Engaging Religious Education

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY STUDIES IN ETHICS SERIES
SERIES EDITOR: DR. DAVID TOREVELL
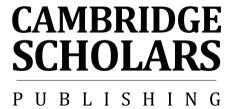SERIES DEPUTY EDITOR: DR. JACQUI MILLER

VOLUME ONE:
ENGAGING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
Editors: Joy Schmack, Matthew Thompson and David Torevell with Camilla Cole

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CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

Engaging Religious Education,
Edited by Joy Schmack, Matthew Thompson and David Torevell with Camilla Cole

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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FOREWORD

Explicitly or implicitly, issues of ethics underpin every aspect of life, as public institutions and private individuals make decisions that will inform their own welfare and the lives of others. The ethical impulse and its determination has recently gained considerable intellectual attention, as many in the academy seek to understand the moral challenges and opportunities their own subject area presents. This series, which flows naturally from Liverpool Hope University's unique mission, is distinctive in its multidisciplinary range and encompasses arts and humanities, social sciences, business and education. Each volume is informed by the latest research and poses important questions for academics, students and all those who wish to reflect more deeply on the values inherent within different disciplines. Bringing together international subject specialists, the series explores the complexities of ethics, its theoretical analysis and its practical applications and through the breadth of contributing subjects, demonstrates that understanding ethics is central to contemporary scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2009, Liverpool Hope University's PGCE Religious Education Department held a conference entitled *Engaging R.E.* A full range of stimulating workshops and a memorable opening keynote lecture by Professor Julian Stern were delivered, reflecting the breadth and depth of the University's mission to build on a unique heritage of over 160 years' experience in teacher training and an enduring commitment to teaching excellence. The ecumenical dimensions of that heritage, combined with its rooting in the realities of Liverpool life (with what many claim to be the UK's oldest multi-faith and multi-cultural community), ensure that the University is particularly well placed to help address the immense challenges and expectations placed upon education by a UK (and global) society appearing ever more insecure and uncertain about its values and direction.

It is noteworthy and fitting that religious education in particular has been placed in the forefront to deal with such uncertainties and encouraged to engage positively with fundamental educational and social issues that have strong ethical foundations. That is why the contributors to this volume are pleased to be involved in this timely and crucial debate. Clearly, any such involvement is a pressing one and not without difficulty and complexity. As religion returns to the centre stage of contemporary social and political struggles, the religious education teacher is thrust into the invidious role of expert facilitator and arbiter of an often tense encounter between divergent pressures from competing educational, political, and social goals (and the divergent ethical visions shaping their direction). These include the particularly sensitive and complex issues of social cohesion, equality, and diversity as well as pupil inclusion, all of which present the challenge of securing the lively and heartfelt response of pupils. Liverpool Hope University's *Engaging R.E.* conference revealed religious education practitioners rising to these challenges with characteristic commitment and insight.

As with the conference itself, the chapters presented here draw from as wide a range of perspectives as possible, including academic reflection upon competing pedagogical, philosophical and spiritual principles, as well

as shared reflections upon the practicalities of classroom practice and curriculum content for those encountering these challenges on a daily basis. Teaching excellence is promoted when these perspectives meet and complement each other.

Julian Stern discusses pupil engagement with the fundamental realities of death and love. He elucidates a conceptual framework (drawing upon Buber and Macmurray's visions of the self understood in relationship with the other), to facilitate this process with a depth and sensitivity that allows for spiritually meaningful and edifying encounter with some of their most profound dimensions (including the Shoah). **Heather Marshall**, a classroom practitioner, considers the contemporary challenge of engaging R.E. pupils in combating islamophobia through exploring the concept of jihad in Islam. Following her exposition of some of the sensitivities and pressures (and subsequent confusion) that are brought to bear with respect to this topic, Heather produces very welcome practical strategies, including a scheme of work to support and guide colleagues in the classroom.

Robert Thorne, a sixth-form lecturer in religious studies, graciously shares the insights he gained with respect to engaging with community cohesion and Islamophobia at Oldham Sixth Form College in the wake of the disturbances in that city in the last decade. His honest analysis, rooted in this challenging context, provides inspirational, practical methodologies for promoting sincere, constructive dialogue between previously alienated and mutually suspicious communities and individuals. Enabling religious education effectively to engage with community cohesion also underlies **Joy Schmack**'s perceptive analysis of the effectiveness (or otherwise) of out of school visits to faith centres. Focussing on synagogue visits, the importance of planning objectives and the role of the "faith hosts" are clearly revealed. Key strategies are provided to help practitioners realize the huge potential value that the shared experience of a faith centre visit (and its faith representatives) can provide as a means for combatting negative stereotypes and promoting community cohesion.

