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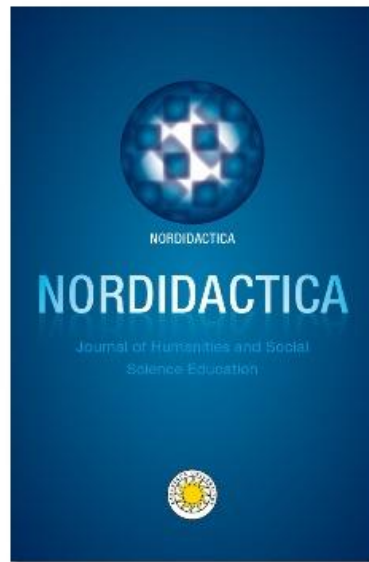
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Worldviews and Big Ideas: A Way Forward for Religious Education?

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Abstract: This article explores the position of ‘worldviews’ in Religious Education, using England as a particular case study to illustrate contemporary international debates about the future of Religious Education (or equivalent subjects). The final report of the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE 2018) – which recommended that the subject name in England be changed from ‘Religious Education’ to ‘Religion and Worldviews’ – provides a stimulus for a discussion about the future of the study of religion(s) and worldview(s) in schools. The article offers a review of, and reflections on, the worldviews issue as treated in academic literature relating to Religious Education, before noting the challenges that the incorporation of worldviews presents. The article goes on to suggest ways in which a ‘Big Ideas’ approach to the study of religion(s) and worldview(s) (Wiggins and McTighe 1998; Wintersgill 2017; Freathy and John 2019) might provide criteria by which worldviews are selected for curriculum content. Finally, the article discusses what the implications of these recommendations might be for ‘Religion and Worldviews’ teachers and teaching.

KEYWORDS: WORLDVIEWS; BIG IDEAS; COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Background

In September 2018, the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE), established by the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC),¹ released its final report, entitled *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward. A national plan for RE* (hereafter, CoRE 2018).² Chaired by Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster, and comprising fourteen specialists (including teachers, academics and educationalists), CoRE had been charged with considering ‘the nature, purpose and scope’ of Religious Education (RE) in England (CoRE 2018, 19).³ This was in a context⁴ characterised by the subject’s regrettable marginalisation due to, amongst other factors: low levels of RE provision in schools (with many schools falling short of legal requirements) (CoRE 2018, 22-25); a lack of specialised teachers (21); inadequate training, support and continuous professional development (CPD) for RE teachers (7-8); poor levels of confidence among trainees and teachers (8); and the subject’s exclusion from both the English Baccalaureate and the Russell Group’s list of ‘facilitating subjects’ (i.e. most commonly required or preferred by universities) (10, 18, 62).⁵

Whilst neither the CoRE nor the REC are governmental bodies, and the report is neither peer-reviewed academic research nor legally-binding policy, the findings nonetheless hold considerable weight in the national debate in England and are reflective of equivalent challenges faced in other national contexts. As advocates of ‘close-to-practice theorisation’, which ‘heightens the potential for knowledge transfer and research impact’ particularly in relation to ‘context-dependent and jurisdiction-bounded educational policies, practices and settings’ (Freathy et al. 2017, 437), we seek

¹ The Religious Education Council of England and Wales states that it ‘was established in 1973 to represent the collective interests of a wide variety of professional associations and faith communities in deepening and strengthening provision for religious education’ and ‘exists to explore and clarify the scope of religious education in schools and its relationship to other areas of the curriculum. It aims to facilitate joint involvement in decision and policy making at national level and to provide a means of communication between member bodies, offering opportunities to share ideas and learn from each other’ (<https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/about/> [Accessed 15 November 2019]).

² The Commission on Religious Education describes itself as a ‘high-profile independent Commission with a remit to make recommendations designed to improve the quality and rigour of religious education’ (<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk> [Accessed 15 November 2019]). It was established to ‘review the legal, education, and policy frameworks for religious education’ (<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/about-the-commission-on-religious-education/> [Accessed 15 November 2019]).

³ The authors of this article had no involvement in, or influence over, the production of the report or its findings beyond the submission of written evidence by the first author. This article is an academic response to its findings in the broader context of the study of religion(s) and worldview(s).

⁴ The CoRE report focuses on RE provision in schools in England. As appropriate, our discussion restricts itself to that context (rather than a more general discussion of UK RE). However, due to executive and legislative systems and frameworks (devolution, amongst them), the reader will appreciate that there are also references to the UK. We have attempted to be specific in all cases.

⁵ The Russell Group consists of 24 ‘world-class, research-intensive universities’ (<https://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/our-universities/> [Accessed 15 November 2019]), which are considered the elite of tertiary institutions in the UK.

to highlight correspondences between the report and discourses in academic literature from multiple contexts. This article therefore treats this context-specific report as a helpful policy case study that is illustrative of contemporary, supra-contextual academic debates about the future of RE (or equivalent subjects). CoRE 2018 acts as practical stimulus material for our theoretical discussion of the future of the study of religion(s) and worldview(s) in schools. We outline the report's findings, focusing specifically on the report's recommendation that the subject is renamed and reoriented to incorporate the study of 'worldviews'. We offer a review and reflections on the worldviews issue as treated in RE-related academic literature. Having noted the challenges that the incorporation of worldviews might present, we suggest ways in which the notion of 'Big Ideas' in the study of religion(s) and worldview(s) (Wiggins and McTighe 1998; Wintersgill 2017; Freathy and John 2019) might facilitate such a move, and what the implications might be for 'Religion and Worldviews' teachers and teaching.

Core 2018 – Focusing on 'Worldviews'

Amongst other suggestions, the final CoRE report recommended that RE be renamed 'Religion and Worldviews', partly to reflect the increasingly diverse world of religious and non-religious worldviews in which students find themselves, and partly to remove the ambiguity of the subject title 'Religious Education', 'which is often wrongly assumed to be about making people more religious' (7). The word 'religion' was retained in the subject name 'both to provide continuity and to signify that young people need to understand the conceptual category of "religion" as well as other concepts such as "secularity", "secularism" and "spirituality"' (7). (This justification – in which one concept is deemed to signify many others – is not wholly convincing.) The CoRE report also recommended that a nine-point National Entitlement be extended to all English schools, accompanied by the creation of a National Body (14, 15, 19) and Local Advisory Networks (to replace local government-level Standing Advisory Councils on RE). The recommended National Entitlement for 'Religion and Worldviews' (hereafter, RW) aims to work towards 'a new and richer version of the subject' (3), based on 'a nuanced, multidisciplinary approach' (4) and the explicit, academic study of 'religion' and 'worldview' as concepts, as well as richer investigation into religions and worldviews themselves (5). It is underpinned by five principles (36-7; here summarised), which recognise:

- a) the complexity of the concepts 'religion' and 'worldview';
- b) the diversity that exists within 'dynamic' institutional worldviews;
- c) that personal worldviews draw on multiple sources and complex interactions;
- d) that practice, emotion and lived experience are as significant as doctrine;
- e) that the study of religion and worldviews is multi-disciplinary.

The National Entitlement (CoRE 2018, 34-5) emphasises the need to teach the content of, and interaction between, worldviews, as well as the diversity within and between them. It also suggests that students are taught about: the concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘worldview’; the role of rituals and practices in religious and non-religious worldviews; questions of meaning and purpose; and connections between worldviews and moral and social norms on an individual and societal level. Acknowledging the powerful and influential nature of worldviews, the National Entitlement also notes that there is variety in the (multi-disciplinary) ways in which we might understand, interpret and study them, including through ‘direct encounter and discussion’ with individuals and communities.

