be the introduction of a national syllabus, with RE becoming part of the national curriculum; such a move, however, would require further legislation. Although the law and national framework see RE as a separate curriculum subject, it is expected to contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and is regarded as an important contributor to citizenship education (Jackson, 2003, 2004, Chapter 8).

Since the publication of the National Framework, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, representing professional organisations and faith communities, has lobbied for the development of a national strategy for the subject based on the National Framework.[7] The strategy includes improving the quality of the religious education taught in maintained community and faith schools (a drive for extending and improving initial and in-service training of teachers – including non-specialists – is envisaged), encouraging those responsible for RE in faith-based voluntary aided schools, academies and independent schools to consult and use the National Framework for Religious Education in planning their RE syllabuses, and encouraging schools generally to strengthen an inclusive approach to the subject, by developing links with faith communities in their local areas. Funding from the Department for Education and Skills has been provided to take the proposals forward.

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7   The strategy was published at the end of September 2005. See http://www.religiouseducation council.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=34&Itemid=89 (accessed 27 November 2006).

State-Funded Religious Schools

History

The existence of state-funded religious schools acknowledges institutionally an element of plurality in England. About a quarter of all state-funded schools in England and Wales are schools with some kind of religious orientation.

The close collaboration between Church and state in education in England goes back to the 1870 Education Act. The 1902 Education Act established the 'Dual system' of partnership between the state and the churches in providing a national system of education. The 1944 Act clarified this system, by distinguishing different types of maintained (i.e. state funded) schools. County schools were entirely publicly funded and had no Church appointed governors. Voluntary schools, originally funded by religious bodies, went into voluntary partnership with the state.

They were of three types: Aided, Controlled and Special Agreement.[8] In voluntary schools controlled by the state, the church was still able to provide a minority of governors but made no financial contribution. The RE syllabus was provided by the LEA. In schools aided by the state, the religious body retained more influence and contributed towards the cost of buildings and their maintenance. These Voluntary Aided schools (Church of England, Roman Catholic, some other Christian schools and, significantly, a few Jewish schools[9]) had a majority of governors appointed by the sponsoring religious body. Since 1988, Voluntary Aided schools, like all other maintained schools, have had to follow the national curriculum. However, they have continued to teach religious education and to have collective worship according to the religious tradition represented in the school, although many governing bodies of Church of England Aided schools, following advice from their Diocesan Education Authorities, are using the local agreed syllabus.

The fact that some Jewish Voluntary Aided schools were established in 1944 has lent weight to the argument that other non-Christian religious bodies should apply for certain independent schools to be granted Voluntary Aided status. There was an unsuccessful attempt to establish a Hindu Voluntary Aided comprehensive school in London in the 1970s. Several Muslim independent schools attempted, again without success, to obtain Voluntary Aided status during the 1980s and 1990s.

Another possible route to state funding for independent religious schools was introduced in the 1993 Education Act (UK Parliament, 1993). Groups of parents, charities, religious bodies etc could apply directly to the Department for Education to establish their own schools. However, the strict financial and demand led criteria imposed by the incoming Secretary of State, Gillian Shepherd, kept independent evangelical Christian schools and Muslim schools out of the state system (Walford, 2000).

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8   Special Agreement Schools had curriculum arrangements close to those of Aided schools.
9   There were some Jewish schools with public grants even before1870 (Gates 2005b).

Law and Policy since 1997

Radical changes have been effected since 1997. In addition to the Labour Government's stated aim of achieving fairness and good community relations, evidence (from Ofsted statistics) of higher attainment and a stronger sense of community in some religious schools, an increased demand from parents and lobbying from pressure groups have all contributed to this more pluralistic view of the state school system. Some independent faith-based schools, including the Islamia school in Brent, were brought into the state system.

