Epistemic Insight

RExChange Session K:

Big Questions and Epistemic Insight in the Classroom

Prof Berry Billingsley and Mina Cullimore

Starter:

Think of a 'big question' that has been key in your recent RE classroom discussions

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The Epistemic Insight Initiative

The EI Initiative builds on research that says that

the system of education (i.e. the way school works and the pedagogical habits of teachers)

is having an ***unintended consequence*** for ***how children think about the nature of knowledge*** –

in relation to thinking about real world problems and Big Questions

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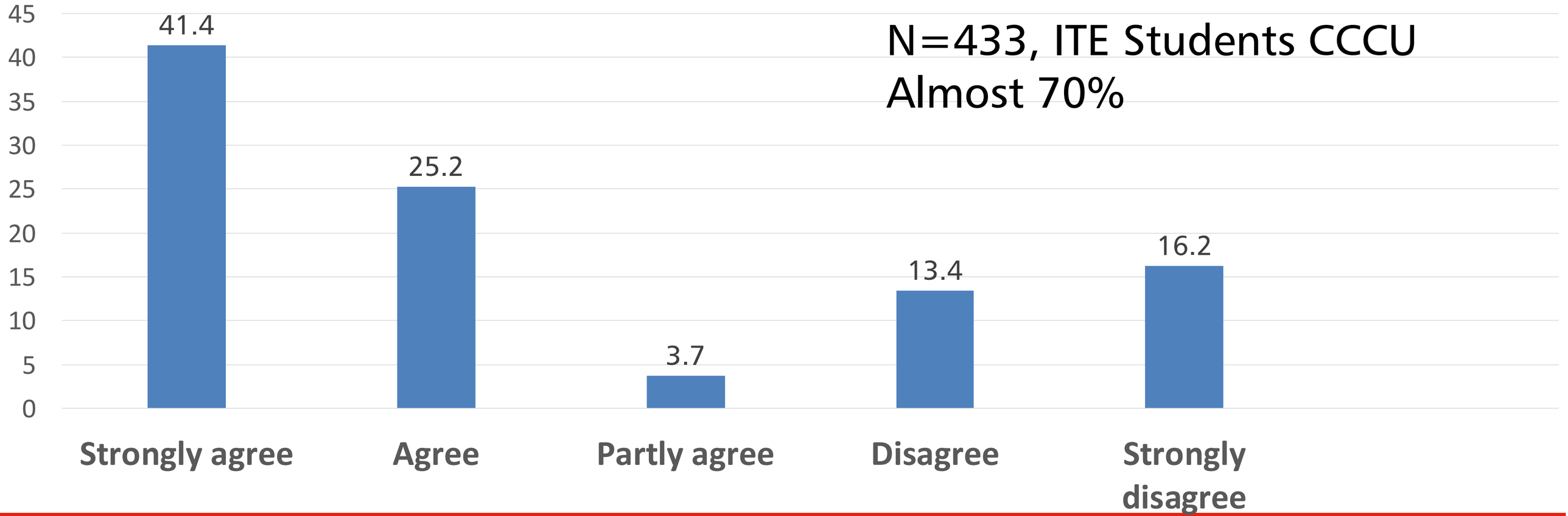
Entrenched compartmentalisation

In secondary school, I never had a lesson where teachers from two separate subjects taught a lesson together



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Developing Knowledge

- How do we gain knowledge?
- Does knowledge change over time?
- Can different disciplines provide complementary (but different) types of knowledge about the same question?

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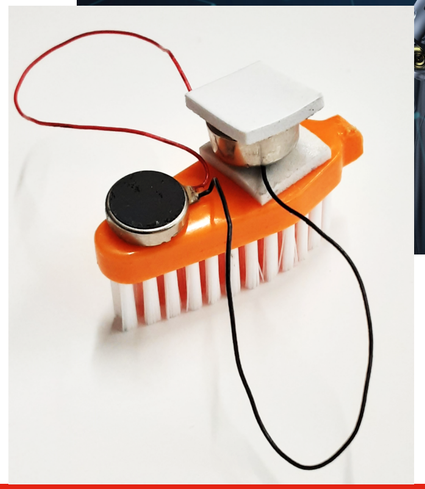
The Epistemic Insight

In primary and secondary – talking about questions and how we frame and investigate them is overshadowed by an emphasis on knowledge and answers.