‘Worldviews’ in the academic study of Religious Education

Key to the revision of the RE curriculum, as envisaged in CoRE (2018), is generating in school students a better understanding of the concept ‘worldview’ and the diversity thereof (3-7). The report defines ‘worldview’ as follows (4):

A worldview is a person’s way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world. It can be described as a philosophy of life or an approach to life. This includes how a person understands the nature of reality and their own place in the world. A person’s worldview is likely to influence and be influenced by their beliefs, values, behaviours, experiences, identities and commitments.

Use of ‘worldview’ as a hypernym or ‘primary concept’ (Everington 2018, 11) appears frequently in current RE-related research across national boundaries (Van der Kooij et al. 2013, 2016; Miedema 2014; Ahs et al. 2016, 2017; Everington 2018; Taves et al. 2018; Flanagan 2019). For some, this ‘overarching framework’ serves to remove the inappropriate opposition of the ‘non-religious’ to the ‘religious’, given that both may offer answers to ‘Big Questions’ (Taves et al. 2018, 207). For others, the use of the term ‘worldviews’, which they regard as more inclusive, promotes a recognition of the ‘variations and fluidity’ in the ways in which people view and experience the world and the increasingly ‘eclectic’ approach of younger generations to religion and spirituality (Ahs et al. 2016, 212, 225). In certain contexts – notably in Finnish trials of an ‘integrative’ approach – this has led to the suggestion that the use of the term ‘religious’ in the curriculum subject title should be removed altogether. Where previously ‘Religious Education’ has been taught to ‘religious’ pupils (according to their nominated faith) and ‘Secular Ethics’ has been taught to ‘non-religious’ pupils in a ‘segregative’ Finnish system, Ahs, Poulter and Kallioniemi suggest that an ‘integrative’ approach should be taught under the banner of ‘Worldviews Education’ (2017), which can act as ‘an important tool for societal integration’ (Ahs et al. 2016, 209; see also Miedema 2014, 82). This was echoed by Teece (2017) who, in advance of the publication of CoRE (2018), called for RE in England to be renamed ‘Worldview Studies’ as a better descriptor for what it means to learn about the faith and beliefs of others around the world in the 21st century (potentially including existentialism,

hedonism, humanism, scientism, environmentalism, Marxism, consumerism, materialism and celebrity cultism).

Just as there has been considerable debate and disagreement over terminology relating to religions and beliefs (Jackson 2014, 27-31), so the term ‘worldview’ has proven difficult to define. Scholars have grappled repeatedly with the lack of conceptual clarity (e.g. Smart 1983), and controversies provoked by the term, especially as it relates to non-religious worldviews (Everington 2018, 3-4) and for its linguistic associations with National Socialism and GDR state socialism (Schweitzer 2018, 519). Van der Kooij et al. state that ‘although there is a basic agreement about the conceptual meaning of “worldview” in RE, namely a view on life, the world, and humanity (McKenzie 1991; De Jong 1998; Vroom 2003; Miedema 2006), this agreement is not sufficient to define the concept precisely’ (2013, 213). In attempting to devise a *precise* definition, Van der Kooij et al. suggest that a worldview is, firstly, a view on life incorporating answers to existential questions (2013, 215). These questions may be ontological, cosmological, theological, teleological, eschatological or ethical in their focus (2015, 82). Whilst not every category will be a feature of every worldview, at least the ontological (the nature of existence and humankind), teleological (the meaning and purpose of the universe and humankind, as well as the meaning *of* life in general and the meaning *in* life held by individuals) and ethical (what is good/bad and right/wrong) categories must be addressed for a worldview to qualify as such (thus discounting political theories). Worldviews will also offer answers to questions about moral values and the meaning of life, and will concern people’s thinking and actions (i.e. a worldview is not simply abstract). In this conception, religions may be understood under the umbrella term ‘worldview’, with all religions considered to be worldviews, but not all worldviews being religions (Van der Kooij et al. 2013, 212).

But do individuals whose beliefs and values fail to meet the criteria offered by Van der Kooij et al. (2015, 82) nonetheless have a worldview, or at least a particular way of engaging with and being in the world? Similar questions emerge when we analyse Michael Hand’s recent definition of worldviews ‘as theories of the meaning of life [which] are at once speculative and practical, concerned both to explain the human condition and to prescribe a pattern of life’ (2012, 530; see also Hand 2018). For him, they provide ‘a general account of the significance, origin and purpose of human existence’ (529). However, by stating that ‘not everyone subscribes to such a theory: some people are agnostic about these matters’ and ‘a religion need not include a theory of the meaning of life’ (529), Hand seems to have defined ‘worldview’ in ways that limit its application. Accordingly, one may or may not have such a theory; religions may or may not incorporate worldviews (i.e. theories of the meaning of life). What of the non-religious individual who does not subscribe to the idea of life having meaning? What of the adherent whose religion does not offer a theory of the meaning of life? What of the person who does not share the anthropocentric assumptions of Hand’s worldview or those of others above – focusing specifically on *human* history, life, destiny and behaviour? Does none of these individuals have a worldview? Are they in deficit because their particular worldviews do not align with a *precise* definition derived from an analysis of systematised, corporate and longstanding and/or unstructured,

individual and ephemeral worldviews? If CoRE (2018) advocated a change from ‘RE’ to ‘RW’ to be inclusive of all by reflecting the diversity of beliefs, values and practices in society, then the definitions of ‘worldviews’ above may prohibit accomplishment of that ambition. The distinction drawn between ‘institutional’ and ‘personal’ worldviews in CoRE (2018) may provide a resolution.

Institutional and personal worldviews

Like CoRE (2018), Van der Kooij et al. (2013; 2016) distinguish between ‘organized’ (like ‘institutional’) and ‘personal’ worldviews. They suggest that an organised worldview is ‘a view on life that has developed over time as a more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas’ (Van der Kooij et al. 2013, 215). These organised worldviews will seek to influence the beliefs and behaviours of their adherents, prescribing moral behaviours, as well as to impart meaning to and into their lives (Van der Kooij et al. 2013, 216-17). Personal worldviews, on the other hand, are less easy to pin down. Acting as a ‘bricoleur’, an individual may draw upon various worldviews (religious and/or secular) in the compilation of their personal worldview, which may be ‘more eclectic and idiosyncratic’ (and, perhaps, less well articulated: Van der Kooij et al. 2013, 218) than the established, organised versions upon which they might draw (Van der Kooij et al. 2013, 213). A personal worldview, then, can be envisaged as a construction by the individual of a collage, a pastiche, a bricolage; it is a composite and a process of ‘building’ (Ahs et al. 2017, 4) that speaks to their life experiences and the organised worldviews that have influenced them, as well as the reflections thereon that will influence their beliefs and practices moving forward (Flanagan 2019).

Initially, we had thought that this might be depicted as a Venn diagram, with the personal worldview represented by the area of intersection, drawing upon ‘a range of sources’ (Everington 2018, 10), informed and influenced by ‘overlap, cross-fertilisation and interaction’ (CoRE 2018, 36) between worldviews, enmeshed with life experiences, upbringing, cultural factors, education, and so on. Some, all or none of those spheres of influence might be institutional (non-)religious worldviews. However, we concluded that any such diagrammatic representation would be flawed. It would need to be four-dimensional, allowing for change and continuity over time. It would have to show the position and (inter-)relationship of this personal worldview representation with regard to that of other (personal and institutional) worldview representations. It would need also to reflect potential differences in the quality (type/form) and quantity (size/scale) of influence exerted by the different spheres. We would be left with a dynamic interconnecting matrix of personal beliefs, values and practices, acted upon by varying forces (potentially including institutional worldviews), exerting its own energy upon others, to create an interconnecting ‘worldview web’, evolving and enduring in differing respects over time, and in a dynamic relationship with its context(s).