In 1998 the School Standards and Framework Act introduced the concept of 'religious character' and modified the range of types of school receiving state funding (UK Parliament, 1998). There are now four categories of school within the state system: Community (formerly County schools); Foundation; Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled. All Community schools must use the local agreed syllabus as a basis for religious education and may not have a religious character. Schools within the other categories may have a 'religious character'. Most, but not all, Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled schools and some Foundation schools have a religious character. All schools with a religious character can have collective worship that is distinctive of the religious body concerned. Only Voluntary Aided schools can have 'denominational' religious education. Voluntary Controlled and Foundation schools with a religious character have to use the local agreed syllabus, except in the case of children whose parents have specifically requested 'denominational' religious education. A school may have a religious character of more than one religion or denomination.[10] All schools with a religious character must have an ethos statement. This statement becomes part of the Instrument of Government

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10   There are nearly 7000 state funded schools in England with a religious character (the overwhelming majority being primary schools). The following figures are based on Department for Education and Employment statistics published in January 1999 and the Religious Character Order of September 1999. The figures in the first column represent the total number of primary schools with a religious character within each listed category while the second column gives total numbers, including secondary schools.

Roman Catholic (RC)	1771	2108
RC/CE	3	11
Church of England (CE)	4531	4717
CE/Methodist	28	29
CE/URC	2	2
CE/Free Church	1	1
CE/Christian	0	1
Methodist	27	27
United Reformed Church	1	1
Congregational	1	1
Christian	13	32
Society of Friends	1	1
Seventh Day Adventist	1	1
Jewish	25	30
Muslim	2	2
Sikh	1	2
Total	6408	6966

The first Greek Orthodox Voluntary Aided school opened later, in 2000.

for the school, and the governors are responsible for deriving a mission statement or set of aims for the school from it. In effect, a wider range of religious schools has been incorporated into the state system, partly for reasons of fairness and partly because such schools are recognised as potentially having certain qualities that might be more difficult to develop in some Community schools.[11]

The expansion of state funded Jewish education (very much at the primary level) should be seen against a background of assimilation (the Chief Rabbi's 1994 book is entitled *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren*? [Sacks, 1994]), while the expansion of Church of England secondary provision should be seen in the context of falling church attendances and the belief that Church schools are an important instrument for the Church's mission (Archbishop's Council, 2001).

The 1998 School Standards and Framework Act also introduced school organisation committees, one of whose roles is to make decisions at the local level about proposals for new faith based schools. They are composed of five groups, including Anglican and Roman Catholic groups (and, in some circumstances, there may be a sixth group representing other local interests).

Estelle Morris, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills at the time, in her speech in the debate in the House of Commons on admissions to faith based schools, stated emphatically that the responsibility for approving or rejecting applications lay with these local committees and not with government: 'the Government do not intend centrally to create, authorise or designate more faith schools' (Morris, 2002).

The Education Act 2006 (at the time of writing awaiting royal assent) will abolish school organisation committees. Under the new system, Local Authorities will propose, opening, closing or changing the status of schools. Objections would lead to proposals being referred to a Schools' Adjudicator. Until the new system is in place, school organisation committees will continue to complete any schemes in the pipeline.

Current thinking in the Labour Government (2006) strongly supports the incorporation of more independent schools within the state system, including more faith-based schools, and radical and controversial plans to change the character of the state system, giving considerably more autonomy to individual schools, are due for implementation.[12] However, in an attempt to ensure that state funded faith-based schools are inclusive of children from different backgrounds, the Government considered requiring new faith schools to make 25 per cent of places available to pupils from backgrounds other than that of the school's religious affiliation. This proposal was vehemently resisted, especially by the Catholic Church and by the Jewish community, and was withdrawn by the Government (October 2006).

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11   As an example of its confidence in the ability of religious bodies to make schools work in difficult social settings, the Government, in March 2000, announced its intention to develop Inner City Academies (later called 'Academies') catering for children of all abilities. A few of these are sponsored by Church related bodies. Further information is at URL: http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/what_are_academies (accessed 16 July 2006).

12   The proposals have been toned down to some extent, and the Education and Inspections Bill has now been approved by Parliament (October 2006) and will become the Education and Inspections Act (2006), following Royal Assent.

