

**Opening up the treasure box!**  
**New perspectives on curriculum intent**  
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What comes to mind when you think of treasure?

A collection of valuable objects, something which is much loved, something unique perhaps.

What comes to mind when you think about treasuring something?

Caring for something, handling something carefully, looking after something in a particularly special way perhaps....

Treasure comes from a Greek word which means a storehouse or treasure. It is where we get the word thesaurus, a storehouse of words.

So as RE professionals, what is in our treasure box? What is to be prized and valued? What is to be loved?

There are six particular jewels I want to pull out of the treasure box this morning.

**The first jewel is our own worldview.**

We all have a position, a worldview. As we go about our daily lives, we all bring unique interpretations based on our prior knowledge, positioning and experience to whatever we see around us. We are never neutral. This is very important in RE. Everything we encounter in life is interpreted. Life in my view is essentially hermeneutical. Let me give you an example. My husband and I were staying in a hotel in Kensington in London. On the wall was a large mural of dinosaurs. I brought my own prior knowledge and positioning to this- it made sense to me as the Natural History Museum was just up the road. My husband however said, 'what is that about... pointing at it...random or what?! His interpretation of his surrounding was based on different experiences and prior knowledge. Needless to say, I explained my understanding, which then changed how he viewed what was in front of him. We cannot but help interpret things around us. Let me give you a more RE example... Kate Christopher and I were chatting just before Christmas about our experiences of Christmas

songs and carols, particularly ones sung in primary schools... She mentioned one which says that Jesus sees the first Christmas tree, and I talked about the worrying line in Away in a manger which says Jesus didn't cry.... As theologians (among other things!) Kate and I brought our knowledge to this, and we started to discuss what interpretations of the birth of Jesus were being applied or implied here... Jesus clearly didn't see a Norwegian spruce when he was born, so is the composer saying that Jesus could see the whole world, or that he came for the whole world... or are we reading too much into it and does it really matter? Surely Jesus must have cried, he was a baby, so is the composer saying Jesus is unique, holy, innocent in some way by saying he didn't cry....? We bring our own interpretations to what we encounter.... Life is one hermeneutical circle! As we integrate new facts, information, knowledge into a meaningful whole.... This means that as teachers we are **more than what we do** in the classroom, as teachers it is also about **who** we are. We can find the roots of this in the term pedagogy, which is far more than just about teaching.

The origin of the word pedagogy, from the Greek means 'to lead a child' and was used in reference to the slave who escorted Greek children to school. Therefore, the term was synonymous with the person, as well as with what they did. The ontological nature of pedagogy is therefore implied in the earliest use of the term. Robin Alexander (2008) maintains that pedagogy is more than an act of teaching. He says in his 'Essays on pedagogy' that it includes the ideas, beliefs and values by which the act of teaching is informed, sustained and justified (2008, p,4).

Our worldview is part of who we are, this is a gift, a jewel, that we must acknowledge and own as teachers. There is a sense of vulnerability about this. I wrote about the vulnerability of conversation last term, if you are interested there is link on the screen

<https://www.cstg.org.uk/2019/11/the-power-of-conversation/>

I think that there is a similar sense here... yet it is one of the greatest treasures you have. I'm sure there are moments in RE lessons where you have been unexpectedly moved, why not tell pupils? This film, this text, this piece of art showed me something new... it challenged my own worldview... it made **me** think....

**This leads me nicely to my second jewel... the worldview of the pupil, the child, the**

## **young person...**

This is probably something that we are all aware of. Every child, every young person has a position. Their worldviews, their opinions are treasure. They also need to know that worldviews are fluid, that they are not static, they can change. One of the important aspects of treasuring the pupil's worldview is to understand that we all have to be intellectually open to the other... we acknowledge our own position, its fluidity and then create space for the other... Someone who is filled with ideas, concepts and opinions limits their ability to learn well. They do not have the space to listen or discover. An open mind, therefore, or as I prefer, a mind with space, is an essential starting point in RE.

**The jewel of your context. Your local context is a gift.** I remember Mary Myatt asking the NATRE Exec once, what does your local community give to you? So I'm asking what treasures does it offer? If your community is religiously diverse what gift does that offer? If it isn't, what gift might this offer instead? Your community is people, who have been gifted to you? Your community is spaces and buildings... what has been gifted to you? Your community is work-places, retail outlets, organizations, what has been gifted to you? Your community is the environment around you? What has been gifted to you – sea, woodland, parks, unusual architecture...? Your community is clubs, groups.... What has been gifted to you? What jewels, what gifts does your context bring?