Religious education is clearly now at the forefront of engaging with such issues as community cohesion and diversity. **James Holt** addresses the problem of how many faiths to cover within religious education. Given recent government emphasis upon understanding the full diversity of the local and national community, he cogently argues for the inclusion of New Religious Movements such as Latter-Day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses (often numerically more prominent than Buddhists). In doing so, he raises important questions about the considerable pressures faced by religious education teachers to develop the expertise and resources required to present

an increasingly wide variety of faith stances in a fair and objective manner. **Gaynor Pollard**'s chapter takes up the important challenge of feminism and religious education. She argues that those who produce agreed syllabuses in Religious Education often come from the more conservative wings of religious thought and practice and very rarely, if at all, take into account feminist theology. Her challenge is to situate what has been learnt from feminist approaches to religion into mainstream religious education content and teaching. Sharing examples from biblical teaching, she points to how pupils themselves might engage in a creative hermeneutics of sacred texts which takes their own gendered experience seriously. Drawing from the scholarship of Upton, she identifies three main approaches from within feminist apologetic responses to patriarchal norms, which encourage a reversal of more traditional methods of biblical work, so that the hidden voices of women might be reclaimed.

For many of the papers a central element of engaging pupils in religious education is the development of pupils' faculties of reflective analysis which, (with the recent re-emergence of child-centred educational philosophy) is once again understood in terms of the promotion of "pupil voice". An increasingly popular methodology being applied across many areas of religious education is the Philosophy for Children (P4C) strategy developed in the 1960s. Heather Marshall employs this to good effect with respect to studying jihad. **Pat Hannam** upholds P4C as the ideal approach for developing an inquiry-based, relevance-driven pedagogy for religious education that engages teenagers in meeting what she sees as the fundamental challenges of twenty-first-century society (globalization, diversity, and climate change). **Emma McVittie** also extols the virtues of reflective learning as a stimulus for creativity in both the training and classroom practice of primary RE teachers. She shares the successes of her application of individual reflective journals as a key motivational tool for developing creative teaching and engaging learning with her students.

Not surprisingly for religious education, the importance of the human heart emerged as a central theme in a number of the papers. **Matthew Thompson,** for example, draws attention to some of the secular philosophical frameworks and assumptions which he argues have come to dominate and distort the ways in which religions are presented and evaluated in the RE classroom. He describes what he holds to be a more authentic sacred philosophical framework (and a classroom resource) that allows for a more engaging encounter with the Christian faith. The vital challenge of engaging with depth as well as breadth of spiritual experience is reflected upon within a Catholic context by Daniel O'Leary and more generally by David

Torevell. **Daniel O'Leary** formulates his ideal vision of Christian education which focusses upon developing pupils' (and teachers') sacramental imagination. This concept (grounded in Newman's and Rahner's theology of nature and grace) is understood as an artistic awakening within the heart that facilitates sensitivity to, and a transforming encounter with, the Divine in our daily experience of the natural world. What in some respects can also be seen as this re-emergence of the more orthodox foundations of Catholic Christianity is also found in **David Torevell**'s exposition of a pedagogy of stillness, in which he draws upon the insights of the fourth-century Egyptian monk Evagrius. Both O'Leary and Torevell seek to counterbalance what they regard as the negative legacy of more traditional Augustinian (and potentially dualistic and demoralizing) Catholic understanding of sin and human nature. Torevell points towards a fascinating application of Evagrius' pedagogy of stillness as a means of promoting the kind of happiness and fulfilment which the Children's Society report of 2008 declares to be essential to children's well-being in the twenty-first century.

To be truly engaging, religious education must on the one hand facilitate an authentic, edifying encounter with as much depth and breadth of the richly diverse realities of religious traditions as time will permit. On the other hand, it also has to play its role in equipping pupils with the vision, skills, and motivation to engage effectively with the fullest range of challenges that they face in their personal and communal lives. Religious education practitioners are united in a love of their subject where these two dimensions of engagement so often complement each other. They bring their often divergent perspectives, yet also their shared commitment, to ensure their discipline remains the most critical component of any truly worthwhile and relevant education, thereby ensuring it plays a vital role in the moral and social development of pupils in the twenty-first century.

Camilla Cole, Joy Schmack, Matthew Thompson, David Torevell

CHAPTER ONE

LOVE, DEATH, AND INCLUSIVE RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION

JULIAN STERN

> Bravest thing about people, Miss Joan, is how they go on loving mortal be-
> ings after finding out there's such a thing as dying (Tyler, 1965: 76).

Professional practice in schools should be creating a healthy learning com-
munity in religious education, in which people are in genuine dialogue with
each other and with people beyond the school. This paper describes how
religious education (RE) is made more inclusive through its ability to deal
with – to be in dialogue about – the deeply personal and challenging issues
of love and death. Love and death are reasonably well established in RE syl-
labuses, as might be expected with such a subject that has so much potential
to address these topics. For example, UK national guidance suggests that
young children (aged 3 to 5) "talk about some of the ways that people show
love and concern for others and why this is important" (QCA, 2004: 22).
The same document suggests "discussing and reflecting on key questions of
meaning and truth such as . . . life after death" (QCA, 2004: 14), and expects
7–11 year olds to address "the journey of life and death: why some occa-
sions are sacred to believers, and what people think about life after death"
(QCA, 2004: 27).

However, there are personal and professional reasons why love and
death, and other sensitive issues, are often pushed to the sidelines, neu-
tralized or distorted. These include limits set to dialogue, as the study of
religions requires an "assumption of mutuality and dialogue"' (Hull, 1998:
190). As Jackson reminds us, RE is "a conversational process in which stu-
dents, whatever their backgrounds, continuously interpret and reinterpret
their own views in the light of what they study" (Jackson, 2004: 169).