Religious Symbols and the Debate about 'Multiculturalism'

Although there were some individual disputes over the wearing of religious symbols in schools some years ago (the Sikh turban for example), a tradition has developed in which it is normal, for example, for girls from some Muslim families to wear the hijab ('head scarf'), or for boys from some Sikh families to wear a top knot (tying up uncut hair) or a turban.[13] Until recently, there had not been any serious problems with regard to the wearing of religious symbols, and cases of conflict over dress in schools were rare. However, there has been a change in climate in relation to some forms of Islamic dress in recent times, as illustrated by two cases.

In the first, a female Muslim student at a secondary school in Luton took the school to court, on the basis of the Human Rights Act, following the school's refusal to allow her to wear a jilbab – full length traditional dress, covering the body, but not the face. The case went to the Court of Appeal which judged that the school had denied her the right to express her religion. However, this judgement was overturned by judges at the House of Lords (in March 2006) who found that the school had 'taken immense pains to devise a uniform policy which respected Muslim beliefs' and had done so 'in an inclusive, unthreatening and uncompetitive way'. They noted that the school's rules on dress were acceptable to mainstream Muslim opinion. The student moved to another local school where she was permitted to wear the jilbab.

The second case needs to be seen against the background of an apparent hardening of attitudes towards multiculturalism in general, and towards Muslims in Britain in particular, by members of the Government. In a speech launching a Commission on Integration and Cohesion, Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, suggested that 'multiculturalism' may well be a source of social division. The speech includes the following passage:

> '… there are white Britons who do not feel comfortable with change. They see the shops and restaurants in their town centres changing. They see their neighbourhoods becoming more diverse. Detached from the benefits of those changes, they begin to believe the stories about ethnic minorities getting special treatment, and to develop a resentment, a sense of grievance. The issues become a catalyst for a debate about who we are and what we are as a country. About what it means to live in a town where the faces you see on the way to the supermarket have changed and may be constantly changing. I believe this is why we have moved from a period of uniform consensus on the value of multiculturalism, to one where we can encourage that debate by questioning whether it is encouraging separateness.'[14]

The speech was presented as initiating an important public debate.[15] However, within a short time, some Government Ministers were questioning the value and limits of multi-

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13   See Jones and Welengama (2000) for an account of a successful legal appeal in 1983 against a ruling that an independent school could require Gurinder Singh Mandla to remove his turban and cut his hair as a condition of admission as a pupil.

14   The speech was delivered on 24th August 2006. The full text was accessed at http://www.guardian.co.uk/religion/Story/0,,1857368,00.html on 27 October 2006.

15   Kelly's ideas on 'multiculturalism' are closely related to those of Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, and she refers directly to Phillips in the speech.

culturalism, contrasting 'multiculturalism' and 'integration'. The opinion of Kelly takes a simplistic view of cultures as separate and bounded entities and ignores years of research and scholarship on different meanings and uses of the terms 'multicultural' and 'multi-culturalism' (eg Baumann 1999; Jackson 2004; May 1999; Modood, Triandafyllidou & Zapata-Barrero 2006; Parekh 2000; Rattansi 1999, Runnymede Trust 2000). Ideas of 'critical multiculturalism' (May 1999) or 'reflexive multiculturalism' (Rattansi 1999), as presented in academic discourse, are totally compatible with a diverse but integrated so-ciety. The false polarization of 'multiculturalism' and 'integration' was widely inter-preted, especially in influential segments of the media, as a statement of governmental disapproval towards difference within society and as an appeal for cultural assimilation, rather than integration. However, on December 8th 2006, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, clarified his own views on multiculturalism and integration, giving a much more meas-ured view, affirming Britain as a multicultural society, whilst emphasising the vital im-portance of integration.

