

Transitions from religious education (RE) to Religion and Worldviews: developments and perspectives three years on from the final report of the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE)

The purpose of this panel session is to present, and prompt discussion of, developments in thinking about the school subject RE since the publication of the final report of the Commission on RE (CoRE) in September 2018. The essence of the report is advocacy of a transition from RE to Religion and Worldviews, with emphases including these: worldview as a concept overcoming religion-nonreligion binaries; lived experience, increasing diversity and hybridity. The report's wide-ranging nature has meant intensive follow-up debate in the RE / Religion and Worldviews subject community. Some of the key questions are addressed in the session presentations: in Religion and Worldviews, what are the disciplinary boundaries to be drawn and choices to be made? How are religion and religions to be represented? What educational benefits are offered to pupils? How does the subject (or how would any re-iteration of it) relate to basic educational purposes?

One Discipline, many methods: Disciplinary Futures for Religion and Worldviews (RE) for students aged 5-19

Denise Cush

Professor Emeritus, Bath Spa University, Member of the Commission on RE 2016-2018.

Since the publication of the CoRE report in 2018, there has been much discussion of the concept of ‘disciplinary knowledge’ and of which academic disciplines underpin the school subject RE/RS/RWV (e.g. Kueh, 2020; Georgiou and Wright, 2020; Wintersgill 2019; Freathy et al 2019). Against most of these contributions, I argue for the simple answer that the obvious academic discipline is one – Study of Religions, or to reflect both the contested nature of the category ‘religion’ and the increasing attention paid to ‘non-religion’, Study of Religion and Worldviews. I argue that this is a discipline in its own right, however (to use Smart’s term), it is polymethodic, drawing upon, but not exhausted by, many other academic disciplines. 21st century RE/Religion and Worldviews in the UK needs to build upon CoRE, the Worldviews Project and the Big Ideas project to construct a vibrant and memorable curriculum which is both academically rigorous and personally inspiring, providing students with the knowledge and skills they need not only for the few who choose SR at university, but transferable to the many situations in which they will find themselves in in later life, both professional and personal.

Aspects? Approaches? Content?

Professor Anthony Towey

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While post-CORE emphasis on *approaches* to RE rather than *content* may be welcomed, I argue that practitioners and theorists should remain mindful of at least three particular educational *aspects* of the subject when re-imagining curricula.

a) **‘Othering’**. (Orientalism) From evidence gathering across the country with the Commission, one of the key pedagogical contributions RE can make is sensitising

students to the whole issue of “othering” and their own positionality. Profiling this aspect as an educational aim conducive to societal cohesion neither instrumentalizes the subject nor subverts its broader remit.

b) **“Transcendence”** Between the Interim and Final Reports of CORE. this aspect of the subject became obscured. Pedagogically, transcendence is not unique to RE and subjects such as Music Art Literature, Science all have aesthetic power. That said, the proposals of religion almost by nature trespass the transcendent which, however inarticulately, forms part of our life experience,

c) **“Paradox”** - lastly, the study of religion requires an encounter with the reconciliation of opposites - whether this be in terms of concepts of mystery, marvel, mercy, or mundanity. Again, this aspect of human cognition is present in other subjects but is an aspect of RE relevant to educational maturation.

Epistemic and Personal Awareness - Challenging Disciplinary and Personal Knowledge in the Study of Religion and Worldviews

Dr Martha Shaw

London South Bank University

The CoRE report and REC Worldviews Project present a game-change in RE. I argue that two features in particular are fundamental to the study of religion and worldviews at school level. The first is the explicit focus on the study of the categorisation of religion, which includes a challenging of reductionist and essentialist representations. As well as broadening the subject content, this suggests a deconstruction of traditional ‘ways of knowing’ so that pupils understand ‘knowledge’ as interpretation. This ‘epistemic awareness’ is central to pupils’

capacity for criticality and contributes to the academic rigour of the subject. The second stand out feature of the worldviews approach is reflexivity. As a school subject, Religion and Worldviews is part of the broader education of the child. Rather than understanding this in terms of personal development or socialisation, a worldviews approach draws on philosophical hermeneutics to bring the pupil into dialogue with difference in a reflexive process that foregrounds and challenges their own assumptions. As such a worldviews approach has potential for transformational pedagogy. Examples of classroom practice show how a worldviews approach is interpreted by teachers to develop pupils' epistemic and personal awareness - two important elements of 'worldview literacy'.

The need for roots (in the world): CoRE proposals, in relation to 'religion and worldviews', and religious education at this point in history

Dr Patricia Hannam

Hampshire Education Authority

The Commission on RE (CoRE) final report (2018) argues for a change in name of religious education to 'religion and worldviews' education. More recent documents have sought to explain why this might be important. However, there is the possibility that a reorientation of religious education towards 'Religion and Worldviews' may open up dangers. Picking up the discussion from Hannam and Biesta (2019), this paper argues that any new orientation of the subject, especially in the secondary school, cannot rely on proposals for curriculum making or even of pedagogy alone; instead it needs an urgent reconsideration of educational purpose. This is because at a time of pandemic and climate break-down what is required is a reorientation to

the world; to a care for and love of the world. And, since this is not the same as simply having a *view on the world*, it will be argued with Weil (e.g. 1963 and 2005) it is not 'views of world' that should be the object of concern, but a re-rooting in the world itself. The educational task becomes one of love and of attention and discernment, and what is at stake is life itself.