Science is 'good at this' – but the answers it provides are only to very small precise questions. Religion asks Big Questions that often do not have simple agreed-upon answers.

This key point is overlooked in primary school. It is missed out by secondary school students because each area of enquiry begins and ends as they walk in and out of the classroom door.



Following the science?

Scientists criticise UK government's 'following the science' claim

Ministers accused of abdicating political duty to narrow field of opaque expertise on Covid-19

Coronavirus - latest updates

See all our coronavirus coverage

The Guardian, 23 May 2020

Prof. Devi Sridhar (Chair Global Public Health, University of. Edinburgh):

'As a scientist, I hope I never again hear the phrase "based on the best science and evidence" spoken by a politician'

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Real world problems

How does EI address this?

LEARNING OUTCOMES	Relationships between science and religion	The nature of science in real world contexts and multidisciplinary arenas	Ways of knowing and how they interact
UPPER PRIMARY	Science and religion are mostly concerned with different types of questions, including different types of why question.	Science begins with observations of the natural world and constructing ways to explain our observations. Some methods are more scientific than others.	Science has some similarities and some differences with other ways of knowing that we learn about in school.
LOWER SECONDARY	Today we ask big questions about human personhood and the nature of reality that bridge science and religion. Some people say that science and religion are compatible and some people say they are not.	Science informs our thinking about every aspect of our lives. Some questions are more amenable to science than others. There are some questions that science hasn't yet and may never be able to answer.	A school is a multidisciplinary arena. Different disciplines have different preferred questions, methods and norms of thought.
UPPER SECONDARY	Science and religion are not necessarily incompatible.	Scientism is not a necessary presupposition of science.	Some questions are more metaphysically sensitive than others.

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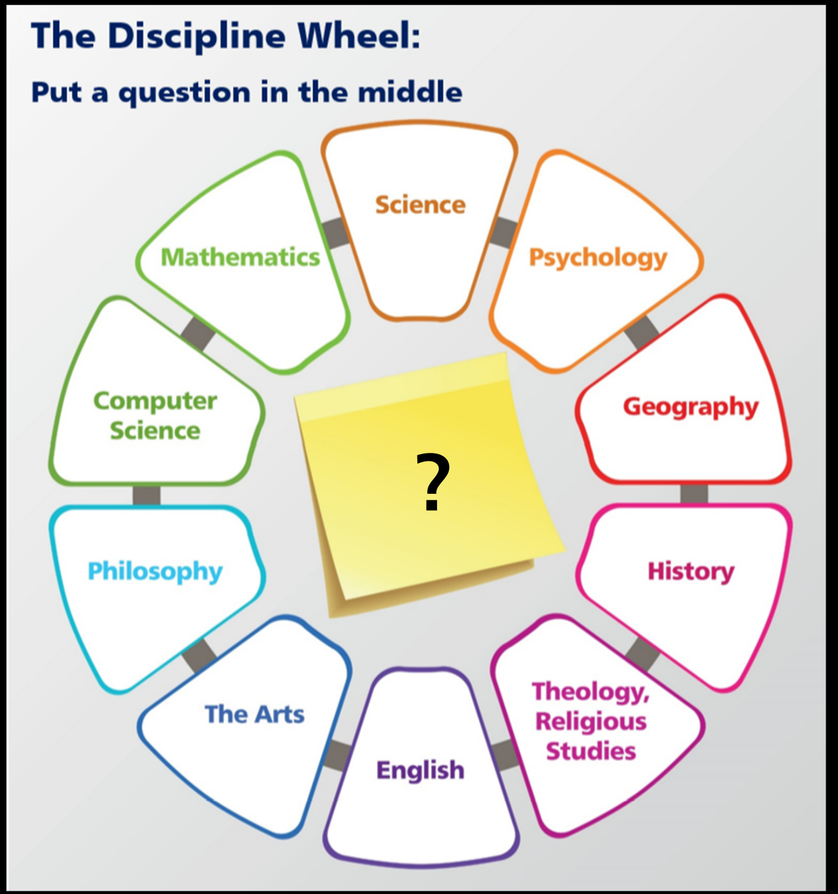
A Pedagogical approach
The distinctiveness of disciplines

Using an EI tool, e.g. this Discipline Wheel, students engage in scholarly enquiry in our lessons, exploring:

- ❑ What are the characteristics, strengths and limitations of a discipline or area of knowledge?
- ❑ How do disciplines interact to inform our thinking about different types of questions?
- ❑ Why does it matter how a question is framed?
- ❑ What are a disciplines preferred questions, methods and norms of thought?