> '… multicultural Britain was never supposed to be a celebration of division; but of diversity. The purpose was to allow people to live harmoniously together, despite their difference; not to make their difference an encouragement to discord. The values that nurtured it were those of solidarity, of coming together, of peaceful co-existence. The right to be in a multicultural so-ciety was always implicitly balanced by a duty to integrate, to be part of Britain, to be British and Asian, British and black, British and white … So it is not that we need to dispense with multicultural Britain. On the contrary we should continue celebrating it. But we need – in the face of the challenge to our values – to re-assert also the duty to integrate, to stress what we hold in common and to say: these are the shared boundaries within which we all are obliged to live, precisely in order to preserve our right to our own different faiths, races and creeds. We must respect both our right to differ and the duty to express any difference in a way fully consistent with the values that bind us together.' (http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/ Page10563.asp).

The second case should be considered against the background of the debate about 'multi-culturalism' during the latter months of 2006. A Muslim female bilingual support worker was suspended from her post at a primary school in Dewsbury, after she insisted on wearing a niqab (veil covering all the face except the eyes) in lessons. She was asked to remove the veil after pupils said they found it difficult to understand her during English language lessons. The support worker refused and was suspended (September 2006). Af-ter her suspension, she brought a test case under the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2004. The tribunal found she had not been directly or indirectly dis-criminated against on religious grounds, but did find she had been subjected to conduct which created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for her, and she was awarded damages for 'injury to her feelings' (*Daily Telegraph* 20 October 2006). Before the tribunal arrived at its findings, a senior Government Minister and former Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, expressed his own discomfort at meeting women in his own constituency surgery who wore the niqab, stating that 'wearing the full veil was bound to make better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult'. The words of the politicians have, on the whole, been carefully expressed. However, the clearly changing view of some senior politicians towards cultural differ-ence was taken by elements of the press as a licence to generate conflict. In the case of the niqab debate, for example, the *Daily Express* reported the story in a lurid way, and

then conducted a readers' poll on whether the niqab should be outlawed in schools. Un-surprisingly 99 per cent of those who completed the poll said that it should.[16] Whether intended or not, the perceived shift in policy legitimized certain forms of racism in parts of the media.

The debate about the niqab was widely reported in the media, and various points of view were expressed. The Muslim Council of Britain, a national association whose aims include promoting co-operation, consensus and unity on Muslim affairs in the UK, issued a moderate joint statement.[17] This includes the view that 'the veil, irrespective of its spe-cific juristic rulings, is an Islamic practice…'. There is an appeal for Muslims 'to show solidarity against criticising the veil or any other Islamic practice', but also 'to avoid seeking to capitalise on this debate in order to further political or personal interests'. Women who customarily wear the veil 'in the work-place or in educational premises' are advised to avoid disputes with their employers, since these would likely lead to further bad publicity and the possible imposition of compulsory dress codes in the work place and elsewhere. The Council expresses understanding towards 'those who may find the veil a barrier to communication', but it is claimed that 'the level of discomfort caused is insignificant', particularly when compared to discomfort resulting from other 'less widely condemned practices such as sexual promiscuity, nudity and alcohol consumption by other segments of society'.

Despite the widespread media attention to the issue, the niqab is worn by a tiny minor-ity of Muslim women in Britain, who choose it for different reasons, some primarily be-cause of cultural tradition (often relatively recent migrants, from Somalia or Yemen for example), others (usually younger women, with a Salafi connection) as a symbol of wor-ship and resistance to the corrupting influences of the world.[18]

Those considering the issue of the niqab seriously, including discussing it in an educa-tional context, need to separate facts from prejudices, to reflect on why the niqab awak-ens negative feelings among some people, and to analyse the issues in a calm and bal-anced way.[19]

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16   Ban it! Daily Express, 21 October, 2006. An Ipsos MORI telephone poll shows, however, that members of the British public consider that Muslim women have a right to wear a niqab, but not in the classroom, or on television, for example. Very few respondents (14%) claimed to feel frightened or intimidated by women wearing a veil, but the majority considered wearers to be segregating themselves (61%) and are making a clear statement of separation and difference (59%). Interviews were conducted on 11th October 2006 with 1,023 British adults aged 18+; data were weighted to reflect the national population profile. [http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/2006/itv.shtml]

17   The full statement is at http://www.mcb.org.uk/article_detail.php?article=announcement-595 accessed 27 October 2006.

