CULHAM ST GABRIEL FUNDED PROJECT@ UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION: **PRACTITIONER RESEARCH IN PRIMARY RE**

Helen Rivers

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In this session….

Emma (12 mins)

Overview of our research project and the communities of practice approach

Helen (15 mins)

Using Religious Texts in Primary RE lessons

Your questions and further discussion (8 mins)

Our questions for you…….

- Do teachers face barriers in their use of religious texts in RE? If so, what and why?
- What types of resources do you use for teaching about scripture / religious texts?
- What types of resources would you like at your fingertips?
- What needs researching in RE?

Project description and aims….

Meta-level
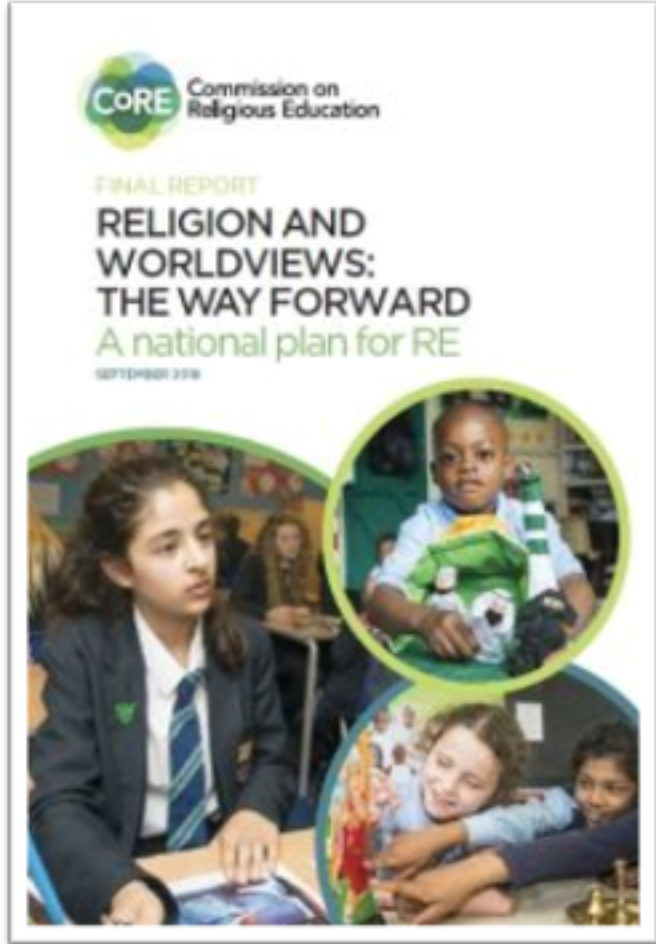**Understanding Primary RE teachers' experiences of practitioner-research**.
Research has shown the toughest barriers to practitioner research are "structural conditions", normally in the workplace. St Clair et al's findings categorise these barriers into three core areas: **time**, **funds** and **support** (2009:177,187).
The project steps on from St Clair et al's findings to understand how supportive conditions for practitioner research can be implemented to mitigate structural and other barriers.

We want to find out the benefits, if any, teachers gain from practitioner-research.
And, what are the best ways to support teachers in practitioner-research.

Macro-level
Can CoRE's criteria for a National Entitlement and Big Ideas for Religious Education synthesise as meaningful curriculum and pedagogy in Primary RE?

Commission on Religious Education

FINAL REPORT

RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS: THE WAY FORWARD
A national plan for RE

SEPTEMBER 2018

THE NATIONAL ENTITLEMENT TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS (September 2018)

All pupils are entitled to be taught Religion and Worldviews in every year up to and including year 11. Post-16 students, including those in Further Education should have the opportunity to study Religion and Worldviews during their post-16 course of study.

9 criteria for teaching and curriculum design (pp. 12-13).