Is such a conception really only applicable to personal worldviews, or might it also apply to institutional worldviews? As Ahs et al. note (2016, 223): ‘In real life, social

categories are never fixed, uniform or harmonious; rather, they are dynamic, complex, context-bound, and intersectional'. So, while Taves et al. (2018, 212) state that 'lived worldviews may be more fragmentary, episodic, and situation dependent than formal, systematized worldviews would lead us to expect', it may also be the case that institutional worldviews themselves are actually more fragmentary, episodic and situation dependent than they might first appear. According to whom, and what criteria, have they ever been deemed 'organised', 'coherent' and 'established'? No institutional worldview is a discrete, impermeable system, no religious worldview an 'off-the-shelf' product, consumed by an unthinking and universally-assenting populace. Worldviews are, by their very natures, 'shiftable', changing across contexts and between communities and individuals. This point reveals the *necessary imprecision* of the terms 'religion' and 'worldview', the deliberate discussion of which (with students) would offer a valuable way into the issues of particularity and agency: there is no monolithic form of Christianity (or Hinduism/African Traditional Religion/Buddhism, and so on), no monolithic Christian worldview, no single template for a 'Christian', only particular forms or expressions of Christianity in particular locations, amongst particular communities and for the individuals who populate those communities. That taken on board, plurality is the key; should we be talking about Christianities, not Christianity and archetypal Christians; Islams, not Islam and archetypal Muslims; and so on, using geographical, temporal and other contextual qualifiers as appropriate? Should we be introducing students to the intersections between contexts, cultures, and perspectives, not bounded, monolithic 'religions' and 'worldviews'? That such particularism exists (whether of experience or expression) *necessarily* engenders uncertainty in the terminology used in attempts to interpret and represent such phenomena. The term 'worldview' is arguably no more *unsatisfactory* than the term 'religion', in that regard. Perhaps, rather than fixate on the imprecision of the terms, we ought to embrace their indefinability: they are as fluid and fuzzy as the phenomena toward which they point. If those are not fixed and finite, then they cannot be completely determinable conceptually.

We therefore need new ways of conceiving of worldviews to explore with students the ways in which various aspects of (ever-shifting, only imperfectly definable) institutional worldviews may, as sources, contribute to the construction of individual personal worldviews (and, potentially, vice versa). Over time, sources may have greater or lesser influence, new sources may emerge, and old ones disappear altogether. Which institutional worldviews (if any) contribute to the development of a personal worldview (and vice versa) depends upon the individual and context. Ultimately, though, no single institutional worldview (whether religious or non-religious) is embodied by an individual at any given time. Thus, religious and non-religious, personal and institutional worldviews may accurately be described as 'messy' (Everington 2018: 7), although reflecting on the 'personal' may assist us in understanding that the institutional is, and has been, constituted by a multiplicity of personal worldviews over time. In fact, an institutional worldview might merely be considered as the official or formal expression of collective personal worldviews as they have been shared through corporate traditions, rituals, behaviours, (un)written sources, and so forth, over time.

However, having acknowledged the ‘messy’ nature of worldviews (and the need to explore that messiness with students), we are left with the practical question of how to embed ‘messy’ worldviews into a workable curriculum.

Issues raised by embedding ‘worldviews’ in RE

It is a matter for debate whether the trend towards diversifying the subject matter, or reframing the already diverse subject matter, of RE is something students and teachers need and want (Halafoff et al. 2015, 253), and/or whether it threatens or damages the integrity of the subject (Everington 2018, 2). Recently, Eileen Barker (2019) has made claims about the inherent and multiple benefits of expanding English RE curricula beyond the so-called ‘Big Six’ world religions to incorporate the study of ‘new and minority religions’. She suggests that this expansion of the curriculum would provide students with a means to: challenge stereotypes; appreciate the diversity of belief and practice observable in contemporary society; investigate interactions between society, the law, human rights and ‘faith’ groups; become sensitised to ‘othering’ tendencies; and investigate ‘key issues’ that might be more opaque when considered through the lens of established religions (for example, ‘origins, development and decline’; ‘choice and change’; and ‘extremisms’) (Barker 2019). Whilst Barker did not move beyond a ‘religious’ framework to embrace the broader term ‘worldview’ and thereby potentially include ‘religious nones’ and non-religious worldviews (such as humanism or nihilism), the incorporation of such subject matter might confer comparable and/or additional benefits to those she has outlined.

Support for the expansion of RE to incorporate consideration of non-religious worldviews can be found in the work of Everington and in the responses of her research participants (2018, 8), but the RE teachers in her sample also perceived considerable practical challenges, such as time constraints, a lack of training and resources, and a danger that the diversity of non-religious worldviews would be difficult to capture, perhaps resulting in an over-emphasis (or even sole focus) on humanism (2018, 6-10), which describes itself as ‘the only clearly defined and common non-religious worldview in the UK’ (Humanists UK, 2018; cited in Everington 2019, 6).

Everington (2019, 2) identifies that ‘two themes in critical responses to the proposed integration of non-religious worldviews are the diminishing of academic rigour and the “dilution” of the subject’, contradicting the CoRE report’s vision of a subject that is ‘richer’, not least for its closer alignment with related academic fields (2018, 3). Citing, for example, responses to the report from the Vice President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews (Shuker 2018) and the Catholic Education Service (CES 2018), she notes that these objections have been voiced particularly vociferously by faith groups (2019, 2-4). Similar concerns have been echoed in a ‘deeply disappointing’ (Dossett 2019, 8) statement issued by the UK’s then Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, who concluded that the move towards a worldviews approach ‘risks diluting the teaching of RE’ (Hinds 2018) and increasing the workload of teachers (a response that the Religious Education Council attributed to a lack of understanding on Hinds’s part [REC 2018]).

Central UK government support is crucial (issues of devolution notwithstanding) if the CoRE's (2018) proposals are to lead to the repeal and replacement of existing legislation which, for example, stipulates that RE in schools without a religious designation shall reflect the fact that the nation's religious traditions are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the other principal religions represented (1988 Education Reform Act, Clause 8[3]). There is no mention of non-religious worldviews.

In support of Everington's assessment, we suggest that the dilution argument is underpinned by two erroneous assumptions: (i) that religions are discrete entities, largely unrelated to or insulated from their surroundings; and (ii) that religions are not themselves worldviews, and therefore their share of the subject will *necessarily* be reduced by the addition of their apparent 'opposites' – a reification of the constructed Western academic dichotomy between the 'religious' and the 'secular'. With regard to the first assumption, CoRE (2018) correctly points out that religions (as worldviews) are 'fluid' and 'dynamic' (36) and are (at least in part) reflective of their wider context, which they influence in turn. To understand religion(s), therefore, one needs to understand the wider landscape – the social, economic, political and cultural context (which includes non-religious worldviews) – with which there will necessarily be interaction and cross-fertilisation.

