Introduction

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Religious Education in England

1. Religion in Society and religious education in schools – from instruction to education?

2. Activity. What would you expect to see in a “typical” religious education lesson in England?

3. Activity. Lesson plans - interpreting beginning students’ priorities and related teaching points.


5. Final thoughts.
Pre–19th Century

No distinction between religious and secular education

Middle Ages:
Very few schools, all controlled by the Church

17th Century:
Anglican control of education a key issue in the rift between Church and Dissent

18th Century:
Charity and Sunday schools, etc., – no distinction between religious and moral education
19th Century

- Agreement that education should be permeated by religion; disagreement over how this was to be achieved.
- Increasing Government involvement in schools, including funding.
- Conscience clause introduced in 1850 to ease the problem of one-school areas.
- 1870 Education Act made education compulsory for all school-aged children.
- The number of non-church state-maintained schools quickly surpassed the number of church schools.
- State no longer insisted on union of religious and secular instruction.
1944 Education Act

Religious Instruction

• Religious Instruction compulsory
• Includes daily Collective (corporate) Worship
• Conscience Clause retained
• Locally agreed
• Act did not specify (but assumed) Christian worship and instruction
• Overriding aim – morality via induction into the Christian faith
Religion in England in 1944

“...legislating for a society that had ceased to exist...”? (Cox and Cairns 1989)

• Church attendance was already in decline

• “Christianity had already ceased to have a prior, determining hold upon the affections of the majority of the British population” (Parsons 1994)

• Schools continued to be faced with the unrealistic task of Christian nurture until the 1960s
1960s
Religious Instruction, Christian faith and morality

• In 1967, the Plowden Report argued that Religious Instruction “should recognise that young children need a simple and positive introduction to religion. They should be taught to know and love God…” (DES 1967)

• A minority of those contributing to the report argued that Christian beliefs are not known to be true and so their transmission is unjustified
1960s – a decade of change
Confessional Religious Instruction became harder and harder to justify

“The immigrant children posed particular problems in schools. Were they to be taught Christianity like the others … or were they to be educated in the faiths which were being practised in their homes? … was there not needed some inter-faith education, so that the … Christian native population could understand and sympathize with the religious beliefs of their new schoolfellows, and so that the followers of the newly arrived religions could understand each other and the indigenous population?” (Cox and Cairns 1989)
1988 Education Reform Act
“The re-Christianising of … RE”? (Hand 2004)

- Religious Education “shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain”
- National Curriculum introduced – Religious Education excluded
- Religious Instruction renamed Religious Education
- Conscience clause retained
This is religious education in England in 2017

• Compulsory for all school-aged children and young people
• Conscience clause
• Locally agreed
• Approximately one third of schools are “faith schools”
• All Party Parliamentary Group for RE established June 2012
• Excluded from the National Curriculum Review
• National RE Subject Review (Religious Education Council)
• Commission on Religious Education (2016 - 2018)
What would you expect to see in a “typical” religious education lesson in England?
Lesson plans

• What are the priorities of the student teachers who wrote these plans?

• What feedback might you give these students, in order to improve their teaching?
Priorities for teacher education in religious education in England in 2017
“It is necessary for [RE teachers] to think carefully of the rationale of the subject, of the nature of its material and its aims…” (Cox 1966)
“Although progress has been made in recent years in establishing greater clarity about the nature of RE, there are still serious areas of uncertainty about the subject which often inhibit teachers’ ability to plan, teach and assess RE effectively, and undermine pupils’ progress.” (Ofsted 2010)
Final thoughts

Questions are guaranteed in life; Answers aren't.