These last two jewels, to me, are really important when schools think about their vision. A really good school vision is unique to its context. It considers its pupils and its context. A vision is bigger than the curriculum. This is really important. The curriculum intent is **one** way in which a school realizes its vision.

### **Questions:**

*What is your school's vision?*

*In what sense are you seeing your pupils' worldviews and your community as treasure?*

**So lets move on to some specifics around intent.**

**I want you to see the intent of the entire school curriculum as treasure!** Intent is simply what school leaders intend pupils to learn. Ofsted says good intent has the following features

- A curriculum that is ambitious for all pupils
- A curriculum that is coherently planned and sequenced

- A curriculum that is adapted, designed and developed for SEN pupils/particular needs
- A curriculum that is broad and balanced for all pupils

The key question is 'what do you want pupils to know?' This must obviously take into account the pupils themselves and their context! It must help to fulfil your vision as a school.

Surely a curriculum intent which is ambitious, coherent, broad and balanced is treasure to you! I think we all want RE to be ambitious, coherent, broad and balanced. It is treasure to us because **we** can exemplify this, **we** can showcase this through **our** subject. Which leads me nicely to the next jewel....

**Our subject of religious education, the study of religion and worldviews, is a prized jewel.** It is a jewel in the whole curriculum. Yes, I'm sure other subjects would say the same, but let's just think for a moment about what our subject actually offers. High-quality RE will support pupils' **religious literacy**. By religiously literate I mean mean that pupils will have the ability to hold balanced and well-informed conversations about religion and worldviews. Pupils will be able to make sense of religion and worldviews around them and begin to understand the complex world in which they live. RE is primarily about enabling pupils to become free thinking, critical participants of public discourse, who can make academically informed judgements about important matters of religion and belief which shape the global landscape. I should say I've largely quoted from the new Norfolk Agreed Syllabus here, but I think this 'offer' to our children and young people should apply to all RE. Our subject is to be highly prized, yes, it is treasure. It stirs, it moves, it transforms, we need to 'fall in love' with what our subject is really and truly about. We need to love our subject, and I mean love the depth and breadth of the body of knowledge and the methodologies it opens up for each pupil.... and by the way don't forget to get your love RE stickers from our stand later!

Most of you probably know that I believe we must ground our subject in its disciplinary roots, in particular in theology, philosophy and the human/social sciences. These disciplines offer an intellectual history/tradition which is manifested institutionally through higher education, a body of knowledge founded on core concepts and theories, particular objects of research/investigation, specific terminology and language to define and explain concepts, research methods and modes of enquiry. Each discipline has a specific stance towards the nature of reality and particular ways of validating knowledge. Each discipline has a group of

intellectual followers (academics) who conduct new research in that discipline and bring changes to it over time. For example,

*Theology is about asking questions that believers would ask. Pupils explore questions and answers that arise from inside religions and worldviews.*

*Philosophy is about asking questions that thinkers would ask. Pupils explore questions and answers raised through considering the nature of knowledge, existence and morality.*

*The Human/Social sciences are about asking questions that people who study lived reality or phenomena would ask. Pupils explore questions and answers raised in relation to the impact of religions and worldviews on people and their lives.*

Rooting our subject in the disciplines I believe, gives it status, it gives it credibility, it gives it parity. Let's shout about our subject and what it offers.

**Lastly, the sixth jewel is the curriculum we offer our pupils.** Are we offering the best stuff? Are we offering treasure, or are we offering what we have always done? Some 'relevant' stuff that will appeal to our pupils? Is our curriculum a bit like a plastic throwaway which is quick and easy, rather than offering the aspects of our subject which have substance, depth and quality? It's time to open the treasure box on curriculum....

Each of the different disciplines, theology, human/social sciences and so on offer their own treasures, their own bodies of knowledge as well as methodologies. If we use disciplinary lenses, they can provide a coherent and ambitious frame for determining what the curriculum looks like as well as the how we might study it...

Human/social science treasures include meeting and engaging with believers, like the EAB facility through REONLINE for example, as well as engaging with podcasts, vlogs, case studies, stories from believers, visiting places of worship, but also analyzing data such as pew research or the census.... The NATRE/University of Bristol Shared Space project promotes genuine interaction with members of different religions and worldviews

<https://www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/projects/the-shared-space-project/>

Philosophy treasures include taking seriously questions about reality, knowledge and existence. Using the process of reasoning and studying the works of great philosophers. Using dialogue, discussion and debate to refine the way in which we think about the world and our place in it.