Two philosophers illuminate the issues of love, death and dialogue:
Martin Buber (1878–1965) and John Macmurray (1891–1976). Working
from different religious perspectives (one Jewish, the other Christian), both
of them are concerned with the personal relationships between people as

the basis for understanding existence itself, and are therefore sometimes referred to as *personalist* philosophers (Long, 2000: chapter 11). For Buber and Macmurray, without love and without death there is neither life nor learning. The denial of love is the denial of the *other*; the denial of death is the denial of the *self*. This article builds on that broad insight to argue that good, engaging, inclusive, RE – what might be called *touching* RE – should be able to recognize both love and death. It is an attempt to understand and build a justification for RE out of the need to overcome the denial of love and death. Syllabus references are primarily to UK contexts, yet the underlying philosophy is much broader.

Denying Love, Denying Death

RE may be challenged if it is too *dangerous*; however, it is even more at risk if it is too *safe*. A group of UK primary teachers specializing in RE discussed David and Goliath. "I could not use that in my school", one teacher said. Asked why not, she said "because there is a killing in it, which goes unpunished". That was an interesting, but a safe, approach to RE. If schools were only to tackle the *safe* elements of religions, there would seem little point in studying religions. Neutralizing religious narratives can be found in school uses of Noah's ark: this account, the first biblical account of a holocaust, is often made into a jolly boating story with super furry animals. Explicit denial, in the case of David and Goliath, or neutralizing denial, in the case of Noah's ark, are liable to make the study of religions less significant – whether within religious traditions, or in multi-religious school-based RE. Both illustrate a disinclination to deal with death in RE, and there is a similar problem with love.

Love is difficult, and there are dangers in talking about love, bound up as it is with romantic and sentimental stereotypes. In recent years, the discipline of positive psychology has attempted to re-focus the larger discipline of psychology onto strengths and virtues, amongst which they count love. The description of love by Peterson (2006) is used as a starting point here, as it is detailed and authoritative (within its own discipline), and includes broader and narrower senses of love. Peterson's "typologies of love" starts with "affiliation", in which "the people involved simply want to be associated with some other person" (Peterson, 2006: 264), and goes through "liking", in which "the people involved have a positive attitude toward each other" (Peterson, 2006: 264), "friendship . . . [w]hen liking is coupled with a mutual perception of similarity and expectations of reciprocty and parity"'

(Peterson, 2006: 265), to the narrowly-defined love (Peterson, 2006: 267). Love, for Peterson, happens "[w]hen a relationship is characterized by reciprocated exclusiveness, absorption, predispositions to help one another, and interdependence" (Peterson, 2006: 267).

This description of love is in turn subdivided into "passionate" and "companionate" love (Peterson, 2006: 267), echoing the Ancient Greek and later Christian traditions of *eros* and *agape*, and Hindu traditions of kâma and *prema*. Hendrick and Hendrick, from the same disciplinary background, describe love in terms of self-expansion, and say that "[b]eing in love should result in higher self-esteem and stronger self-affirmation, as well as more other-affirmation", along with "'[p]ositive emotional states such as happiness and an optimistic outlook", "[h]ope for the future", and "a heightened sense of self-efficacy and the ability to cope with one's world" (Hendrick and Hendrick, in Snyder and Lopez, 2005: 481). Each element of these definitions could be argued over, yet the emphases on interdependence and self-expansion are helpful, at least as starting points.

Schools should not necessarily be places full of love (even in the broadest of Peterson's senses), any more than they should be full of death, but they should be places that allow for the *possibility* of love and friendship (Stern, 2009b: chapter 2), and that allow for the *consideration* of death and include forms of dialogue with dead people (Stern, 2009b: chapter 4). Where love and death are taboo or are actively denied, the school is not a real community. Existence in such places is *light*. Schools are not places where the slogan "Be yourself" is enough. To be yourself, you need others, and the self is not static: it grows and develops, moves outwards in self-expansion as love or friendship. "To be a friend is to be yourself for another person," says John Macmurray, and this "means stark reality between persons without pretence and sentimentality" rather than "the pretence to love" (Macmurray, 1979: 5).

The denial or neutralizing of death or of love, and the relationship of one to the other, is well articulated by the British poet Philip Larkin. Well known for his misanthropy as well as for his ability to express this sensitively and powerfully, Larkin's inability to love, or to love fully, seems to have been the source of much sadness. Larkin writes in the poem 'Dockery and Son' of the difference between himself and a friend from university (i.e. Dockery) who had a child at 19. Why have a child, why add to oneself? Larkin says, "Why did he think adding meant increase? / To me it was dilution" (Larkin, 1988; 153). He wrote another poem, when he was 33 years old, about himself as an individual, a one, and it is this that pins down his view of denial. "Thinking in terms of one / Is easily done" it starts, and goes on to describe

a single life. "But counting up to two / Is harder to do; / For one must be denied / Before it's tried" (Larkin, 1988: 108). It is an interesting question to ask teachers of RE: are you able to count up to two, in the terms of Larkin's poem? Should teachers be attempting to help their pupils count up to two, too? One of Larkin's biographers says that Larkin believed "the adulthood of 'after twenty' has caused him to realize that solitude now involves effort; other people and the burden of being sociable have to be dealt with" (Bradford, 2005: 78). Counting up to two is not simply an alternative to the welcome, if increasingly difficult, solitude. It is also a description of love. Larkin wrote to a friend about his poem 'An Arundel Tomb'; "'love being stronger than death' is, he concludes, a 'sentiment . . . only justifiable if love can stop people dying', which, of course, it cannot" (Bradford, 2005: 153).

