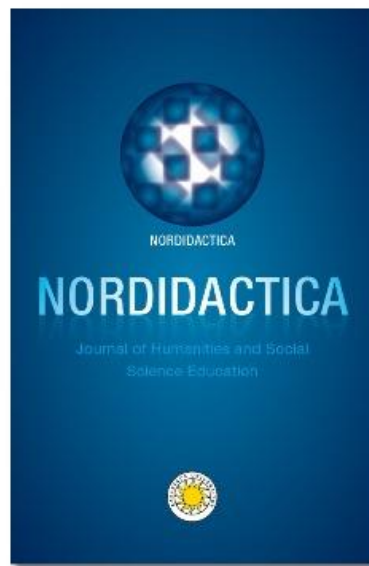


**Barbara Wintersgill's *Big Ideas for Religious Education* and the *National Entitlement to the Study of Religions and Worldviews in England*.
Some reflections on a Big Ideas approach to curriculum planning in an English context from a participant in both projects.**

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Barbara Wintersgill's *Big Ideas for Religious Education and the National Entitlement to the Study of Religions and Worldviews in England.* Some reflections on a Big Ideas approach to curriculum planning in an English context from a participant in both projects.

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Abstract: This paper examines the thinking behind the six 'Big Ideas' suggested in Wintersgill 2017 as a way of deciding what is most important in RE and some of the ways in which this is being developed for practice. The project was based on the theory of 'Big Ideas' developed by Wiggins and McTighe and as applied to the science curriculum by Harlen et al. It aimed to address questions such as how to select and sequence content, and how to make RE more coherent and more engaging for pupils. The paper discusses the suggestion that further 'Big Ideas' are needed, such as the Big Ideas concerned with methodology and epistemology proposed by Freathy and John 2019, or Big Ideas about religion such as theories of its origin and purpose. The relationship between Wintersgill's publication and the 'National Entitlement to the Study of Religion and Worldviews' proposed by the final report of the Commission on Religious Education 2018 is explored by the author who was involved in both projects. The 'National Entitlement' was developed with a similar concern to identify the essentials of RE, without which the subject (renamed by the Commission as 'Religion and Worldviews') cannot be grasped adequately. However, the attempt to provide depth rather than breadth of learning should not be translated into narrowing of content in the sense of a reduction in the religions and non-religious worldviews studied, but instead might even draw upon a wider range of religious and non-religious traditions.

KEYWORDS: BIG IDEAS, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, COMMISSION ON RE IN ENGLAND

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Introduction

The problem of deciding upon content in RE must be as old as the first RE teacher, but became particularly acute fifty years ago when multi-faith RE was introduced in Sweden and the UK. Given the millennia of history and worldwide geographical spread of the major religious traditions, the many diverse groups within each of these, the thousands of smaller and newer traditions, and if we include 'non-religious' or 'quasi-religious' worldviews, and then add philosophical and ethical issues, the possible content is immense and impossible to manage. The author recently found and re-read an essay on the nature of RE written when she was training to be a teacher in 1975-6, and was amused to find that even then, decades before the internet, we were discussing the 'knowledge explosion' and the need to make sure that we made the best use of our short time with students by focusing on knowledge that was distinct to our subject, gave a fair picture of what religion, religions and non-religious worldviews were all about, achieved a balance between breadth and depth of study, and contributed something of lasting value to the students' lives that they could engage with and of which they could see the point.

This practical problem for teachers has been highlighted recently by an international focus across the school curriculum on a variety of ways of identifying crucial knowledge and central ideas of subject areas represented by phrases such as 'Essential Content', 'Big Ideas', 'Core Elements', 'Threshold Concepts', 'Powerful Knowledge' and so on (Skeie 2018) – basically what you need to 'get' to 'get' a subject (specialist or disciplinary knowledge), and knowledge that will be useful across a range of situations, in the future as well as the present. One important example in our subject is the development of the new national curriculum for RE in Norway, organised around 'core elements', the most significant elements of RE in this case understood as: knowledge of religions and worldviews, the range of methods, concepts and sources used, exploring existential questions/answers, the ability to take on the perspectives of others, and ethical reflection (Skeie 2019). Often, as in England and Norway, the projects are influenced by an overall educational principle of teaching 'fewer things in greater depth' (Oates, 2011: 6), and a concern for sequencing and progression in learning rather than just amassing more information at the same level. At the same conference, Laughlin and Zathureczsky argued that a Big Ideas approach might help to address some of the problems encountered by the 'Ethics and Religious Culture' curriculum in Quebec (2019). The fact that similar debates are taking place in different countries demonstrates that the time has come to face up to this problem of selection.