With regard to the second assumption, we note historical and longer-standing arguments that may be influencing contemporary discourses. In the mid-1970s, for example, similar discussions were occurring, with John Hull providing criteria by which one might select non-religious worldviews (or 'life stances', as he termed them) for inclusion in RE syllabuses. In his judgement, these were three-fold: (i) 'the ideology or way of life must explicitly reject religion'; (ii) 'it must claim to be a substitute for religion'; and (iii) 'it must nevertheless exhibit certain characteristics of the religions, such as a theory of history, a total view of man and his destiny and a system of ethics' (Hull 1984, 89). Hull's criteria were not intended to provide a definition of 'life-stances' per se, but rather of which 'life-stances' should be considered in the specific curriculum context of RE. This is important because otherwise we might ask: do all non-religious worldviews explicitly position themselves in relation to religion (via rejection, opposition, or suggestion of substitution); is this necessarily a dyadic relationship, with non-religious worldviews self-defining in relation to religion; and do all worldviews necessarily offer theories of history, a total view of humankind and its destiny, and a system of ethics, or even consider such to be possible, meaningful and worthwhile? It is clear that Hull's intentions were to justify the inclusion of non-religious worldviews in a subject that was deemed to be wholly or predominantly about religion(s). For this reason, his criteria were oriented towards the relationship between non-religious worldviews and religion(s), and the extent to which a study of the former could shed light on a study of the latter. However, if religions are themselves deemed to be worldviews, and if the nature and purpose of RE is re-defined to bring into scope both 'religion' and (religious and non-religious) 'worldviews', then the criteria for selecting and sequencing content needs to be revised accordingly. Selected worldviews do not need to be made in the image of religion.

Furthermore, even if the attention paid to existing (wholly or predominantly religious) curriculum content was to diminish, then this could be understood in terms analogous to (albeit fictional) changes in other domains: History transitioning from ‘British history’ to ‘British and world history’; Biology shifting from ‘plants and animals’ to ‘plants, animals and organisms’; English broadening from ‘English literature’ to ‘English and Anglophone literature’; and so on. In each case, the original content would not *necessarily* be removed and replaced, although it *may* be reduced and reframed as part of a broader programme. The concept of ‘dilution’ however implies the thinning or weakening of the subject matter. This is a misleading metaphor because it focuses on ‘religion’ as the solute and ‘worldviews’ as the solvent, rather than recognising the benefits conferred by the new ‘religion and worldviews’ solution. The changes proposed by CoRE (2018) do not imply watering-down an old blend to produce an insipid imitation, but the creation of a new concoction that concentrates on both ‘religion’ and ‘worldviews’ (of which religions are examples) and the relationship between these concepts. The result should be a strong cocktail, not a weak cordial.

A similar concern relates to the (imagined) size of the subject – would it not have too much content, were it to include non-religious worldviews as well as religious worldviews? This anxiety is unnecessary, not least because, as Dossett notes, ‘non-religious worldviews have featured on RE curricula [in England] since the 1970s’ (2019, 7). Quite apart from that fact, no subject can be ‘contained’ within a school curriculum or, for that matter, within any curriculum. No scholar – whether a school pupil, university student or fully-fledged professor – expects to ‘cover’ a subject, discipline, or field of inquiry in its entirety. The History, Biology and English curricula do not attempt to cover the whole of history, every organism and ecosystem, and every work of English literature, respectively. All curriculum subjects are faced with an enormous scope of potential content and have to find criteria and methods for selecting and sequencing it. RE has always done so, and RW would need to do the same. The challenges of selection and sequencing, however, must not dictate how we conceive of the subject matter theoretically and conceptually, even if selection and sequencing are necessary for practical pedagogical and curricular purposes. The task then is to create a list of content – for this is necessary, at some level, for the purpose of planning programmes of study, units of work and/or individual lessons – whilst continuing to convey to students and teachers the very broad, unruly and fluid nature of the field in which they are co-researchers. In other words, the constructed curriculum must contain within itself the seeds of its own destruction, always pointing beyond the apparently fixed and finite by taking opportunities – through shared inquiries and exploratory talk – to highlight its indeterminacy, unfinalisability and open-endedness (Freathy et al. 2017, 426-7). We next consider why this criticality and dialogism is both theoretically and ethically important.

Criteria for selecting worldviews for curriculum content

Despite the UK government's resistance (Hinds 2018), calls for further research (e.g. Everington 2019) suggest that it is worth considering the issues arising from an albeit theoretical implementation of CoRE 2018's recommendations. Two key questions arise from the discussion above: *How* might the fluid and contested concept of 'worldview' be investigated in a RW curriculum alongside its 'dynamic' and 'complex' (Ahs et al. 2016, 223), 'fragmentary' and 'episodic' (Taves et al. 2018, 212) 'real-world' manifestations? And, *which* non-religious worldviews should be included, given the criticisms that some have levelled against the report for its lack of 'clear guidance' (Everington 2019, 5)?

Based upon the report's five underlying principles (see above, CoRE 2018, 36-7), implementation and selection must enable students to appreciate: conceptual complexity; diversity within and between institutional worldviews; influences upon personal worldviews; the significance of doctrine *and* practice, emotion and lived experience; and the multi-disciplinary nature of religion/worldview study. These principles should be observed such that 'programmes of study':

*... reflect the **complex, diverse and plural** nature of worldviews. They may draw from a range of religious, philosophical, spiritual and other approaches to life including different traditions within Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, non-religious worldviews and concepts including Humanism, secularism, atheism and agnosticism, and other **relevant** worldviews within and beyond the traditions listed above, including worldviews of local **significance** where appropriate. (CoRE 2018, 13, emphasis added)*

The recommendation that selection takes place on the bases of 'relevance' and 'significance' is challenging. Who gets to select what is 'relevant' or 'significant', and according to which criteria might those labels be applied? Potentially, selection could focus on a quantitative measure – how many people (locally, nationally, and globally) subscribe to the worldview under consideration? – with those most populous selected for inclusion. Alternatively, one could look to qualitative analysis, for example, asking how influential – politically, economically, socially, and so on – a worldview has been in the past, is in the present and will likely be in the future, and select those which have had the greatest influence.

However, selecting traditions/worldviews which have the largest following (relevance?) or have had the greatest influence (significance?) risks perpetuating existing hegemonies. It is vital that we also take into account historical and contemporary realities which have minimised, marginalised and exacted violence on certain traditions and worldviews. By way of example, the European colonial project in the 'Scramble for Africa' often involved efforts both to Christianise and 'civilise'. Integral to this process was the demonisation of indigenous worldviews and the conversion of 'savages' to coloniser religions and worldviews. Assessment by quantitative or qualitative measures would privilege 'relevant' (populous) and 'significant' (change-effecting) Christianity, thereby rendering those indigenous traditions 'irrelevant' and 'insignificant', only revisiting upon them historical injustices.

Here, then, broader consideration of the dynamics of power must be taken into account when making judgements about ‘relevance’ and ‘significance’. This concern echoes Dossett’s call for attention to the contextual influences and intersectional engagements of ‘hybridity, secularisation, race, colonialism, migration, etc.’ in the study of religion(s) and worldview(s) (2019, 8). Given the subjectivity involved in determining ‘relevance’ and ‘significance’, alongside the contested nature of the concept ‘worldview’, it is not easy (if at all possible) to determine a singular, ethically-defensible and theoretically-coherent list of worldviews for inclusion on curricula. By whom the curriculum is determined, and how, is an important consideration.

The above discussion, however, has treated selection solely from the perspective of determining which objects of study should constitute the fixed and finite *subject knowledge content* of RW. As we explore in the following section, a different picture emerges if we consider selection of objects of study from the point of view of developing multi-disciplinary, critical and reflexive *skills and approaches* utilised in the academic study of religion(s) and worldview(s). Focusing our attention on epistemology and methodology both enables a less problematic evaluation of ‘relevance’/‘significance’ and attends more closely to the report’s recommendation that RW align with, and draw upon, related fields in the academic sphere (CoRE 2018, 3). Relative ‘relevance’ or ‘significance’ can therefore be reframed in terms of the learning opportunities afforded by an investigation into any given worldview or aspects thereof. Coherence is provided not only through criteria for selecting and sequencing otherwise ‘messy’ subject matter, but through the rationale for the disciplinary, interpretative and methodological skills and approaches taken.