Theology treasures include where beliefs come from, how they have changed over time, how they are applied differently in different contexts and how they relate to each other. Investigating key texts and traditions within different religions and worldviews, exploring the ways in which they have been used as authoritative for believers and the ways in which they have been challenged, interpreted and been disregarded over time. Some very specific treasures include the Cambridge 50 Treasures, and the British Library exhibition on Buddhism as well as its online resource of sacred texts.

<https://www.50treasures.divinity.cam.ac.uk>

[https://www.bl.uk/sacred-texts?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI6ZGSz9Sj5wIVDbTtCh12NwY-EAAYASAAEgJ4yPD\\_BwE](https://www.bl.uk/sacred-texts?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI6ZGSz9Sj5wIVDbTtCh12NwY-EAAYASAAEgJ4yPD_BwE)

I want to zoom in on some theological treasures for a moment...and in particular a project I worked on with the University of Cambridge. It is called Theologies of Reading. It brings together the different jewels I have spoken about today....

The work sprung from a series of seminars convened jointly between the divinity and English faculties which I attended for personal interest. It begins with a premise that reading is **not** merely about consumption, about getting content or acquiring information. Instead, it is interested in asking how reading concerns questions of meaning and truth. How should we understand the relationship between the reader and text?

It led to a joint piece of work between me at the time working as a consultant and the university to engage teachers with academic researchers in the field of theology and English. One teacher wrote a blog about his experience which is on REONLINE and you can also hear more about it from Jennifer in Seminar A9. We also have new resources available on REONLINE which went live yesterday. You can also pick up a PDF copy of the resource at our

stand. <https://www.reonline.org.uk/resources/theologies-of-reading-new-perspectives-on-pupil-engagement-with-texts-an-introduction/>

### **Why do I believe that Theologies of Reading truly opens up the treasure box?**

My worldview – Any reading of text acknowledges that a text is inert until we bring ourselves to it. An acknowledgement of our own worldview is inevitable, and vital. All reading is about interpretation.

Pupils worldviews – Thus, all pupils need to understand this! They bring themselves to a text and they interact with it based on their prior knowledge and experiences.

Context – what ‘readings’ does your community offer you and what does it need? Are there particular voices that need to be heard in your community? Are there texts that can be chosen carefully to support your school’s vision? E.g. texts which support diversity or inclusivity, texts which support cultural capital....

Intent of the curriculum – Texts may support the whole school curriculum intent... think carefully about which texts are going to support an ambitious curriculum? This is likely to be texts which provide some level of challenge and rigour... where pupils can engage critically as well as reflectively...

Love of subject – using the range of approaches that will help pupils become more effective readers of text... watch out for the wonderful work of Bob Bowie and friends also in seminar A9, as well as using recitation, midrash, translation, commentaries, prosody, lectio divina and so on. There is a methodology here for all.... Create a love of delving into texts... the resource on REONLINE explains all of these by the way.

Curriculum – it’s time to open the treasure box of texts and use some of the theology of reading methodologies to bring these jewels to our pupils. The new Norfolk Syllabus includes the following texts in its exemplar materials for Key Stage 2....

John’s Gospel Chapter 1, as well as Jesus’ prayer for his disciples in John 16....

Excerpts from the Old Testament including Genesis, prophets and Psalm 8

Excerpts from the Quran and Hadith

The Ramayana

The Sikh Mool Mantra

Plato's analogy of the cave

Excerpts from the works of St Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine

Excerpts from the work of Descartes, David Hume, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill

So, we return to the Intent question.... Don't we all want RE to be ambitious, coherent, broad and balanced.... If so, we first need to find the treasure box and then we need to open it!!

*So what is in your treasure box? I wanted to give you some treasure to take away! We looked at midget gems to eat, but they aren't vegan friendly so instead we have had to go with some nice bright vegan friendly sweets which you can imagine are gems! Take the bag, take out a 'gem' and tell the person next to you which jewel or gem you are going to get out of the treasure box after today! Then pass the bag down the row... share your jewels! And in a minute or two I'll give you my final reflections.*

If '**Five on a Treasure Island**' is anything to go by, then the search for the treasure box itself may not be easy. It will take time, energy and commitment. The children work together as a team... we need to work together as a community. We may find like the children that our treasure map is stolen from us, or people try to grab the treasure out of our hands or try and 'lock it away'.... However, like Enid Blyton (1942) I'm a happy ending sort of person.... for some of you today you have the map so go and find the treasure, team up, work with others.... For others of you who already have your treasure box.... now is the time to open it!

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