Big Ideas are generalised summaries of what we want students to understand by the end of their RE in school. They are common destinations, which can be reached by many alternative routes. Because Big Ideas describe what we want students to understand, they frame the questions that lead to that understanding.
Big Ideas perform a similar role in students' learning as concepts in that they are '<u>pegs' on which students can hang the myriad pieces of knowledge they acquire over the years of RE study in order to make sense of them</u>.
For example, students learning about the creation stories in Genesis will probably 'hook' them to Big Idea 5 and Big Idea 6. This takes them way beyond the customary activity of illustrating the six days of creation to an understanding that in Judaism and Christianity these stories should not be learnt in isolation, but understood as the beginning of grand narratives that explain theories of the origin and destiny of the universe and where humanity stands in those narratives. (p10)

BIG IDEA 5 INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER Religious and non-religious worldviews interact with wider communities and cultures. They affect the way communities have come to identify themselves over time by shaping their traditions, laws, political systems, festivals, values, rituals and the arts. The patterns of influence vary significantly in different communities and at different points in time. Some communities are influenced predominantly by one religion. More diverse and plural communities are influenced by several religious and non-religious worldviews. Their appeal to a highly respected authority or vision, whether religious or non-religious can lead them to make positive and life-changing contributions to their communities. It can also give them considerable power, which may lead to both positive and negative outcomes.
BIG IDEA 6 THE BIG PICTURE Religions and non-religious worldviews provide comprehensive accounts of how and why the world is as it is. These accounts are sometimes called 'grand narratives'. They seek to answer the big questions about the universe and the nature of humanity such as 'Does anything exist beyond the natural world?', 'Is there life beyond death?', 'What is the path to salvation?' and 'Do we have one physical life or many?'. These narratives are usually based on approaches to life, texts or traditions, which are taken to be authoritative. People interpret and understand these traditions in different ways. (p15)

BIG IDEAS
FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
Edited by Barbara Wintersgill

Six Projects	National Entitlement	Big Ideas
Contribution of study-visits to pupils' knowledge, understanding and memory in RE	1 + 5	2 + 4
Teachers use of texts and stories in RE, focusing on Sikhi and Islam	5 + 9	2 + 6
Pupils' engagement in multi-arts RE classes	5 + 9	2
'Spirituality' in the curriculum: pupils' perspectives	2	2 + 4
The new Ofsted framework in Primary Schools: Head teachers' responses to how CoRE's National Entitlement can help.	All	-
Can Big Ideas can enhance a LA syllabus?	1, 2, 9	1, 3, 4

CoRE's NATIONAL ENTITLEMENT
Pupils must be taught…
1. about matters of central importance to the worldviews studied, how these can form coherent accounts for adherents, and how these matters are interpreted in different times, cultures and places
2. about key concepts including 'religion', 'secularity', 'spirituality' and 'worldview', and that worldviews are complex, diverse and plural
5. the role of religious and non-religious ritual and practices, foundational texts, and of the arts, in both the formation and communication of experience, beliefs, values, identities and commitments
9. the different ways in which religion and worldviews can be understood, interpreted and studied, including through a wide range of academic disciplines and through direct encounter and discussion with individuals and communities who hold these worldviews.

BIG IDEA 1 CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY Religions and non-religious worldviews involve interconnected patterns of beliefs, practices and values. They are also highly diverse and change in response to new situations and challenges. These patterns of diversity and change can be the cause of debate, tension and conflict or result in new, creative developments.

BIG IDEA 2 WORDS AND BEYOND Many people find it difficult to express their deepest beliefs, feelings, emotions and religious experiences using everyday language. Instead, they may use a variety of different approaches including figurative language and a range of literary genres. In addition, people use non-verbal forms of communication such as art, music, drama and dance that seek to explain or illustrate religious or non-religious ideas or experiences. There are different ways of interpreting both verbal and non-verbal forms of expression, often depending on a person's view of the origin or inspiration behind them. The use of some non-verbal forms of communication is highly controversial within some religious groups, particularly their use in worship or ritual.

BIG IDEA 3 A GOOD LIFE Many religions and non-religious communities strive to live according to what they understand as a good life. Their members share an understanding as to the sort of characteristics and behaviours a good person will seek to achieve, as well as dealing with what is, or is not, acceptable moral behaviour. People have different ideas about how and why we should lead a good life. The ideal is usually presented in the lives and character of exemplary members. There maybe considerable agreement across different religions and non-religious worldviews on some matters, and considerable differences on others. Also, there are often major disagreements over the interpretation and application of moral principles between members of the same religion or worldview.

BIG IDEA 4 MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S EXPERIENCES Many people have deeply felt experiences, which they may refer to as being religious or spiritual or simply part of what it means to be human. These experiences may result in people undergoing transformative change and on rare occasions the experience of a single person has led to the formation of a new religion or worldview. Through religious rituals and other practices, people sometimes experience a deep connection with God or gods, nature, their own consciousness or with each other. This can give them a heightened sense of awareness and mystery. Many people find that belonging to religious or non-religious groups with others who share their beliefs, values and traditions gives them a sense of identity and belonging.