Big Ideas about the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)

In the CoRE report, there is a clear correspondence between the National Entitlement and the ‘Big Ideas’ promoted earlier by the University of Exeter’s ‘Identifying Principles and Big Ideas for Religious Education’ project (St Luke’s College Foundation, Ref. 016J-086). The ‘Big Ideas for RE’ report (Wintersgill 2017) suggested that six ‘Big Ideas’ might be used to select and sequence content in the English RE curriculum, adopting the approach of the ‘Principles and Big Ideas of Science Education’ (Harlen 2010 and 2015, itself drawing on the work of Wiggins and McTighe 1998). These Big Ideas focused on the characteristics of ‘religions and non-religious worldviews’, and were entitled ‘Continuity, Change and Diversity’; ‘Words and Beyond’; ‘A Good Life’; ‘Making Sense of Life’s Experiences’; ‘Influence, Community, Culture and Power’; and ‘The Big Picture’ (BI1-6).

In an article published before the release of the Commission’s report (Freathy and John 2019 [online July 2018]), we reflected on the ‘Big Ideas’ set out by Wintersgill (2017). This led us to propose ways in which academic modes of inquiry might be introduced into the RE classroom, suggesting that ‘Big Ideas about the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)’ ought to be included, as subject content, alongside ‘Big Ideas’ (i.e. theories and generalisations) about the ‘religions and non-religious

worldviews' themselves. Our 'Big Ideas about' (hereafter, BIA1-4)) focused on four aspects (here, in summary form):

1. Encountering religion(s) and worldview(s): Contested definitions and contexts

There is no uncontested definition of 'religion' or 'worldview', nor is there certainty about the nature of individual religions or worldviews. There is no uncontested definition of what the study of religion(s) and worldview(s) is, or what it should involve. A critical-analytical, empathetic, and inquisitive approach – alongside an awareness of dynamic contexts – is required at all times.

2. Encountering Oneself: Reflexivity, Reflectivity and Positionality

Who we are (place, era, culture, aspects of identity, etc.) affects – and sometimes determines – what we know about religion(s) and worldview(s). Encounters with unfamiliar peoples, cultures, religions and worldviews assist us in understanding ourselves better. In turn, this equips us better to investigate and understand religion(s) and worldview(s).

3. Encountering Methodologies and Methods: Discernment and Diversity

The study of religion(s) and worldview(s) is inherently multi-disciplinary and methodologically diverse. The disciplinary and methodological approaches taken to the study of a religious phenomenon or worldview will contribute significantly to the results.

4. Encountering the 'Real World': Relevance and Transferability

The study of religion(s) and worldview(s) is a vital tool in gaining knowledge and understanding of the various religions and worldviews in the world, as well as their engagement in contemporary public and private affairs. It offers many transferable skills, which are invaluable in many domains of life experience, including further education and employment.

Freathy and John 2019, 8-10

The article as a whole proposed that issues concerning epistemology and methodology should be specifically positioned as objects of inquiry. Like CoRE (2018), it promoted an awareness of multi-disciplinarity; the use of multi-methodological approaches; the practice of reflexive learning; reflection on positionality; and the importance of encounter and dialogue. As well as the considerable overlap between CoRE's underlying principles and BIA1-4, there are notable areas of commonality between BIA1-3 and the ninth point in the National Entitlement:

Pupils must be taught:

*the different ways in which religion and worldviews can be **understood, interpreted and studied**, including through a wide range of academic disciplines and through **direct encounter and discussion** with individuals and communities who hold these worldviews. (CoRE 2018, 35, emphasis added)*

In relation to a newly conceived RW, and alongside other criteria, we now suggest that our 'Big Ideas about the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)' could usefully guide

selection of worldviews for inclusion on curricula, based on the extent to which study of each worldview (or aspects thereof) generates discussion of these Big Ideas and exemplifies associated interpretations, methodologies and methods. Amongst other objectives, worldviews thereby become the instruments by which these Big Ideas are explored. Within this perspective, students can be conceived as co-researchers, whose inquiry is just as focused on *‘the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)’* (epistemology and methodology *as* curriculum content) as it is on the religion(s) and worldview(s) themselves. The community into which students are being inducted, according to this conception, is not a faith community of religious practitioners (as might have been the case in some previous, confessional and proselytising forms of RE) but the scholarly communities of inquiry dedicated to the academic study of religion(s) and worldview(s). As Freathy et al. (2017, 433) state, school students ‘can become nascent members of communities of inquiry bound by a willingness and ability to contribute to a joint *enterprise*’ and by drawing upon “‘a shared *repertoire* of communal resources – language, routines, sensibilities, artefacts, tools, stories, styles, etc.” of which they should be increasingly self-aware (i.e. theories, concepts, methodologies and methods) (Wenger, 2000, p. 229 [our italics])’. Freathy and Freathy’s ‘RE-searchers approach’ (<http://www.reonline.org.uk/re-searchers/> [Accessed 15 November 2019]) offers an example of how this joint enterprise can be brought into the classroom: Primary school students are reconceived as co-researchers who engage in multi-methodological, dialogical inquiries into religion(s) and worldview(s) and the study thereof. In this approach, the enterprise of inquiry, amongst other factors, can dictate the subject matter: method determining content (as well as vice versa). Let us now explain how ‘Big Ideas *about* the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)’ can contribute to criteria for selecting worldviews for inclusion on curricula.

BIA1: Encountering religion(s) and worldview(s): Contested definitions and contexts

Everington has highlighted the level of uncertainty surrounding the term ‘worldview’, including the inconsistent and sometimes contradictory way in which it has been employed (2019, 4-6) both in the CoRE (2018) report and in academic and public discourse. This prompts her to suggest that more research is required into ‘definitions of “worldview” and “non-religious worldviews”’ (2019, 6; see also Schweitzer 2018, 19-20). This suggestion is true only if one subscribes to the view that worldview(s) (including religion[s]) can possibly be *precisely* defined. Alternatively, if one accepts BIA1 above (Freathy and John 2019), then the contested nature of the terms should be a specific focus of study *alongside* the dynamic and contested ‘real-world’ contexts within which religions and worldviews find their expression (Wintersgill 2017, CoRE 2018). This removes entirely the need to find or enforce fixed definitions. Rather, the imprecision of the terms, and plurality of interpretations, is to be embraced and explored with the students. It is no longer a point of inconvenience, but a focus of study that engenders an improved understanding of religion(s) and worldview(s) and the study thereof.

Within such a framework, worldviews might be selected (and thereby deemed ‘relevant’ and ‘significant’) for the way in which they foreground the imprecision of definitions and/or the difficulty of determining definitions that apply to, or adequately account for, the diversity to be found across contexts (BIA1). This might involve examining a series of dissimilar non-religious worldviews, precisely to explore the contestation surrounding the nature and definition of a ‘non-religious worldview’. It might involve selecting religious worldviews that speak to majority and minority, mainstream and outlying, expressions of an institutional worldview. Students should be given the opportunity to explore worldviews selected to illustrate the similarities and differences that exist *between* institutional worldviews, whilst also acknowledging the heterogeneity that exists *within* them (Van der Kooij et al. 2013, 223; see also Ahs et al. 2017, 3-4 and 6-10). These approaches would help to avoid presenting worldviews as essentialised and monolithic (Ahs et al. 2016, 212; Everington 2018, 10), be that in definition or expression.