Let's use an example…

you could use your own question from the starter or one of the ones here…



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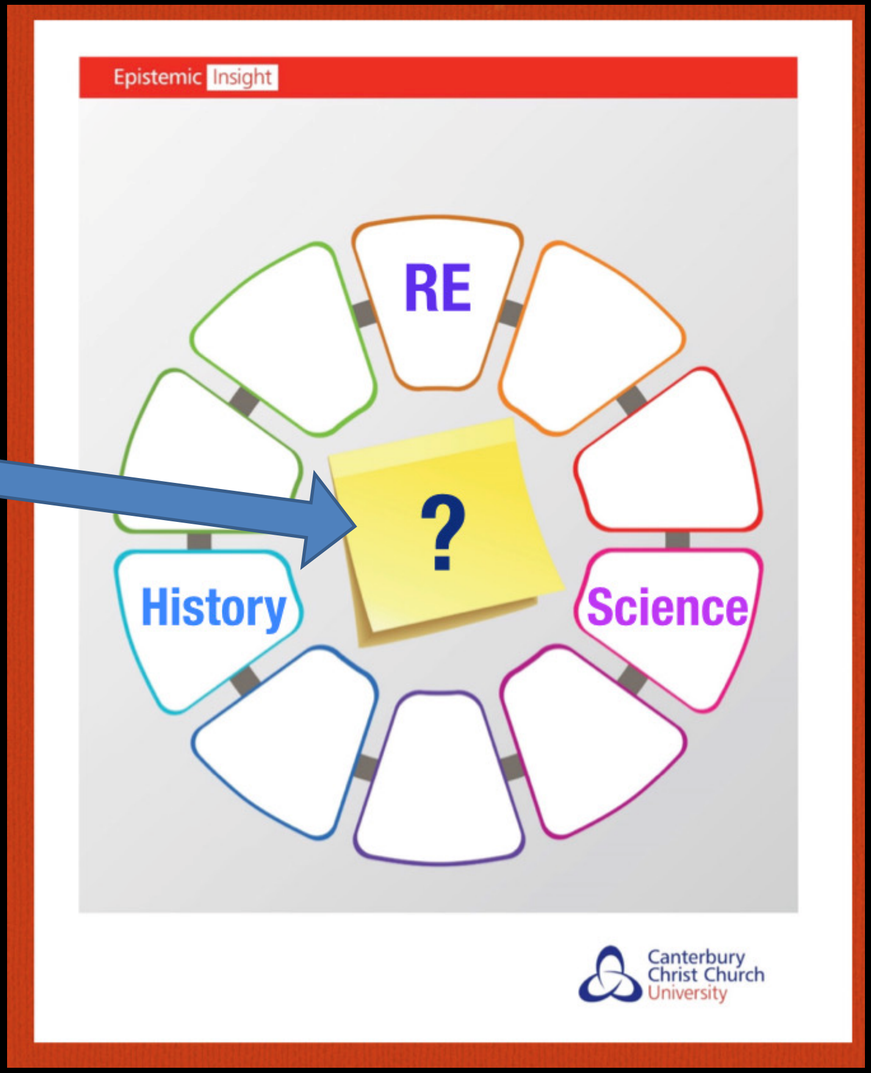
Using Epistemic Insight Tools

We can use big and bridging questions

What gives value, meaning and purpose to human life?

What is freedom?

Why do we experience suffering?



What makes a human?

What is the role and value of face coverings?

What do we mean by personhood? Can a robot/AI be a person?

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Permeable Walls @ KS3

Schools are taking part in an action-research project ‘Permeable Walls’

Bespoke materials, staff CPD, surveys and reports prepared by our EI team help to evidence the testing and efficacy of interventions

To find out more and take part contact lasar@canterbury.ac.uk