Love and death can be denied, or can be distorted. A writer on the Afghanistan conflict describes a kind of distorted view of love or, rather, two kinds of distorted views of love:

> In the first week of the war in Afghanistan, a British newspaper reporter spoke to a Taliban fighter on the Pakistani border. The young *jihadi* was full of confidence. The Americans, he said, would never win, for "they love Pepsi-Cola, but we love death." (Buruma and Margalit, 2004: 49)

Surely a love of Pepsi-Cola and a love of death are equally problematic, and each represents a denial of the more obvious characteristics of love. Another denial would be to enforce love, and this seems to be the message described in the following extract from the writings of Rudolf Steiner:

> It is December 21, 1919, and Rudolf Steiner is addressing a Christmas assembly of teachers, parents, and students of the newly formed Waldorf School. "Do you love your teachers?" he asks the children. "Yes," comes the resounding reply. A few minutes later in his talk he repeats, "… I would like to ask you again, 'Don't you all sincerely love your teachers?'" "Yes, we do," shout the children. These earnest questions and fervent answers are repeated many times in the next few years on his frequent visits to the school. (Steiner, 1996: ix)

Perhaps something is lost in the translation, but the sense of enforced love suggested by this report is uncomfortable and seems as much a denial of real love as that described by Larkin.

Overcoming Denial: Philosophers

Is it possible for RE to help overcome the denial of love and death? Such a task is clearly not easy, and is not exclusive to RE. However, the task is made easier through understanding the approach to persons provided by two philosophers, the Scottish Christian writer John Macmurray, and the Viennese-born Jewish writer Martin Buber. For Macmurray, a human being "knows that he is alive, and consequently knows that he must die", and this knowledge "is the first inevitable consequence of being a person" (Macmurray, 1935: 37). "The fear of death isolates man from the world," he continues, and "isolates man from man, breaking the bonds between friends and kinsmen, and forcing the individual into the isolation of his own existence" (Macmurray, 1935: 37), yet at the same time it "reveals the intimate dependence of man on nature and upon his fellows" so that, "[u]nless this consciousness of death were overcome, human life would be paralysed" (Macmurray, 1935: 37). It is religion, according to Macmurray, that captures the effort to "deal with the knowledge of death and to overcome the fear of it" (Macmurray, 1935: 37–8), but not through denial. In fact it was in the trenches of World War One that he learnt to overcome that fear.

> Just outside my post in the front line itself a dead Highlander, in a full kilted uniform, was hung up in the centre of a mass of barbed wire. It was impossible to get at him without a major operation in no man's land. So there he remained, day after day, almost as if he were one of us. No doubt this normal experience of the soldier on active service affects men differently. With me it resulted in a quick and complete acceptance of death, for myself as well as for my comrades. It had seemed a dreaded end, before the war. Now it became an incident in life, and in the result it removed for ever the *fear* of death. (Macmurray, 1995: 18)

It is worth noting that this is not overcoming the fear of death by denying it, or by denying its unpleasantness, but rather by recognising how the fear of death would restrict life: "[t]he person who lives on the defensive is really seeking death, seeking to escape from life", and this applies to "most of us", who "wake up late in life to discover that we have never really lived at all" (Macmurray, 1996: 144). The knowledge of death is also the knowledge of being embodied, as Hull says of spirituality: "[s]pirituality is not the antithesis of materialism . . . [so a] true spirituality will not seek to become more and more spiritual but will seek to become more and more embodied, more significantly in touch with our bodily existences" (Hull, 1998: 65). If the fear of death can restrict or neutralize life, the appropriate response

to such fear is to wake up and to take part in life. This is done with other people – for Macmurray, other people in community, people we treat as ends in themselves and not as means to other ends. Communities are where people are and can become more real. "We are all more or less unreal", he says, and "[o]ur business is to make ourselves a little more real than we are" (Macmurray, 1992: 143). Schools are places in which this should happen, as schools – like families, friendship groups, and religious groups – are necessarily communities.

Macmurray says that "[t]he school is a community; and we learn to live in community only by living in a community" (Macmurray, 1968: 149–50). A school's "first principle is that it must be a real community" (Macmurray, 1968: 35). This is "[n]ot because community is a good thing – I would underline this – but because this is the condition of success in its educational function" (Macmurray, 1968: 35). Hence

> when we try to teach, we must deal with living human beings. We, the teachers, are persons. Those whom we would teach are persons. We must meet them face to face, in a personal intercourse. This is the primary fact about education. It is one of the forms of personal relationship. It is a continuing personal exchange between two generations. To assert this is by no means to define an ideal, but to state a fact. It declares not what education ought to be, but what it is – and is inescapably. We may ignore this fact; we may imagine that our task is of a different order; but this will make no difference to what is actually taking place. We may act as though we were teaching arithmetic or history. In fact we are teaching *people*. The arithmetic or the history is merely a medium through which a personal intercourse is established and maintained. (Macmurray, 1968: 5)

The difference between an organization in which people can become more real and one in which this is less likely to happen is well illustrated by Martin Buber. Buber considered the problem of treating people as *it*, matched by an equally problematic approach to an exclusively private life of feelings. Both positions need to be overcome. In modern society, he said, all too often:

> Institutions are "outside," where all sorts of aims are pursued, where a man works, negotiates, bears influence, undertakes, concurs, organises, conducts business, officiates, preaches. They are the tolerably well-ordered and to some extent harmonious structure, in which, with the manifold help of men's brains and hands, the process of affairs is fulfilled.