Focusing inquiry toward BIA1 – an epistemological issue – students’ critical skills are enhanced. Crucially, this does not necessitate ‘dilution’ of subject content but, rather, added richness and rigour. The study of a supposedly singular institutional worldview can be refocused, for example, on an institutional worldview that finds hugely different expressions across varying denominational, global and cultural contexts. Integral to the study of religion(s) and worldview(s), and a means through which one might focus on contested definitions, is to examine the ‘lived experience’ of those who inhabit particular worldviews, a focus which Dossett traces back to the Warwick Project (2019, 8). Lived experience, in particular, is vital in gathering an appreciation of the particular and diverse ways in which people develop and inhabit their worldview, not least to avoid reinforcing stereotypes, of which the Commission considers RE to have been culpable in the past (CoRE 2018, 36). Thus, students should engage with the individuals and communities about whose ways of life and worldviews they are inquiring, and they must consider the ‘real religious landscape’ rather than abstractions (Dossett 2019, 8).

BIA2: Encountering Oneself: Reflexivity, Reflectivity and Positionality

And, of course, the students themselves are part of the (non-)religious worldview landscape. BIA2 encourages them to reflect on that fact – to consider (i) how they fit into the landscape they are studying, and (ii) what effect(s) their own worldview commitments and positionality have on both the ways in which they study religion(s) and worldview(s), and the conclusions that they come to about religion(s) and worldview(s) (Larkin et al. 2019).

This emphasis derives from the commitment that RW should be subject to the core scholarly standards that we would apply – both *to* and *in* – any other curriculum subject. As in any academic field, there is an expectation of rigorous, critical and ‘scientific’ engagement and inquiry; this includes reflection on method and a consideration of the influence that the researcher’s presence and positionality has on the process, results and

conclusions of any inquiry. The personal worldviews of the students thereby become objects of study.

For students, explicit reflection on their lived experience and the sources that inform their own ‘fluid, multi-layered’ identity and worldview (Ahs et al. 2016, 225) offers the opportunity to consider ‘the extent to which experience is governed by hidden ... meta-narratives, which are usually pre-conscious and non-cognitive’, thereby attending to the ‘dynamics of knowledge production’ (Dossett 2019, 8). It would allow them to analyse the ways in which their dynamic personal worldviews intersect with, are similar to, and differ from institutional worldviews (both religious and non-religious), thereby recognising their individuality, and the diversity of expressions and interpretations of worldviews that exist both locally and globally across dynamic contexts (Ahs et al. 2016, 212). Personal reflection by students on their own worldview – an inherently active and transactional (rather than didactic) mode of learning (Ahs et al. 2017, 3-4) – will sensitise students both to similarities to, and differences from, those around them, including those with whom they are (or have been) bracketed under the labels of institutional worldviews (as fellow Muslims, Christians, ‘nones’, for example). Inevitable in this process is increased reflection within the classroom on the contemporary (non-)religious landscape in society (Everington 2018, 4). It also enables a reflexive response – a recognition that who they are affects how they study (including preferences for methods of learning), as well as how they interpret religion(s) and worldview(s) and, therefore, what they learn.

Focusing in on BIA2, selection for ‘relevance’ and ‘significance’ should therefore focus on highlighting for students the particularity of their own lived experience and their own epistemological ‘lenses’ (Freathy and John 2019, 34-5). ‘Relevance’ here becomes relevance *for the learning process* and may therefore mean selecting remote, minority, or culturally distinct/distant worldviews alongside the local and familiar. After all, encounters with difference may hold a mirror up to our own worldviews and show us that the way in which we perceive the world is neither normative nor objective.

BIA3: Encountering Methodologies and Methods: Discernment and Diversity

Our third ‘Big Idea *about*’ focuses on the inherently multi-disciplinary nature of both academic and school-level study of religion(s) and worldview(s) (see also Georgiou 2018; Norfolk SACRE and Agreed Syllabus Conference 2019). The final principle underlying the National Entitlement shares this emphasis (CoRE 2018, 36-7). School students should therefore be introduced to the ways in which different disciplines approach religions/worldviews and be asked to consider, for example, what the anthropology of religion offers that the philosophy of religion does not, or what Classics/Ancient History can tell us about early Christianity that we might not glean from textual analysis in Biblical Studies. This is recognised, albeit in an ‘Afterword’, in the sequel publication on ‘Big Ideas’ by Wintersgill et al. (2019, 83):

[w]e recognise that disciplinary knowledge ... should include both the processes deployed by the various disciplines concerned with the study of religion and religions/worldviews and the new knowledge and understanding that results from the application of these processes. We have to date focused on the knowledge and understanding. ... An important aspect of Big Ideas is that, since they emerge from disciplinary knowledge, they must be reviewed regularly to ensure that they reflect new knowledge and understanding ... They are not meant to be treated as fixed and unchangeable categories.

A necessary component of a multi-disciplinary approach is the use of a multiplicity of interpretations, methodologies and methods in our study of religion(s) and worldview(s). As Richard Kueh suggests, part of students' subject matter in RE should be disciplinary knowledge; that is, knowledge of 'the tools, norms, methods and modus operandi' by which researchers in the relevant disciplines conventionally 'go about exploring' religion(s) and worldview(s) (Kueh 2018). It is clear how this process functions in other subjects: for example, students conduct source work in History, field trips in Geography, practical experiments in Science, and so on. This focus on 'how?' as well as 'what?' should be replicated in RE/RW, with students being introduced to a variety of interpretations, methodologies and methods, and crucially, to reflect on the differences, strengths and weaknesses of each. Students could work closely with texts, consider variations in expressions of worldviews across contexts (cultural, spatial, temporal), conduct interviews with experts, and so on, considering what perspective the approach taken offers, and how it affects the outcomes of their study. Each choice determines which worldviews, or at least which aspects thereof, should be selected for scrutiny, and here the form and accessibility of sources of evidence might be a decisive factor in curriculum content selection.

In academic research, active engagement with the beliefs and practices of individuals and/or groups might involve interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, (non-)participant-observation and so forth. Each of these approaches involves 'encounter and discussion' as per the CoRE (2018) report, and accords equal importance to agency and performance, thereby contributing to the dismantling of what Dossett describes as a 'false "philosophy and ethics" versus "phenomenology" dichotomy which, as it stands in all its postcolonial glory, threatens to undermine efforts to move the school curriculum in a positive direction' (Dossett 2019, 8). Having students visit institutions (e.g. places of worship or secular assembly), inviting visits from individuals who hold particular worldviews, and creating opportunities in the classroom to engage with the material realities of worldviews (e.g. texts, artefacts and ritual performances) all offer equivalent opportunities. Crucial to such encounters is to provide opportunities to engage with multiple 'worldview representatives', so as to inculcate an appreciation of diversity within and between worldviews. Once again, the selection of worldviews need not be overly prescriptive; selection according to this criterion can be based upon demonstrating, and gaining experience of, a variety of disciplinary, interpretative and methodological skills and approaches.

BIA4: Encountering the ‘Real World’: Relevance and Transferability

In societies with an increasing population of ‘nones’ – those who claim no religious affiliation or belief (or no institutional religious affiliation) – it is imperative that students consider and come to an understanding of such positions. They may not be religious themselves, they may not come from religious families and, and even if they are or do, the students will routinely encounter those who are not religious in their communities and throughout the course of their lives. As Everington suggests, at least part of the purpose of RE/RW is for the students to come to an understanding of the actual religious and non-religious landscape in which they live, making the subject ‘fully inclusive and relevant to all pupils, including the increasing number who have no religious background or commitment’ (2019, 2). To that end, ‘there is a need for a subject that represents the “real”, rather than “imagined”, religious landscape (e.g. Dinham and Shaw 2015)’ (2019, 2-3).