18   See, for example, A Veiled Woman's Response to the Niqab Debate http://www.islaam.ca/ fo-rum/islam-in-the-news/a-veiled-woman-s-response-to-the-niqab-debate/view.html (accessed 29 October 2006).

19   Excellent material on doing exactly that, which could be used in religious education or citizen-ship education, appeared by mid October, providing students with a range of reliable internet sites for background information on the debate, and encouraging informed discussion (Turner, 2006).

Pedagogical Trends in Religious Education

England has a rich tradition of religious education pedagogy. Much of its impetus has arisen in pedagogical studies in university departments of education or religious studies departments and in innovative local education authority agreed syllabus conferences (Copley, 1997). The key debates of this tradition can be traced back to the changes of the 1960s and 1970s described earlier. No doubt the debates have deeper roots, but their investigation is beyond our present scope. Few would argue that the pedagogical initiatives of the 1960s and 1970s have not been decisive for English religious education practice, although, as we shall see, their legacy is keenly contested. A comprehensive treatment of these initiatives cannot be offered here, but briefer remarks on selected figures should serve to illustrate some major issues.

In the early 1960s Harold Loukes was a key figure in the beginnings of a shift in English religious education's emphasis (Loukes, 1961). Loukes reported research undertaken in secondary modern schools where discussions in religious instruction lessons, as they were then called, were audio-taped and school pupils interviewed about their content. A high level of negativity towards religious instruction was evidenced. Many pupils accused teachers of marginalizing their own experiences and ideas, interpreting lessons as Christian indoctrination. Loukes' response was to recommend a problem-centred syllabus focused on relationships, responsibilities, and other issues of approaching adulthood. The principle that religious education needs to be existentially relevant has been prominent ever since Loukes. It is reflected in General Certificate of Secondary Education examination courses for the subject that are taken by a substantial majority of 14–16 year old students.[20]

Although Loukes anticipated that religious content for the subject would be drawn from the Christian tradition, whose teachings would be placed alongside students' own perspectives in a more conversational way than before, by the later 1960s the privileged position of Christianity in English religious education came under challenge. Ninian Smart's establishment of the University of Lancaster Department of Religious Studies from 1965 was a highly significant development. Smart's project was to create a multidisciplinary, open setting for the study of religion conceived as a global human phenomenon (Smart, 1958, 1968, 1973, 1977, 1986a, 1986b, 1993, 1995, 1996). The approach is associated, often, with phenomenology but care should be taken to distinguish Smart's position from later uses and misuses of the same term (O'Grady, 2005a). The methods of phenomenological agnosticism (temporarily suspending judgment on religious beliefs and practices) and structured empathy (attending carefully and sympathetically to the beliefs of others and considering whether or not these have similarities or differences with one's own) were central to Smart's university religious studies teaching and considerable literary output. He chaired directed projects designed to apply these methods in secondary (Schools Council, 1971) and primary (Schools Council 1977) school religious edu-

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20   http://www.edexcel.org.uk/quals/gcse/rs/gcse/1483/,
       http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/GCSE(ShortCourse)ReligiousStudiesB(PhilosophyandEthi
       cs).html , http://www.aqa.org.uk/qual/pdf/AQA–3062–3067-W-SP–07.pdf (all accessed 10 July
       2006).

cation, and is widely regarded as the pioneer of a world religions approach that was inspirational to many teachers and landmark agreed syllabuses (Birmingham, 1975; Hampshire, 1978).