> Feelings are "within," where life is lived and man recovers from institutions.

> Here the spectrum of the emotions dances before the interested glance. Here a man's liking and hate and pleasure are indulged and his pain if it is not too severe. Here he is at home and stretches himself out in his rocking-chair. (Buber, 1958: 62–3)

This is inadequate as "the separated *It* of institutions is an animated clod without soul [a translation of the word 'golem'] and the separated *I* of feelings an uneasily-fluttering soul-bird" (Buber, 1958: 63). What is missing is the sense of a person: "institutions know only the specimen, feelings only the 'object'; neither knows the person, or mutual life" (Buber, 1958: 63). The move is from *individual* to *person*. Buber concludes his recorded conversation with the therapist Rogers, "if I may say expressly Yes and No to certain phenomena, I'm *against* individuals and *for* persons" (Buber, 1998: 174).

Buber and Macmurray both describe relations as at the heart of spirituality. We only know people through particular kinds of relationships and we only *are* people in and through our relationships. Knowing the person is an *action*, not a *state of mind* but a kind of *imaginative leap* to the reality of the other person. The action of knowing is therefore an act of *inclusion*: "It is inclusion – imagining the real [*Realphantasie*] – that banishes the illusion that we are confined to our skins or our own private experiences, as so many people think" (Friedman, 1999: 410, writing about Buber). We can be in dialogue, and dialogue is always an act of inclusion. Further, we can love, a particular act of inclusion.

> Love does not cling to the *I* in such a way as to have the *Thou* only for its "content," its object; but love is *between I* and *Thou*. The man who does not know this, with his very being know this, does not know love; even though he ascribes to it the feelings he lives through, experiences, enjoys and expresses. (Buber, 1958: 28–9)

As Shakespeare said, love is a "marriage of true minds" which "alters not with his brief hours and weeks, / But bears it out even to the edge of doom" (Sonnet 116). This is a religious obligation, according to Buber, and he links the Jewish and Christian approaches to love:

> To the question . . . which was the all-inclusive and fundamental commandment, the "great" commandment, Jesus replied by connecting the two Old Testament commandments between which above all the choice lay: "love God with all your might" and "love your neighbour as one like yourself". Both are to be "loved", God and the "neighbour" (i.e. not man in general, but the man who meets me time and again in the context of life), but in different

ways. The neighbour is to be loved "as one like myself" (not "as I love my-self"; in the last reality one does not love oneself, but one should rather learn to love oneself through love of one's neighbour), to whom, then, I should show love as I wish it may be shown to me. But God is to be loved with all my soul and all my might. By connecting the two Jesus brings to light the Old Testament truth that God and man are not rivals. (Buber, 2002: 60)

Overcoming Denial: Religious Education

In terms of RE, a single well-tried lesson can be described that illustrates how the philosophies of Buber and Macmurray might be enacted in schools. The lesson was originally developed by Marie Stern in a London special school (and reported variously in Stern, 1998; Stern, 2007: 162–3; and in detail in Stern, 2009a: 73–6), and it was used to help children with signifi-cant additional learning needs understand the number 6,000,000, as part of a course on the Shoah. In class, pupils are given a sheet with ten dots on it. Each dot was then labelled with the name and description of someone that pupil knew, either in school or at home. After the ten-dot sheet, a sheet was given with one hundred dots, and a similar exercise was completed, as a group. As there were just over a hundred pupils and staff at that school, it was possible to talk about all the people in the school: "this dot represents Karen in class three, and she is good at sport and music", and so on. A thousand-dot sheet, provided next, needed to restrict the information, with an arrow to individual dots labelled with the first name only of a person known to one of the pupils. And it was assumed that even if the whole class worked on a single sheet, it would be impossible to label every dot. Then an A4 sheet with 10,000 dots was used, made up of 100 blocks of 100 dots. (With adults, it is possible to start this lesson with the 10,000 dot sheet.) For this sheet, again, very brief labels are needed, perhaps just the initials of a person. Each group of pupils should start labelling dots, beginning at the top left hand corner. Even with a lot of preparation, pupils are unlikely to get beyond the first or second blocks of one hundred dots.