BIG IDEA 6 THE BIG PICTURE Religions and non-religious worldviews provide comprehensive accounts of how and why the world is as it is. These accounts are sometimes called 'grand narratives'. They seek to answer the big questions about the universe and the nature of humanity such as 'Does anything exist beyond the natural world?', 'Is there life beyond death?', 'What is the path to salvation?' and 'Do we have one physical life or many?'. These narratives are usually based on approaches to life, texts or traditions, which are taken to be authoritative. People interpret and understand these traditions in different ways.

methodology + methods (meta-level)

Teachers as problem-makers: Prioritising teacher agency
Maximising teachers' agency in the selection, planning and enactment of Practitioner Research (PR) in their schools. In PR when teachers are solvers-of-problems that have been already identified elsewhere they become reliant on others, such as academics, as 'experts' (Gerwitz et al. 2009, 570). Whereas, if teachers are 'problem-makers' who problematising their own and others' taken-for-granted assumptions, then they become active in research through engaging in critical dialogue (Davis et al, 2009; Newman & Leggett, 2019). (Salter + Tett, Journal of Education for Teaching; forthcoming).

Communities of Practice (CoP)
'*a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly*'. Key features: regular sharing of information; members helping each other to solve problems and explore ideas; members being bound by the value they find in learning together (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002, 22). These features lead to high standards of shared practice giving structure to social learning within the community promoting '*practitioner-led learning and peer-to peer support*' (Haworth 2019, 168) […] and construction of '*situated knowledge*' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) through individuals connecting within their specific social and cultural contexts. (Salter + Tett, Journal of Education for Teaching; forthcoming).

Methods of data collection:
Teachers' individual reflective diaries
Focus group discussions
Individual interviews

Preliminary findings (meta-level): Forming a community of practice

The three dimensions developed by Wenger-Trayner (2015) show how the group formed a community of practice that sustained their engagement in Practitioner Research.

1) **Shared domain of interest in RE**. Teachers regarded RE as a neglected area of the curriculum, so welcomed the opportunity to engage with other teachers also passionate about it. They valued each others' existing competence and were open to learning from each other. They considered their expertise to be validated by the group in ways not usually recognised in broader educational communities, which led to a shared confidence in the importance of RE. Teachers were energised by fostering the common goal of enhancing the learning experiences of pupils, which highlight the potential of PR for teachers' professional development and satisfaction.

2) **Becoming a community.** The teachers engaged in meaningful discussions about their practice, helped each other and shared information about their teaching. They built relationships that enabled them to learn together and from each other. They valued the expertise that each brought to their communal discussions. They demonstrated partnership working through joint exploration of the RE curriculum and by providing mutual support for the ideas they developed together; especially through discussing their actual practices and exploring the curricular constraints they were working within.

3) **Shared practice.** Through their sustained interaction in the CoP teachers shared professional experiences, methods of teaching, evaluation of their practice, and ways of addressing problems. They developed ideas about engaging pupils in RE that have the potential to become a shared repertoire for their practice. This required investment of time and energy into researching teaching and learning approaches collaboratively and creating contextually appropriate practices, so that they could become a team with potential to influence change in RE.

some further preliminary findings (meta-level)

Learning through research: from the early stages, participating in the project impacted on teachers' academic and professional thinking. Engaging with research that others had done, and sharing the research that they planned to do, encouraged teachers to adopt a more evaluative stance towards their own and others' professional practice. Teachers experienced personal development through sharing their ideas within the group which promoted self-discovery and self-awareness as they learnt more about themselves and others.

Finding time for PR: teachers created time for PR motivated the opportunity to engage in debate and reflection about how RE might be better understood in the wider education community. They were driven by the expectation that the practical interventions they were researching would make positive contributions to RE in their schools motivating them to prioritise their research. Teachers made time for PR because they were motivated by their mutual commitment to each other for their research and for broader professional support and well-being.

Critical reflection: teachers had to take on new roles as beginning researcher-teachers and engage in critical reflection on some of their taken-for-granted practices. The university setting provided a safe space for reflection due to the supportive group they were part of. This allowed for collegial conversations about learning and teaching that led to an enhanced confidence about the possibilities of pursuing their own research into the issues that interested them.

