

RE-Imagining an Image: A participatory study exploring monologic and dialogic approaches in Primary Religious Education (RE). Lizzie Yeomans, OU Masters in Education 2024.

FOUNDATIONS FOR DIALOGUE

from Paulo Freire

"If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings.
Dialogue is thus an existential necessity."



Figure 1: The image of an explorer from the REC

Freire's 'banking concept' of education where the teacher is seen as the expert who 'deposits' knowledge in the minds of students who are ignorant, passive receptacles waiting to be 'filled' (1970, p. 45) is commonplace in the current climate of education.

This can be defined as the '**monologic approach**,' where there is a correct answer that needs to be remembered (Bakhtin, 1986).

A **dialogic approach**, contrastingly, defines teaching and learning as a constantly renewing thinking process, with an acceptance that knowledge is contested and may change.

Getting better at RE means that pupils should 'know more and remember more' (Ofsted, 2021).

Equating remembering to learning is problematic. To be authentic, education needs to be democratised, to avoid pseudo-participation (Biesta, 2010; Friere 1970), in which the outcomes are already set and controlled by the teacher.

Responses to **Figure 1** from student teacher participants (NS, JS, CMc, CM):

"So it's this lone man coming in putting their perspectives on everything." (NS). "Not for working classes" (JS). "He's up there and he's looking down and that's just like fundamentally wrong." (CMc). "One person, one perspective, looking one direction." (JS).

Figure 2: New Image created by PAR group.



It is not clear who the teacher is in **Figure 2**, or in which direction they are looking. A dialogic approach moves the power from the 'expert' teacher (DfE, 2019) to the "collective" (CM).

The sun represents the safety of the classroom, whilst the thundercloud, "Embraces the discomfort" (JS) where there is not always a right answer. "I like this 'embracing of the discomfort' as I try very hard to make the classroom a very comfortable place. I would have missed out on important conversations. I love the fact that the uncomfortable weather has been included, because it shapes us into an experience.

There are going to be things that you don't know." (NS). This shift from being an 'expert' to an embracing of "the discomfort" reminded me of Freire's call for 'humility in dialogue' (1970). Life worlds above each figure represent the equality of the teacher-pupil relationship (Freire, 2002).

The creation of the new image (**figure 2**) was a participatory process. It represents the Primary RE classroom, but also reflects the action research process through which the participants created the image. Its movement from an individual "holding the power" (CM) to a recognition that "how you move forward... you listen to each other... as a collective" (CM), echoes liberatory pedagogy. Freire proclaimed that the liberated, 'must move forward constantly' (1984, p.544). This image could help to re-imagine a new paradigm for the primary RE classroom. To move away from the monologic approach and the teacher as expert, the role of the teacher as explorer (**figure 1**) needs to be reimagined. The teacher should become the subject, to recognise that they have a worldview and they are not 'neutral' (Biesta 2020; Freire, 1984). We should "deviate from that stereotypical explorer" (NS).

There is a need for change in primary RE ITE, specifically how student teachers are supported to be dialogic (Orchard and Bowen, 2024; Unstad, and Fjørtoft, 2021; Whitworth, 2020; Castelli 2018).

This is required to promote epistemic justice (Beauchamp, 2023; Stones and Fraser-Pearce, 2022,) and religious literacy (Soules and Jafralie, 2021; Biesta, 2010).

Additionally, RE needs to be challenged in the light of decolonisation (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021; Esau 2021; Bamber et al 2019; Farrell and Lander 2019; Keddie et al 2019).

To do this well in ITE, student teachers need time for dialogue with each other, which can lead to subjectification (Biesta, 2020).

Subjectification is the recognition that they are also part of the world which is being studied. This can lead to what Freire terms 'conscientisation' (1984).