Once this work has been completed, the teacher should get the pupils to help roll out five rolls of paper, each roll consisting of 20 sheets of A3 paper with each sheet having six times 10 000 dots on it. (These dimensions have been carefully practised in many school settings.) The roll out (in a large classroom, or better still in a corridor or hall) will reveal exactly six million dots. This must only be done after the task of labelling: the pupils will understand large numbers, and will understand 6,000,000, in a way that

they did not before. So will teachers. It may seem like a simple set of tasks, but it has touched many, many pupils and teachers, upset at the thought of the large number – whether it is applied to the Shoah, deaths in wars, or the analysis of poverty. Large numbers are worth knowing, personally; people are worth knowing, in large numbers. In a remarkably simple way, personal connections are expanded and given new meaning. The personal world of pupils is not only captured by the school: the school is able to set that in an historical context. By recognizing as individuals people who have died in such large numbers, the exercise can help pupils overcome the denial of death, and can help them recognize their closeness to the living. It is therefore a way of making *individuals* into *people*, and goes to the heart of engaging schooling, engaging RE: how can we treat people as ends in themselves and not means to ends?

Through a deep understanding of love and death, and an understanding of how that can be addressed in school RE, we can go some way to overcome the denials of death and of love. This will be achieved, according to Buber and Macmurray, through dialogue, an act of inclusion, in community. The *Spirit of the School* project has investigated how school communities work. It has involved empirical research in a number of schools in the UK and Hong Kong since 2006, and as a result of that work, alongside the philosophical investigation, the *spirited school* was defined in the following way: "The spirited school is an inclusive community with magnanimous leadership that enables friendship through dialogue in order to create and evaluate valuable or beautiful meanings, valuable or beautiful things, and good people" (Stern, 2009b: 161).

A longer version of that definition, with some added explanation, is this:

> The spirited school is an inclusive (bringing in from past times and local and distant places) community (people treating each other as ends in themselves) with magnanimous leadership (aiming for the good of the led) that enables (but does not insist on) friendship (by overcoming fear and loneliness and allowing for solitude) through dialogue (not monologue) in order to create and evaluate valuable or beautiful meanings, valuable or beautiful things (including the environment), and good (real) people. (Stern, 2009b: 160–1)

From those definitions, six questions were derived, to be asked of RE teachers. Responses to each of the questions would help explain how RE can overcome the denial of love and death, and can therefore promote dialogic learning communities. The questions ask

1 Who do you bring in to the school, in RE?
2 How do you treat people as ends in themselves, in RE?

3 In what ways are you magnanimous, in RE?
4 How do you enable friendship to thrive in RE?
5 Are you in dialogue, in RE?
6 How do you take part in creating meanings, things, and people, in RE?

These are the testing questions, and they are commended as ways of investigating how *engaging* is RE. The dots lesson, described above, is a helpful response to questions 1 and 2, and can help respond to question 4. Other case studies could be provided that help respond to other questions, and the examples given in Stern, 2007: 81–9, are starting points.

RE is a subject that draws on the cultures and ideas of peoples from around the world and from all times, and combines this interest with the personal cares and joys of the pupils themselves. The subject is therefore in a sense at the crossroads of the curriculum, the point at which all the present and personal aspects of schooling (also addressed by personal subjects such as personal and health education) meets all the historic and external aspects of schooling (also addressed by social science subject and the study of literature). It is a subject grounded in both the present and the past, the here and the there, the living and the dead. RE is therefore a *life-and-death* subject, or perhaps a *love-and-death* subject, at the heart of the curriculum.

Conclusion

Given the difficult subject matter of love and death, it is valuable complementing the case studies from schools by looking at what pupils say when surveyed more generally. In October 1997, as part of an RE festival, the professional body for UK Teachers of RE, the PCfRE (now NATRE) issued a questionnaire that was completed by over 16,000 young people in schools. Roughly 10% of the questionnaires were transcribed, and a smaller number were entered on an online database <www.pcfre.org.uk/db/>. There were also curriculum guides based on the questionnaire (Fageant and Blaylock, 1998; Weston, 2003). Question 3 on the survey asked the following:

> Here are two viewpoints about death: "When we die, we lie in the grave, and I'm afraid that's the end of us." "I think dying is like being born. You leave the place you know, but you go to a wonderful place you don't know." What are your thoughts about death and the afterlife?

Some of the 11-year-old respondents, who at this stage would have spent

just a few weeks in their new secondary schools, expressed relatively conventional views that might have been drawn from RE, and external religious and humanist, learning. For example: "Death is not a nise [*sic*] feeling but when you go to heven [*sic*] in [*it*] will be like wonderful land." Or: "I think there isn't really a heaven. I think we just get buried and that's it, nothing else." However, the complexity, the depth of thought, and the personal engagement with the issues of many of the responses, all suggest that pupils are able to tackle some of the biggest questions. One child says with great eloquence:

> I think you die because you have been on earth for a while and now God wants you up there with him. Up where the sky's always blue, where you can never leave the ones you love and treasure.

Many children, religiously self-identified as Christian or as none, write about coming back or reincarnation. One child, identifying herself as Christian, says: "I think you could come back but as a spirit to help with good but I could feel something at my Grandmas house when my Grandad died and my dad can too." Another respondent (religiously described as none) says:

> I believe that when we die our body rots away, but our spirit (excluding) our memory) goes into a new born baby. However if the person has some unfinished work or business to take care of their spirit will try and correct it.

A more complex view, from a child who does not indicate her religion:

> I beleive that when you die, you do have an afterlife because i find that when you do die you go to a place eg: heaven and live an afterlife, not into another person but a living creature or plant. I have always thought that when my hamster died she was the tree I had planted on her grave. So I think there is an afterlife.

It is fear that comes through, however, as dominating a number of responses.