Reflection on this ‘real world’, on society at its local, national and global level, involves not only consideration of the multitude of religious and non-religious worldviews that exist within it, but also on the many intersections and engagements between religion/non-religion and other spheres of life. Encouraging the students to reflect on BIA4 involves encouraging them to consider the relevance of worldviews in relation to, for example, history, culture, politics and social dynamics (e.g. in public and private institutions), and issues of gender, sexuality, race relations and social justice. Increased awareness of religious and non-religious worldviews, in all their diversity, alongside the critical skills engendered by BIA1-3, would foster a greater appreciation in the students of the ‘relevance’ and ‘significance’ of the study of religion(s) and worldview(s). Curriculum content selection needs to reflect these aims, but so does classroom practice, including the pedagogical approach, professional knowledge and professionalism of RE/RW teachers (Freathy et al. 2016, 116). We will discuss this next.

Teachers encountering the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)

A 2010 UK government White Paper entitled *The Importance of Teaching* noted that ‘nothing makes more difference to the progress and attainment of any child or young person than good teachers and good teaching’ (43). This highlights the need to consider the preceding discussion in terms of its implications for the initial and continuing professional development of RE/RW teachers, and who should be responsible for providing it. CoRE (2018) notes that teachers in England lack confidence in their abilities to do justice to RE (8) and that they need secure subject knowledge (37). This may result from the fact that teachers in England more often lack subject specialism in RE than in other subjects (21), hence the Commission’s focus on the promotion of ‘scholarly accuracy’ (13) and high-quality teaching (45ff.). Not long ago, the same issues were highlighted in reports from the UK’s All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education (2013) and the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED 2013). Too many of those teaching RE are non-specialists, or indeed – particularly in Primary schools – unqualified teachers. Even

when they have undertaken tertiary studies in Theology and Religious Studies (or cognate disciplines), some may not have wrestled intellectually with the challenges associated with creating, substantiating and interpreting (new) knowledge, and very few will have conducted their own research with any significant degree of disciplinary or methodological sophistication (which would likely take place in original projects at Masters or Doctoral level). How can teachers induct students into the communities of academic inquiry associated with the study of religion(s) and worldview(s), if they themselves have not been so inducted (or only to a rudimentary level)? This lack of specialised, advanced and complex knowledge and expertise – on the part of not only many English RE teachers, but also some associated advisors, consultants, inspectors, textbook writers, syllabus makers, and so forth – militates against implementation of our epistemologically- and methodologically-orientated vision. It also raises the question of who and where are the educators adequately equipped to ‘train’ RE/RW teachers, bearing in mind the continuing marginalisation of university-led, research-based initial teacher education in England. Thus, in the face of providing ‘a new and richer version of the subject’ (3), and reflecting these levels of academic study, provisions need to be made for teachers (and others) to gain in confidence; the problem of inadequate initial and continuing professional development, it seems, will become more acute before it recedes.

A first step is recognising the changing nature and purpose of the subject. The aim of inducting students into the communities of academic inquiry associated with the study of religion(s) and worldview(s) is different from the aim of nurturing and formatively influencing the spiritual life of students, for example. Previously, we discussed selecting and sequencing subject content knowledge about religions and worldviews, so as to contribute to students’ understanding of ‘Big Ideas about the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)’. This is different, for example, from the *instrumental* role afforded to the study of religion in Michael Grimmitt’s (1987) ‘human development’ approach to RE:

... the unifying factor in his rationale is the bringing into a synergetic relationship the life world of the pupil and religious life world of the various religious traditions. In Grimmitt’s design, the religious life world does not include anything that one might select from the phenomena of a particular tradition, but only that which illuminates and informs the pupils’ life world curriculum (see 1987, 226, 267–388). ... So it could be said that the unifying factor is human experience rather than religion. (Teece 2010, 96)

In our approach, the unifying factors are religion(s) and worldview(s) and the study thereof. Pupils’ ‘life worlds’ (personal worldviews) are only relevant in terms of how they influence, and are influenced by, their learning about religion(s) and worldview(s), and because personal reflection and reflexivity are intrinsic parts of what it means to undertake such academic/scholarly study (Larkin et al. 2019). We make no assumptions about purported ‘shared human experience’; the (positive) lessons that students might ‘learn from’ the religions and worldviews under study; or the direction and goal of human development (e.g. spiritual, moral, social and cultural), other than the development of academic/scholarly knowledge, skills, attributes and values associated

with the relevant communities of academic inquiry. We follow the idea, which is found ‘in most cases in most countries’, that school subjects ‘should be clearly related to a delineated field of study at university level’ (Schweitzer 2018, 520). This does not detract from the real-time, ‘real-world’, significance of the subject matter, as the religious/worldview plurality of contemporary global societies (and the political challenges faced therein) dictates that RE/RW is ever more important in the lives of students, whether they pursue such study beyond school or not. Whether a student (or teacher) is religious, religiously inquisitive, or religiously ‘absolutely unmusical’, as Max Weber described himself (1909), does not have a bearing on this significance. Neither does the existence, or lack of, a ‘synergetic relationship’ between the personal worldview of the student (or teacher) and the personal / institutional worldviews under study. What is important, on the part of both student and teacher, is whether they have the relevant and transferable knowledge, skills, attributes and values necessary to encounter, understand and engage with the radical diversity of religions and worldviews present within our world – past, present and (presumably) future. This includes knowledge of contested concepts and contexts; knowledge of oneself; and knowledge of interpretations, methodologies and methods.

It may not be easy to establish straightforward links between RE/RW and subject counterparts in higher education. Diverse academic paths are open to students of RE/RW and to those whose tertiary studies might lend themselves to RE/RW teaching. In the case of RE teachers, says Schweitzer, there is ‘confusion ... concerning the academic expertise to be acquired for teaching’, which may only increase with a transition from RE to RW, ‘since the term worldview is even less defined than the term religion’ (2018: 520). But this is to define expertise narrowly only in terms of subject content knowledge (as if any such would be fixed and finite) and not also in terms of epistemological and methodological knowledge and skills, and broader academic attributes and values. Evolution is required for the subject, and those who teach and study it, to shift towards the aim of fostering students who are academically-attuned to both religion(s) and worldview(s) *and* the study thereof. RW would resonate more than RE with the personal interests and motivations of students and teachers who are not themselves religious, and it would make clearer links with a broader range of academic ‘worldview-related’ fields (anthropology, philosophy, sociology, etc.), albeit that the UK’s higher education Quality Assurance Agency already lists 30 subjects to which Theology and Religious Studies are said to relate and contribute (QAA 2014, 11 and 13–14).

Within the RW classroom, as we have imagined it, students would learn *about* religion(s) and worldview(s) and learn *about* the study of religion(s) and worldview(s). Initial and continuing professional development, and those who provide it, would therefore have to address not only knowledge of religion(s) and worldview(s), but also knowledge of where that knowledge comes from (the interpretations, methodologies and methods employed in the study of religion[s] and worldview[s]). Closer links and alliances across the school-university divide need to be forged, so that RW students, teachers and teacher-educators (amongst others) know something about, and are aligned to, the communities of academic inquiry of which they are peripheral participants (see

Freathy et al. 2017). Therefore, and in the conception of RW put forward by CoRE 2018, a religion(s) and/or worldview(s) *researcher* would be just as important a conversation partner for teachers and school students as an adherent of a religion or institutional worldview. The expertise of a diverse range of academic specialists should also influence the creation of syllabuses and selection of curriculum content, in order to strengthen the sense of progression from school to university, and to enact the Commission's call to 'draw from' academic disciplines (CoRE 2018, 37). With that in mind, it is possible that the nine-person National Body envisaged by CoRE to develop programmes of study for RW (2018, 14, 15, 19) would need to expand to accommodate more academic specialists in the study of religion(s) and worldview(s), chosen according to research and/or teaching expertise. Even under the current legal framework for determining RE locally, such personnel could be integrated more readily into the membership of Agreed Syllabus Conferences and Standing Advisory Councils for RE.

