



It has long been recognised in the world of RE that primary trainee teachers have insufficient input (in terms of time allocated) in RE. Just knowing and understanding something of the subject matter of religious traditions and non-religious worldviews is massive enough without factoring in developing an approach to teaching and learning in the subject. Coupled with that is the common suspicion held by even some of our teacher colleagues in other curriculum areas about the suitability of the subject in today's world. Here Ruth describes an interesting approach designed to enable intending primary teachers to see the value of curriculum RE.



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Mission Impossible 2: training the next generation of RE teachers in four hours! Ruth Flanagan

Introduction

RE has faced a number of challenges in recent times, including reported confusion over its purpose, pedagogy and the subject's presence outside the National Curriculum (for example, Ofsted 2013). Judith Everington's article 'Mission Impossible?' (2000) noted some challenges for RE in the 1990s, including attempting to reconcile very differing aims for RE into a single coherent approach. The introduction of two attainment targets, learning about and from religions), attempted to reconcile these differing aims; yet these again proved problematic (Heze 2010). As the Mission Impossible franchise churns out another film, *Mission Impossible 6*, so RE in primary schools is faced with another impossible task: how to realise the potential of the subject when training of teachers is limited and patchy.

The Ofsted RE report (2013) concluded that RE has not 'realised the potential' of the subject and highlighted lack of subject knowledge and poor training as key factors:

Discussion with newly qualified or recently qualified primary teachers confirmed that very few had had any significant RE training during their initial training and sometimes had had little opportunity to teach RE in their placement schools (2013, p. 18).

On average, a primary trainee teacher receives less than three hours of training in RE on a PGCE or Schools Direct one-year course (NAATRE and RE Council 2017).

Teachers that I have interviewed for my research had training on their Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses dedicated to RE ranging from two to ten hours. The NAATRE and RE Council joint statement on RE (2017) called for:

o guarantee that all one-year primary Initial Teacher Training (ITT) students receive a minimum of 12 hours of subject-specific training in religious education.

Trainee worldview identification

As a lecturer of primary humanities in the Graduate School of Education at Exeter University, I faced the task of training PGCE students to teach RE in only four hours.

I wrestled with what would enable the trainees to understand the purpose, role and nature of RE to equip them to teach what is often all a compulsory subject. Some students raised objections to teaching 'numb jumbo myths to children' and questioned the role of RE in schools. They demonstrated negotiatively towards the subject and had no desire to 'learn from' religions (see also McCreery's research findings 2000, 2005). The challenge was then to prepare the trainees to teach pupils to 'learn from' religions. As I worked with the trainees I noted that individual worldviews and the narratives that had formed these played a significant role in the trainees' attitudes towards RE. In the main the trainees held aspects of secular humanist worldviews and struggled to see the relevance of RE today. The life narratives of those who objected ranged from secular backgrounds to those who attended faith schools and objected to confessional modes of teaching RE.

Working through the process of worldview identification enabled the students to articulate clearly and understand their issues with RE. The students became aware of aspects of their worldviews and the impact this was having on their lack of enthusiasm to teach RE.

A further trend noted by Revell and Walters (2010), who interviewed students from three universities, was that students without a faith allegiance saw their position as neutral and therefore not impacting their teaching. Revell and Walters (2010, pp. 26–27) recommended that agnosticism and atheism be seen as identifiable belief systems rather than a neutral stance.

I reasoned that all trainees needed to understand that they have worldviews that are continually forming and highly influenced by a plethora of views from their life experiences and social, economic, political backgrounds, etc. This would

hopefully aid them in understanding why others may have completely different worldviews from their own. Reducing RE, as I have often observed in schools, to a study of outward behaviours such as clothing, food and festivals is problematic. Examining worldviews would enable trainees to engage with the depth of faith rather than focusing on the outward expressions of faith.

Therefore, various activities and tools were designed to enable students to excavate aspects of their worldviews as a pre-requisite to fulfil the aim of preparing them to teach RE effectively.

Investigating the purpose of RE

Confusion surrounding the purpose, nature and focus of RE coupled with the lack of specific pedagogy for RE creates a further degree of difficulty for the task. Indeed, the RE ONLINE website (www.reonline.org.uk/knowing/why-re) has attempted to assist teachers in identifying eight possible rationales for teaching RE. These I employed with the trainees to discuss together and then for them to choose one or two with which they agreed:

- The Faith Rationale
- The Whole Person Rationale
- The Scholarly Rationale
- The Academic Rationale
- The Human Development Rationale
- The Social Improvement Rationale
- The Cultural Heritage Rationale
- The Omission Rationale

This activity provided each of them with a rationale for teaching RE that I hoped would enable them to engage and be more enthusiastic towards the subject. Teachers' attitudes towards a subject have been identified as having an impact on their teaching practice. Indeed, teachers' enthusiasm for a subject may impact their decisions, teaching methods and the significance with which they weight the subject (Resnick 1989, Richardson 1996, Tillema 2000). Thus, enabling the trainees to have a rationale for why they were teaching the subject might mitigate against this.