> I believe in afterlife but sometimes I am afraid of death. I think when people die they live in another world I think the criminals are still acepted by god becasue god will forgive everyone if you want be forgiven.

One of the most poignant of all the responses simply says "I afraid of death but part of me want's [*sic*] to die". It is difficult to see how the issues raised by these pupils could be discussed and built upon other than in RE.

RE has a special place in the curriculum as a subject able to tackle death, in ways that do not deny the real feelings and fears of pupils. Schools are hosting young people who have complex and powerful views, expressed in these examples by pupils who had just entered secondary schools and who were therefore unlikely to have been greatly influenced by the curriculum in their current schools. It is suggested that pupils have a right to a curriculum that actively engages with those views, and RE is put forward as a vehicle for such engagement. The engagement will of necessity be dialogic, not least because dialogue helps satisfy "the demand for fairness" (Smart, 1960: 13). Smart continues:

> The dialogue form also emphasizes anew the point that where there is discussion, there reasons are found. The possibility of argument implies that there are criteria of truth, however vague. Indeed, the man [*sic*] who refuses to argue at all is guilty of slaying truth: both the true and the false perish, and he is reduced to mere expressions of feeling. (Smart, 1960: 14)

Anne Tyler's novel *The Tin Can Tree* starts with a child's funeral. Later, a group of women discuss what to do about the child's mother. It is a long discussion. Finally, the character Missouri tells Joan: "Bravest thing about people, Miss Joan, is how they go on loving mortal beings after finding out there's such a thing as dying." After this exchange, Charleen says, "Was *that* what you did all this talking to say?" "It was," replies Missouri (Tyler, 1965: 76–7). May RE teachers be as brave, carrying on teaching about love alongside teaching about death.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE PREVENT STRATEGY AND CONSEQUENCES: TEACHING OF JIHAD IN RE LESSONS

HEATHER MARSHALL

The aim of this paper is to begin to understand the government's Prevent Strategy, whose primary focus is the prevention of al-Qaeda influenced terrorism, looking at its implications for teachers and concentrating on strands specifically relating to local authority partners, including schools, and relating them to pedagogy and classroom practice. The Prevent Strategy identifies teaching about and building resilience to controversial issues as the key to prevention. In western countries, Islam is generally associated with al-Qaeda, terrorism, 9/11, 7/7, Palestine, the Iraq and Afghan invasions and Iran, and in western media "jihad" is used to refer to terrorist attacks organized by alleged militant fundamental Muslims. Such association and media coverage fuels fear and hatred, so the Prevent Strategy seemed the ideal base for this research. The first objective is to aid teachers in their understanding of the strategy; the second is to discover how Islam and more precisely jihad is taught in RE lessons, looking at the teacher perspective including teaching materials; and the third is to suggest and create a curriculum and pedagogy to begin to build resilience.

The Prevent Strategy

In May 2008 the government's Prevent Strategy added a local element to a global issue. Schools, identified as a tool for tackling extremist opinion and ideology, were now required to respond to this threat and play their part in the prevention of violent extremism, as well as creating a curriculum which deals with stereotyping and the increase in Islamophobia. This challenge and strategy sounds a number of alarms and raises a number of questions.

> This country, like many others, faces a challenge from terrorism and violent extremism. A very small minority seek to harm innocent people in the name of an ideology which causes division, hatred and violence. It is the role of government to take the tough security measures needed to keep people safe. But a security response alone is not enough; as with many other challenges,

a response led and driven by the community is also vital. (United Kingdom. HM Government, 2008: Ministerial Foreword)

Origins

In May 2008 HM Government produced *The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local Partners in England* with the subtitle *Stopping People Becoming or Supporting Terrorists and Violent Extremists*. The counter-signatures of the document show that the agenda has full governmental support from the top down. The Prevent Strategy is looking to community partners and partnerships to develop and implement effective action which will ultimately make the UK a safer place. The document focuses almost entirely on the threat of al-Qaeda influenced terrorism, explaining that a distorted interpretation of Islam, history, and politics is used to justify attacks against civilians both here and overseas.

To respond to this threat, the government developed a counter-terrorism strategy which came to be known as CONTEST (United Kingdom. HM Government, 2008). With four main components, the government were seen as taking tough security measures to keep people safe. These are:

Pursue – to stop terrorist attacks

Prepare – where we cannot stop an attack, to mitigate its impact

Protect – to strengthen our overall protection against terrorist attacks

Prevent – to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremists

(United Kingdom. HM Government, 2008: 5)

However, the CONTEST strategy was seen as being insufficient, and a longer term and broader programme, particularly around the area of Prevent, was thought to be needed. Believing that it is a combination of interlocking factors which causes violent extremism, the government was now seeing preventing extremism as a major long-term struggle, which needed to be addressed at various levels, including grass-roots and local levels. From these assessments and principles, the Prevent Strategy was created to guide local authorities and other partner agencies in taking this work forward.