Changing Aims of Religious Education

We do not hold the over-simplified view that English religious educational pedagogy since the 1960s has been a series of footnotes to Harold Loukes and Ninian Smart. Yet, from consideration of Loukes' and Smart's positions and recognition of their undoubted influence, a useful explanatory idea arises: that much pedagogical debate has attempted to integrate their emphases, broadly conceived, into a coherent set of principles and strategies for religious education pedagogy (Grimmitt, 2000b, Chapters 1 and 2). Loukes insists that school students' own views and experiences should take a central position in the religious education curriculum, Smart that religious education must be an academically reputable, non-confessional and multi-faith subject of study. Our argument is that it is clear that good religious education pedagogy has to take account of both emphases and to hold both productively in balance and interaction.

Thus, we have a criterion to assess the different developments in English religious education pedagogy through the 1980s and 1990s. Again, lack of space prevents comprehensive treatment of these developments (but see Grimmitt, 2000b; Jackson, 2004); we will, rather, discuss illustrative examples that have been and continue to be influential on practice, some more so than others. It has been part of the self-understanding of several influential English religious education writers that they seek to undermine a phenomenological or liberal consensus associated with Smart and a 'world religions' approach, although not all of these writers echo Loukes' call for more attention to young people's existential concerns. An interesting contribution has been made by experientialist religious educators, for example; whilst they do not question the importance of existential relevance in religious education, these writers are unhappy about the representation of the nature of religion associated with world religions approaches (Hammond, et al., 1990).

For Hammond, Hay and their co-writers, religious education pedagogy must be about more than the surface description of religious phenomena. Attempts should be made to connect students with the inner felt reality of spiritual experience. Hammond and Hay present a series of exercises for the classroom, including 'stilling' and meditation on the question 'who am I?' that are designed to bring students to a more empathetic awareness of the affective dimensions both of religion and their own selves. Hay acknowledges that the 'new methods' have not succeeded as an alternative pedagogy (Hay, 2000). The contribution of experientialist ideas has been as a corrective to the overly descriptive tendency of some phenomenological work. However, there are serious problems with the assumption that school students' own affective states are analogous to religious experience (O'Grady, 2003).

A movement within English religious education loosely allied to experientialism has sought to ground pedagogy in creative arts approaches (see Miller, 2003 for an overview). Although such approaches avoid the difficulties of experientialism – there is no assumption that students' products are analogous to religious art or proceed from or re-

flect religious experiences, students being simply invited to explore themes in artwork – further work is needed to document examples of successful classroom practice and to clarify how such activities help to build understanding of religion. These criticisms are apposite, for example, with regard to the writing of Brenda Lealman (1993, 1996), a source of potential for religious education teachers hitherto realised partially at best.

Andrew Wright's opposition to the alleged overly descriptive quality of world religions approaches has come from a different angle from that taken by the experientialists (Wright, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2006). For Wright, it is vital that liberal agendas of respect and tolerance do not obscure public debates over issues of religious truth. The main strength of Wright's position is his insistence that young people are able and entitled to participate in such debates. The aim of religious education as he sees it is to provide them with the linguistic and conceptual skill necessary for such participation – his is a religious education based on religious literacy or, as he sometimes characterises it, it is a critical religious education that mirrors the rigour of academic theology and religious studies at their best.

Wright's work has attracted criticism on several grounds. He tends, unnecessarily, to polarise experience to language (O'Grady, 2005a, b; Teece, 2005). It can be questioned whether younger students will thrive in the philosophically exacting classroom Wright envisages (Jackson, 2004, chapter 5). Like Lealman, Wright has a scarcity of proven classroom strategy or practice on which to call. However, Wright's work, like Lealman's and that of experientialism, is a corrective to some over-emphases in different approaches rather than a fully developed pedagogical approach. Wright's more recent work places him closer to what may be an emergent hermeneutically-driven consensus in English religious education pedagogy (Wright, 2004, 2006). Additionally, Wright's point that concerns for respect and tolerance should not be allowed to hide differences over truth-claims is an important one to bear in mind as we seek to explore not only dialogue but also conflict in religious education. This places high demands on teachers but these demands have to be faced. For Liam Gearon, it is important that the negative aspects of religion should be dealt with in the subject (Gearon, 2002). Gearon does not say how this should be done but it is one of the matters that our Warwick REDCo community of practice will try to address (see below).