Barbara Wintersgill's Big Ideas

The author was fortunate enough to be invited to be part of a project initiated by Barbara Wintersgill in 2016, which, inspired by the work in the USA on 'Big Ideas' by Wiggins and McTighe (2005) and of Harlen and colleagues in science education in the UK (2010), aimed to explore whether Big Ideas could be developed for RE and how they could help solve current problems in RE. Teachers complain of 'content overload'

and inspectors report that many students experience their learning as a random collection of disconnected information, which they can reproduce for examinations with varying amounts of success, but which does not mean much to them. An ongoing debate among RE professionals is whether it is better to study one or two religions in depth, or have an overview of a wider range of the diverse traditions that are encountered in our contemporary societies. Could a Big Ideas approach provide criteria for selection of content, assist with sequencing content so that students make progress in learning, produce a coherent structure for what can seem to students a mass of unrelated information, and provide an engaging education of which students could see the point and purpose?

A 'Big Ideas' approach proved to be an exciting new way of looking at familiar material and issues. The results of the project (which started with a development group of 13 RE people plus one from the Big Ideas in Science project, in a remote farmhouse in Devon) were published as Wintersgill (ed.) 2017. It is important to read the whole publication in order to grasp the approach, rather than just extracting the list of Big Ideas, but the following comments have arisen from discussions that have arisen since publication. The Six Big Ideas for Religious Education that emerged were not just dreamed up by the group but emerged from a rigorous process described in the publication.

During the initial three days in the farmhouse and subsequent discussion there was as can be imagined much debate about our understanding of the term 'religion' and whether we were attempting to identify the Big Ideas of 'religion' or of 'religions'. We did not adopt a particular shared definition of 'religion' as a basis for the Big Ideas, but rather concluded that the understanding that the concept of religion is highly contested is actually part of the knowledge content of RE. In some of our earlier and longer lists, 'religion' featured as a Big Idea of its own, but in the shorter list that eventually emerged, it is implicit in Big Idea 1, and more explicitly addressed in the descriptions of how this develops at each key stage of education. The author has contributed a chapter discussing the concepts of religion and religions in popular, academic and adherent discourse with particular reference to Dharmic and Pagan traditions to a forthcoming book (Hannam & Biesta: 2020).

The headings of the final list are

1. Continuity, Change and Diversity
2. Words and Beyond
3. A Good Life
4. Making Sense of Life's Experiences
5. Influence, Community, Culture and Power (later shortened to Influence and Power)
6. The Big Picture.

It is important to note that Big Ideas are not the same as concepts or themes, but overarching ideas that cannot be captured by the above headings, but need a narrative paragraph to explain. They are not a list of curriculum content but an earlier stage of

curriculum development; criteria to help with the selection of content from the vast amount available. They can be understood as areas of understanding crucial to the subject, without which you 'haven't got it'. They are useful tools rather than fixed categories, and open to revision and alternatives.

The theory of Big Ideas as developed by McTighe and Wiggins, developed by Harlen et al, and applied to RE by Wintersgill makes clear that Big Ideas are distinguished from other lists of what students should know and understand in a number of ways. They are criteria for selecting and prioritising subject knowledge, transferable to events outside the classroom in the present and the future, help to make sense of otherwise confusing information and isolated facts, and memorable (Wintersgill 2017:11). Thus the emphasis in deciding knowledge content for RE should not be on the kind of 'factual' information that could be used in answering quiz questions about a series of 'isms', but insights that will be of continuing use in understanding how the world works.

The full descriptions can be found in Wintersgill (2017:15), and slightly revised versions in Wintersgill with Cush and Francis (2019:2). The author's own simplified version runs as follows:

1. There is an amazing diversity of religions/worldviews/ways of life, themselves diverse and changing, interacting with each other yet also maintaining continuities through different time/contexts
2. There are many ways in which individuals and communities interpret and respond to authoritative texts and traditional non-verbal artistic material and use both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, literal and figurative, to express their own beliefs, values, experiences and identities
3. There are many ways in which religions/worldviews provide guidance on how to be a good person and live a good life, interpreted differently by members of the same tradition, and agreement may often be found across traditions
4. Religions/worldviews are about experience as much as belief, they can help individuals interpret their experiences as well as providing transformative experiences through practice, and a sense of identity and belonging
5. Religions/worldviews interact with the wider community and cultures, affecting and affected by politics, artistic and cultural life, social values and traditional rituals, sometimes having considerable power and influence beyond their own adherents
6. Religions/worldviews provide coherent overall accounts, however provisional, of the nature of reality - life, the universe and everything -, often based on texts or traditions taken as authoritative, though people interpret and live out these worldviews in different ways, and not everyone accepts the need for such 'grand narratives'.

The Big Ideas are further elaborated and differentiated for students at different ages: 5-7, 7-11, 11-14 and 14-16. The goal of depth of learning is achieved, not as some suggest by restricting study to one or two religions/worldviews (which is one interpretation of 'fewer things in greater depth'), but by prioritising what is important.

This can often be best understood by a 'synoptic' view across traditions, as well as by studying some things in more detail, so that the Big Ideas approach favours neither thematic (across worldviews) nor systematic (one religion/worldview at a time) ways of looking at content. They can either be applied to existing programmes of study to ensure focus, coherence and direction, and to check that nothing important has been omitted, or used to generate new programmes of study. The Big Ideas do lend themselves to sequencing progression in learning and identifying priorities for assessment. This is illustrated in the report and continued in the second publication.