Outline

The Prevent Strategy has five key threads and objectives for addressing the factors leading to people becoming or supporting violent extremism or terrorists, each playing a crucial part in the notion of prevention. The first of these threads, "challenging", holds that violent extremist ideology needs to be challenged, rather than simply ignored or rejected, and mainstream voices need to be exercised and heard to combat any ideology which could be considered extremist. The second, "disrupting", holds that the promotion of violent extremism and those individuals and institutions which seek to endorse it need to be disrupted and removed from their power positions. The third, "supporting", that susceptible and vulnerable individuals targeted and recruited by extremist individuals, groups, or institutions need to be supported in order to decrease the likelihood of them being drawn into extremist violence or ideology. The fourth, "increasing", that communities need to increase their resilience to violent extremism, and the last, "addressing", that grievances and issues which extremist ideologies exploit should be addressed and tackled.

This whole strategy, whilst driven by central government, relies on local communities to play an integral part, asking them to take a lead in establishing effective multi-agency planning to develop and deliver responses which are co-ordinated. The active participation of a range of partners is seen as crucial. Essentially, work on preventing violent extremism should embrace the experience, energy, and ideas of the whole community, and through active engagement the objectives of the strategy should be met.

"Learning Together to be Safe"

In October 2008 the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) published *Learning Together to be Safe: A Toolkit to Help Schools Contribute to the Prevention of Violent Extremism*. This stated that "schools can make an important contribution, being a focal point for local communities and helping to build mutual respect and understanding" (DCSF, 2008: 4). The toolkit takes the form of guidelines and suggestions about how schools can work with partner community organizations in work to tackle extremism. Recognizing the potential vulnerability of all school pupils to propaganda by extremist groups and also the positive influence that schools can be in the lives of pupils and the communities they serve, the toolkit is intended as guidance to help schools refocus to meet the objectives and new

themes of the Prevent Strategy. The toolkit seeks to raise awareness of the threat and risks, provide information about the causes of extremism and about preventive action, help schools make a positive contribution to communities whilst protecting the well-being of pupils, and finally aid them in managing risks to the school community.

In a school context the five strands are to:

1. Understand how an extremist **narrative** which can lead to harm can be challenged by staff in schools; and model to pupils how diverse views can be heard, analysed and challenged in a way which values freedom of speech and freedom from harm.

2. Understand how to **prevent harm** to pupils by individuals, groups or others who promote violent extremism, and manage risks within the school.

3. Understand how to **support individuals** who are vulnerable through strategies to support, challenge and protect.

4. Increase the **resilience of pupils and of school communities** through helping pupils acquire skills and knowledge to challenge extremist views, and promoting an ethos and values that promotes respect for others.

5. Use teaching styles and curriculum opportunities which allow **grievances** to be aired, explored and demonstrate the role of conflict resolution and active citizenship. (DCSF 2008: 7)

The toolkit recognizes the good practice and work that schools already do but also suggests that more should be done. Offering practical advice to schools in four areas – leadership and values; teaching, learning and the curriculum; pupil support processes; and managing risk and responding to events – schools are challenged to build on existing universal, targeted and specialist work and to develop it further in union with other local agencies and activities.

The crucial part of this agenda for teachers is the teaching, learning and curriculum area. The primary aim of this strand is the creation of a "curriculum and pedagogy which promote knowledge, skills and understanding to build the resilience of pupils and explore controversial issues" (DCSF, 2008: 9). In terms of grass-root teaching, this is the part of the strategy which will have the greatest influence. The main issue is being teaching and learning strategies which explore controversial issues in a way which

promotes critical analysis and promotes shared values and visions. In this respect, the curriculum needs to be adapted to meet local needs, challenge extremist ideology, and promote universal rights as agreed by the UN. Although the toolkit looks to a variety of subjects, noting that history, geography, citizenship, and English all have a role to play, RE seems to have a greater responsibility, because "'the case for understanding religion could not be more powerful, for the very survival of civilization may depend on it" (Watson and Thompson, 2007: 17). The daily diet of newspaper and television reports about political conflict and terrorism relating to religion, and more specifically Islam, suggests that pupils need to be able to understand the vibrant and diverse beliefs of Muslims as well as learning about the doctrines, however controversial or hard these might be to teach. This is eloquently explained by Rowan Williams (2004): "the question is not so much why some Muslims are suicide bombers as why most aren't and couldn't conceive of being". To build the resilience of pupils, as one of the objectives of the toolkit, I agree with the Archbishop that RE curriculum and pedagogy should not shy away from controversial issues but should explore them directly, providing pupils with the knowledge, skills, and understanding to handle them.

Criticisms

Criticisms of the Prevent Strategy have come from many sides, not least from the Muslim community itself. The An-Nisa Society suggests that the government's strategy is "flawed and fraught with perils" (An-Nisa Society, 2009: 3). Their main criticisms are, first, that it has led to the disproportionate criminalization of Muslim communities, locating the burden for fighting terrorism on Muslim communities whilst neglecting to account for the majority peace-loving population. Secondly, its usage of terminology such as "violent extremism" ignores the very real threat from far-right and other extremist groups, reinforcing negative stereotypes and associations of Islam being synonymous with terrorism, thereby making the problem of terrorism a single issue relating to British Muslims. Finally, it actually dismantles traditional relationships of trust and confidence between public bodies and service users, through the "securitization" of Islam, leading to an abandonment of funding for traditional community development and replacing it with community cohesion, anti-extremist and anit-terrorist approaches, putting Muslim communities under an intense spotlight of the media and far-right groups. Making a number of recommendations, it calls for the