There are also writers who have sought from radical post-modern perspectives to undermine an alleged liberal, multi faith hegemony. Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker have argued for the deconstruction of the pre-set religious education curriculum in favour of an approach centred on children's personal narratives (Erricker & Erricker, 2000). Here, intuited personal spirituality is to be protected from external impositions: authentic understanding must be constructed for children by themselves. Erricker and Erricker contribute much of value to the debate about English religious education pedagogy. Their advocacy of children's right to have agency in their own education is one that we join. Once more, however, we are inclined to value their contribution as a corrective element rather than a complete pedagogy for religious education (Jackson, 2004, Chapter 3). As already indicated, our preference with regard to religious education pedagogy is an amalgam of studies of religions and reflexive and critical elements that encourages young people to analyse and develop their own values and beliefs. Clive and Jane Erricker's

work, whilst strong on the analysis of personal narratives, regards the study of religions as an imposition of artificially constructed meta-narratives. Clive Erricker's position, however, in so far as it is reflected in the recent Hampshire agreed syllabus, has been modified (Hampshire, 2004). Through an accommodation towards a more generally accepted view of religious education in English common schools, his pedagogy has also taken on a more hermeneutical cast and is essentially interpretive in its approach. Amongst other innovative local syllabuses, note should be taken of the Bradford syllabus which has very clear emphases on religion in the community, on hermeneutical learning and on student autonomy and self-development.[21] Interestingly, school age students were themselves involved in the writing of the syllabus, as a 'shadow' syllabus conference.

In the Introduction (above), some limited attention was given to the interpretive approach to religious education developed by Robert Jackson and colleagues at the University of Warwick (Jackson, 1997, 2004, 2006, forthcoming). But what is the contribution of the interpretive approach to the debate on appropriate pedagogy for religious education in the English common school? We will outline the key pedagogical principles of the approach, describe some of its practical applications in classroom-based research and give a provisional answer to this question, before anticipating some (presently embryonic) new developments. The key principles are as follows:

Representation. In religious education, religious traditions should be represented not as bounded systems but in ways that recognise their diversity and the uniqueness of each individual who is subject to many influences (e.g. from membership group, wider tradition and beyond the tradition).

Interpretation. In studying religious traditions students should not be expected to set aside their own presuppositions, but should compare their own concepts with those of others: 'the students' own perspective is an essential part of the learning process' (Jackson, 2004, p. 88).

Reflexivity. Through their studies of religious traditions students should re-assess their own ways of life; they should be constructively critical of the material they study; and they should maintain an awareness of the development of the interpretive process, reflecting on the nature of their learning.

Thus, the interpretive approach clearly conceptualises the link between religious studies and young people's personal development. There should be a reflexive, ongoing process of comparison and contrast between material from religious traditions and pupils' own ideas. Wright too perhaps comes close to this hermeneutic when he speaks of critical religious education as a series of encounters with alternative horizons (Wright, 2004, p. 177–8, see also Wright, 2006). Yet an additional strength of the interpretive approach is the presence of supportive empirical studies, whether through ethnographic research on children's religiosity (Jackson & Nesbitt, 1993; Nesbitt, 2004), action research (Jackson, 2004, p. 103ff; O'Grady, 2003, 2005b), dialogical approaches to religious education (Ipgrave, 1998, 2002, 2003; Jackson, 2004, Chapter 7) or other areas including research into religious education and special needs (Jackson, 2004, Chapter 6).

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21   URL: http://www.ngfl.ac.uk/re/syl/contents_secondary:htm   (accessed   10   July   2006); http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wie/wreru/aboutus/research_projects/current/redco/community ofpractice.doc (accessed 12 July 2006).