In terms of forging and facilitating such alliances with schools, readers might be wondering whether it is at all practical, for example, to suggest that school students engage with university-based researchers as part of RW, that teachers aim to utilise academics as resources as they might religious adherents. We believe it is. Universities are keen to engage with their communities and to maximise both the evidential impact of their research, as well as the uptake of university places. Indeed, UK universities are currently awarded funding, through the Research Excellence Framework, on the basis of research impact beyond the academy.⁶ Like never before, then, universities are seeking to engage schools and effect change, that is, to demonstrate 'real-world' relevance and significance. Both curriculum authors and deliverers should capitalise on this impact drive. Universities in the UK commonly operate 'outreach' and 'widening participation' schemes, aiming to foster closer links between universities and schools, to promote transition from school to university education, and to encourage a diverse range of students to apply to their universities.⁷ In natural science disciplines, universities offer science 'taster days' and academic scientists visit schools to deliver demonstrations and workshops that give students an insight into scientific research. Given that such initiatives are already up and running, it seems both feasible and reasonable to suggest that university-based researchers of religion(s) and worldview(s) could deliver a similar set of insights into their work to school-based RE/RW students, and that such engagements could be an expectation within an enriched conception of RW for the future.

Bridging the school-university divide need not be confined to face-to-face encounters. Knowledge-exchange might take place in the creation of textbooks, teacher handbooks, curriculum resources,⁸ or through participation on advisory boards and

⁶ <https://re.ukri.org/research/ref-impact/> [Accessed 15 November 2019]

⁷ See, for example: <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/outreach/> [Accessed 15 November 2019]

⁸ See, for example, student and teacher RE resources published by the Graduate School of Education and the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Exeter: Freathy et al. 2014 and 2018;

committees contributing to the development of RE/RW in schools. Teachers can also be engaged in academic discourses indirectly, for example, through reading research digests⁹ and/or through initial and continuing professional development, perhaps mediated by inspectors, advisors and consultants. So, whilst we are focusing here on theoretical concerns, it is worth noting that practical pedagogical examples of ‘close-to-practice theorisation and conceptualisation’¹⁰ are beginning to emerge and infuse some of the above concerns into classroom practice. At Primary school level (up to 11 years of age), Freathy and Freathy have developed the ‘RE-searchers’ – accessible characters whose various approaches to academic study children are encouraged to adopt and then critique (Freathy et al. 2015; Freathy 2016; Freathy and Freathy 2016). This approach was then reworked in a textbook for Secondary schools (11-18 years) – *Who is Jesus?* (Freathy et al. 2018) – which presents students with multi-methodological and multi-disciplinary avenues for inquiry-based learning in RE. Freathy and Freathy have also set out in practical terms a reflexive approach drawing upon generic pedagogical and psychological research, with Shirley Larkin and Jonathan Doney, in *Metacognition, Worldviews and Religious Education: a Practical Guide for Teachers* (Larkin et al. 2019).

Conclusions

It is a demanding task to recast RE as a critical, dialogic and inquiry-led subject, drawing upon multi-disciplinary, multi-methodological and encounter-driven approaches, and encompassing both religious and non-religious worldviews, thereby better to reflect the academic study of religion(s) and worldview(s) and the (non-)belief profile(s) of contemporary society, be that in England or elsewhere. But this challenge, laid down by CoRE (2018), represents a significant opportunity which must not be missed (Chater 2019), despite the apparently ‘bleak’ current outlook (Dossett 2019, 7). The diversity so apparent within England deserves to be recognised in RE/RW curricula, and the academic status of the subject needs to be foregrounded. The question is, how do we achieve these aims? First, we need to accept and embrace the messiness, contestation, fluidity and uncertainty of religion(s) and worldview(s) – both in the terminology that we use and in the phenomena that we investigate – rather than deem these as problems to be resolved. Students should be exposed, as far as possible, to the diverse and complex nature of the subject matter, and the communities of academic inquiry which investigate it. In this multi-disciplinary and multi-methodological field,

<https://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/research/projects/beyondstewardship/> and <https://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/teachers/religioninthedia/> [Both accessed 15 November 2019]

⁹ See, for example: <https://researchforre.reonline.org.uk/> [Accessed 15 November 2019]. This online resource ‘brings together those who teach and research RE, sharing research reports and encouraging collaboration and new ideas, so that cutting-edge research can have a real-life impact both inside and outside the classroom’.

¹⁰ <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-making-of-the-re-searchers-approach-close-to-practice-theorisation-and-conceptualisation> [Accessed 15 November 2019]

it is perhaps this factor – articulated in our BIA1 – that undergirds rigorous, critical and reflexive inquiry more than any other and which necessitates the privileging of the learning process over propositional knowledge in the study of religion(s) and worldview(s). Second, we need to explore more fully the institutional and personal axis to avoid pigeonholing the students themselves (Ahs et al. 2016, 224), and to recognise the individual, and the fact that there are ‘a plurality of ways of being [non-]religious’ (Ahs et al. 2017, 3). This championing of diversity at the institutional and personal level may encourage empathy, understanding, respect and tolerance (Ahs et al. 2017, 6-10) and develop ‘intercultural and interreligious understanding’ (Halafoff et al. 2015, 250), as well as minimising tendencies to ‘other’ those of differing perspectives (Ahs et al. 2017, 3). It necessarily requires students to take a self-reflective approach and to engage actively in comparative and contrastive inquiry, thereby beginning a ‘lifelong process’ of establishing and modifying their own worldview (Van der Kooij et al. 2013, 226). Third, we need to exercise sensitivity in the selection of religion(s) and worldview(s) for inclusion on the curriculum, deploying criteria that recognise key epistemological and methodological issues as articulated in our four ‘Big Ideas about the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)’. Attending to such issues will enable us to focus not only on subject content ‘knowledge’, but also the ‘knower’ and ways of ‘knowing’. Lastly, in a move that distances the new subject from the ‘formational resonances’ of ‘Religious Education’ (Dossett 2019, 8), we need RW students to take on the role of co-researchers, with the classroom refocused on the ‘explicit, academic study of worldviews’ (CoRE 2018, 5). This concerns both diversity of subject content knowledge and diversity of academic skills and approaches. The once near-ubiquitous aim of socialising students into communities of religious practice can be contrasted with the aim, articulated here, of inducting students into communities of academic inquiry. The relationship between teachers and academics must therefore be fostered in order to share expertise about *how* to learn about, and research, religion(s) and worldview(s). Religions/worldviews are not a fixed and finite set of brute facts, parcelled up in bite-sized curriculum resources, to be consumed uncritically. Knowledge of them is not generated *ex nihilo*: one cannot be said to be ‘knowledge-rich’, while having a poor understanding of the derivation of ‘knowledge’. The development of the ‘new and richer’ RW – foregrounding the importance of critical, reflexive, multi-disciplinary, multi-methodological, and encounter-driven approaches to learning – requires partnership between students, teachers, teacher-educators and researchers. The way forward is a ‘richer’ subject that can enrich its students, strengthened not diluted by being re-conceptualised in terms of curriculum content and pedagogical approach.

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