Deciphering the nature of worldviews

In introducing worldviews to the trainees I acknowledged the range of definitions employed across disciplines and chose to employ a definition that recognised the 'bricolage' nature (Kooij et al. 2013) of individuals' worldviews that have evolved dynamically to produce a framework of reference to make sense of the world (Aerts et al. 2007). In attempting to identify and examine some aspects of the trainees' worldviews I referred to current research.

A great deal of research and initial Teacher Education involves reflection and reflexivity through reflective journals or blogs, vignettes, questionnaires, etc. (Jorram 2007, Kyles and Olofsson 2008, Kanning 2008, Schrau et al. 2002, Thomas and Beuchamp 2011, Chen and Huang 2017). Yet this has sometimes merely reinforced misconceptions and bias rather than necessarily unearthing them (Korthagen and Wubbels 1995, Kyles and Olofsson 2008). A further methodological tool that has been trialled in attempting to identify aspects of an individual's worldview is the use of photographic images (Douis and Stockall 2011). Douis and Stockall (2011) conducted research that aimed to uncover pre-service teachers' beliefs about young children. They employed photo elicitation in in-depth interviews. They discovered that this method was useful in eliciting 'entrenched students' current beliefs about children rather than provoking doubt or reflective practice' and provided a richness of data but concluded that 'dialogue is not enough to actually induce change' (2011, p. 192). My focus was on elicitation rather than change, so building on this I employed Mezirow's (2000) 'disorienting dilemmas' concept of transformative learning. This refers to an experience of disorientation that may challenge an individual's norms, beliefs or values. Thus, by examining photographic images that were potentially disorienting, subconscious aspects of worldviews (beliefs, values and norms) might be revealed. I therefore employed a range of photographs, which had the potential to be disorientating, in an attempt to challenge/reveal aspects of the trainees' worldviews.

The next activity involved discussing and answering a range of moral dilemmas. These were then placed on concentric circles where the trainees attempted to unpack the values and beliefs behind these possible behaviours. Discussion ensued as to the fact that behaviours could be the same for very different values and beliefs and conversely the same belief could be expressed through very different behaviour. Thus whilst identifying aspects of their own worldviews this additionally provides the students with a model of how to examine beneath the surface rather than stop at behaviour and practice alone.

Practical tools to investigate worldviews further

To further identify aspects of worldviews we employed Volk's (2009) Selçuk and Volk (2012) framework tool, referring to his ultimate questions:

Framework	Components
	Meaning/purpose
	Responsibilities/obligations
	Discerning right/wrong
	Righting our wrongs
	Greater force/power/being
	Eschatos: life after this life

Figure 1

Questions for each category were placed on an A3 sheet of paper (Figure 2) and the students attempted to answer the questions for themselves.

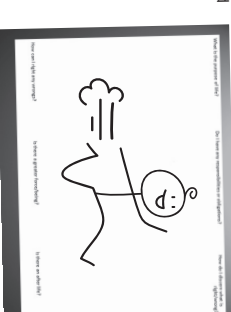


Figure 2

As the student filled out their own they reflected on whether they could answer these questions and what challenges they faced in the process. This activity was extended to placing photos of pupils of different faiths in the centre and attempting to see how they might answer these questions – this is where lack of subject knowledge became apparent. However, this activity provided the trainees with a possible starting point for investigating a faith, for what subject knowledge is useful to develop understanding. In the search for possible answers students realised that for many, within the same faith, questions may be answered differently. This enabled them to see that there is no one 'Christian worldview' or 'Muslim worldview'. Rather there is a range of embodied worldviews that individuals personally who may or may not adhere to a faith.

The exercise provides them with a point of similarity in which they can understand where faith may answer questions differently from their own answers but may be a valid answer for that individual. Thus the teaching of religions becomes less an exotic subject about which the trainees lack understanding but more an understanding that, for some, religions answer their ultimate questions and form their worldviews – a shared human response to life's questions and experiences.

Mission possible?

In conclusion, while acknowledging the impossibility of training teachers of RE in only four hours, I would contend that examination of individuals' worldviews is a crucial starting point. Worldview studies, whilst not replacing RE, becomes a vehicle to enable trainees in a predominantly secular notion to effectively relate to, understand and teach the subject of RE.

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