Debates on Religious Education and Open Questions

We cannot go so far as to say that there is a positive present consensus on the nature and aims of religious education in England. However, as we have seen, there is much focus on hermeneutics and the idea of a developmental conversation between young people and religious materials (or in dialogical approaches to religious education, between young people of different backgrounds and dispositions). Can this be viewed, retrospectively, as an accommodation of Loukes' concerns with those of Smart? Actually, it can be argued that there were already signs of this in Smart's own work, in relation to structured empathy (O'Grady, 2005a). The constructivist religious education pedagogy of Grimmitt (2000a) also has strengths to offer in this regard.

What are the questions that exercise religious educators in England in the early 21st century? We have shown how, in some ways, they are the same questions posed in the 1960s by Loukes and Smart. There is also an emerging cluster of questions around human rights and citizenship (Gearon, 2002, 2004, 2006; Hull, 1996, 1998, 2002; Jackson, 2003; Jackson & Fujiwara 2007). These questions include the issue of increasing 'cultural racism' in society (see Jackson's chapter in part one of this volume). A recent and continuing focus on intercultural education partly results from the internationalisation of English religious education research (Jackson & McKenna, 2005), and from the Government initiated debate about 'multiculturalism'. All of this ought to lead to discussion of what achievement in religious education now means. How do we now characterise a religiously educated young English person? And in the light of this question, what does successful classroom practice look like and do? How do we deal not just with dialogue but also with conflict in religious education, especially in relation to racism of various kinds?

Possibilities for Religious Education

What, given the foregoing open questions, does religious education have to offer to young people now? For these questions to remain open our answers have to be tentative. Yet we have maintained throughout the chapter that religious education should help young people to gain both a positive sense of the development of their own values and beliefs and a growing understanding of their role as citizens of a religiously plural society: the two aims should be seen as cross-cutting. How can the subject develop and grow in the future and what challenges have to be faced? What is needed is a well-documented truly hermeneutical pedagogy (or series of related pedagogies) so that these questions can be answered and development agendas set 'on the ground' of school life. Our lack is not of good theory but of detailed description of successful classroom pedagogy informed by good theory. Within the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, we have instituted an action research community of practice intending to address this lack.[22] Our community of practice constitutes the English strand of the REDCo project. A group of

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22   http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wie/research/wreru/aboutus/research_projects/current/
      redco/communityofpractice.doc (accessed 5 Nov 2006)

researchers is undertaking studies in different educational settings and with different age groups of children and young people, designed to investigate the power of the interpretive approach to secure the necessary pedagogical description. These studies are focusing on different aspects of religious education pedagogy (for example, philosophy for children, assessment, dialogical religious education, community cohesion and religious education, beginning teacher education).

Conclusion

Although there has been some expansion of faith based schools, the vast majority of state-funded schools continue to be community schools. The approach to religious education in state community schools in England and Wales is open and liberal, intending neither to promote nor to erode faith. It could be said that the particular approach to multiculturalism to be found in the syllabuses (rather than in current Government rhetoric) reflects the particular history of civil religion in the UK, and Britain's particular history in becoming a multicultural society (Jackson, 2004). Religious education is thus potentially an arena for dialogue between pupils from different religious and secular backgrounds. The recent debate about 'multiculturalism' and Islam, initiated by the Government, including intemperate remarks from some Ministers, together with emotive and sensationalist stories representing Muslims in parts of the media (particularly some tabloid newspapers), show the vital importance of reasoned and informed discussion – tackling the issue of representing religions, for example – that can be fostered through religious education.

In relation to the above remarks about the importance of dialogue – and this is the argument of our chapter as a whole – the key challenge is to develop and document a truly hermeneutical religious education pedagogy. This links very closely to what we hope to achieve through the Warwick REDCo strand. We consider that the interpretive approach provides an appropriate pedagogical basis. Through our action research community of practice, we intend to illustrate the potential of the interpretive approach to draw together the different concerns of English religious educators since the 1960s, thus also addressing the need for more and better description of successful pedagogy than has been available to date. There ought to be impacts not just on classroom practice but also on teacher education and on policy.

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