MESSAGES WRAPPED IN WORDS

Using Religious Texts in Primary RE lessons

Natalie Mason and Helen Rivers

What's the problem?

- We were aware from professional conversations that some teachers lacked confidence in using textual material from faiths other than Christianity; there is a perceived lack of resources for working with religious texts

- Scriptures are used as an artefact rather than as text, and there is some tension around correct/acceptable ways to approach religious texts

What did we do?

Research questions

1. Which religions/scriptures do Primary teachers draw on most frequently and why?

2. What types of resources/training do Primary teachers say they need to feel confident in using scriptural texts for (i) Islam, and (ii) Sikhi?

Methods of data collection

Two focus groups at existing local RE Networks

Teachers gave permission for discussions to be used in research

We presented our key questions and asked teachers to discuss and make notes in groups

What did we discover?

Data analysis took a thematic approach.

- **What do teachers already do?**

Texts used reflected the texts in RE syllabus

- **Where are they confident?**

More comfortable with stories/DVDs rather than scripture – seen as 'dry'; used scripture as artefact

- **Where are they less confident?**
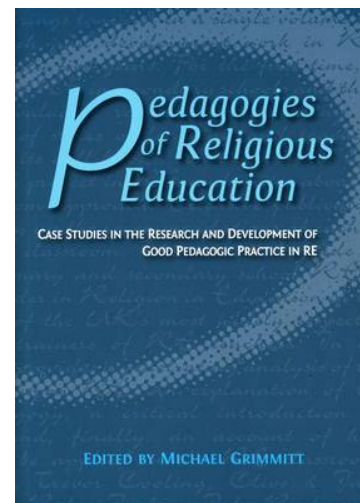
Did not want to cause offence in their use of text

- **What did they want/need?**

Happy to try something different, but wanted reliable/authoritative resources and some background information

Text and RE Pedagogy

- Pedagogy = 'a theory of teaching, encompassing aims, curriculum content and methodology'

- A clear pedagogy of RE should '*resolve some of the perennial issues and difficulties which arise when education and religion are brought into a relationship within the context of a secular education system*' Grimmitt (2000)

RE Pedagogy? - or 'a range of acceptable approaches'? (Stern)

Pedagogies of Religious Education

CASE STUDIES IN THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF GOOD PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE IN RE

EDITED BY MICHAEL GRIMMITT

Hermeneutics

- '*the art of understanding and of making oneself understood*' (Zimmerman, 2015)

- Promoting an open-ended response - not pre-determined e.g. by thematic title.

- Critical engagement with scripture – can also be transformative for people of faith. Taking '*intelligent delight*' in the text (Petriano, 2017).

- Pupils should be introduced to the '*settled understanding*' of the text (Bowie) – this reflects deeper meanings established over time and in context; subject knowledge.

Jens Zimmermann

HERMENEUTICS
A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD
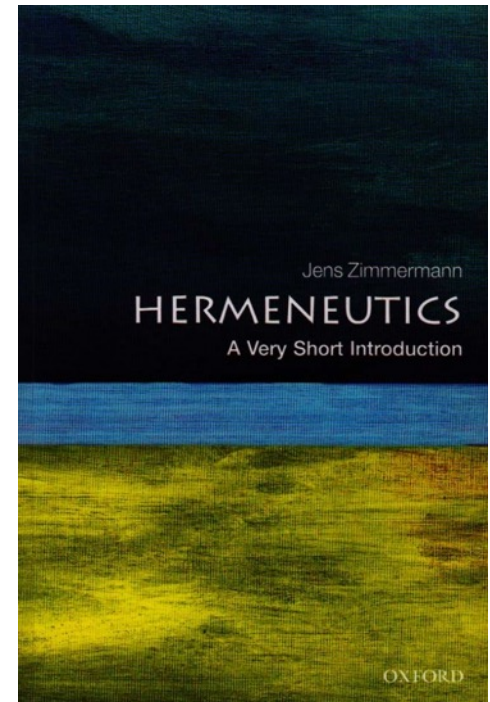
Recommendations:

- Primary pupils should be able access and interpret religious texts (as they do in English)

- Training for primary RE teachers needed – to increase confidence

- Pedagogical model for teaching religious text – Primary focus

- If resource material is based on clear principles, the pedagogical model embedded in the resources

Reflections on conducting teacher-research
Improved teacher agency through research and reflective practice
Impact on wider Primary RE community