Putting Big Ideas into Practice

This second publication (Wintersgill 2019a) demonstrates how the approach developed in the first book can be used to design RE curricula. Two of the original project team, Dave Francis and the author, assisted Barbara Wintersgill with comments and suggestions on draft materials. It was able to take account of feedback on the first book and of the recommendations of the Commission for Religious Education (CoRE 2017 and 2018). The Big Idea narratives were somewhat revised and the more detailed versions at each key stage (ages 5-7, 7-11, 11-14 and 14-16) revised and reorganised to distinguish between the core text and explanation or exemplification (2019: 57-75).

The second book begins by distinguishing between two types of knowledge 'substantive' and 'disciplinary', drawing upon the terminology of Richard Kueh who applies the work of Michael Young to RE (see for example Kueh 2018). 'Substantive' knowledge is the overwhelming mass of information mentioned at the start of this paper, and 'disciplinary knowledge' refers to the norms, concepts, theories, methods, approaches and general ways of going about things that distinguish a particular subject discipline. Disciplinary Knowledge enables us to make sense of substantive knowledge. Kueh champions Michael Young's idea that disciplinary knowledge turns substantive knowledge into 'powerful knowledge', 'concepts that unlock a greater understanding of the world' (Kueh 2018:67). 'Powerful knowledge' has become one of those slogans like 'religious literacy', 'relevance' or even 'Big Ideas' that has become fashionable and therefore used in different ways by different people, reified and objectified, debated and rejected (see for example White 2019, where the author suggests that 'powerful knowledge' has various meanings even to its originator, and an unhelpful emotional charge. It would be preferable to refer to 'specialized knowledge'). Whether we refer to Big Ideas as 'powerful knowledge', 'specialized knowledge' or 'disciplinary knowledge' or something else (perhaps 'empowering knowledge' or 'transformative knowledge'), the idea is that this knowledge both draws upon particular specialist disciplines, and enables the learner not only to understand the particular piece of substantive knowledge that is the focus of a particular lesson, but gradually built up concepts and tools which they can draw upon throughout life when encountering new situations. Wintersgill (2019) claims that 'knowledge is "powerful" if it predicts, if it explains, if it enables people to envisage alternatives, if it helps people think in new ways'. The current author would suggest that the sort of knowledge represented by Big

Ideas theory is empowering because it helps people with their lives. In the case of RE Big Ideas, it might contribute towards being able to cope with diversity, avoiding stereotypes and generalisations about religions/worldviews, asking questions about authority and provenance, respecting the perspectives of others, and developing one's own worldview.

Examining the idea of disciplinary or specialised knowledge, RE, as well as Religious Studies at University level, has a somewhat insecure hold on its claim to be a subject or discipline, in that its substantive knowledge can be claimed by a wide range of established disciplines such as history, sociology etc. However, the author has argued for a long time that, given the constructed and contested nature of all so-called subject disciplines, Religious Studies has as much basis as anything else to claim to be a discipline on its own right – founding scholars, a designated area of human experience/substantive knowledge, a community of scholars, and its own way of going about things, even if this discipline is a polymethodic one (see for example Cush and Robinson, 2016). So, Big Ideas derive from disciplinary knowledge, principally Religious Studies and Theology, but also the other disciplines upon which these both draw such as history, philosophy and ethics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, textual studies and literary criticism, the creative arts and media studies.

Big Ideas in Practice demonstrates how progression in learning can be achieved by focusing on building up the student's grasp of the Big Ideas rather than particular substantive knowledge. It stresses the importance of studying lived religion (people) as well as doctrinal systems and institutions. It suggests drawing upon contemporary events as ways into the subject ('RE Live'), and illustrates how a focus on the Big Ideas helps to balance breadth and depth of learning. It also helps to generate the most useful questions for enquiry-based learning, suggests how to assess student learning, and gives practical examples of how to initiate curriculum planning using the Big Ideas as well as examples of how this can be used to create units of work. It describes itself very much as a 'work in progress' and invites others to have a go at using this approach and reporting back on what works and what may need revising. The team know of one teacher education course and one local syllabus for Religious Education (neither our own) that has adopted the Big Ideas approach, and a university-based research project in Huddersfield (UK) which is exploring how the Big Ideas approach, alongside the report of the Commission on RE, can be used with primary children.

Wintersgill and colleagues are currently exploring funding for developing a programme of study, schemes of work and individual lesson plans based on the Big Ideas, in addition to the work taking place in Huddersfield. Meanwhile, two sample ideas can be found in 2017:29-35 on places of worship and Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*, and a further two in 2019a: on what is religion, and whether England is a Christian country. The unit of work on places of worship gives a new direction to a traditional RE activity by applying Big Ideas 5 and 6 to explore the social role of religious communities and examine how far religion is important to people. Questions such as why people who have very little contact with religion still take part in some religious events, and who would miss religions if they disappeared, enable further

explorations of the decreasing numbers of people who identify with organised religion and what this signifies.

The Missing Big Ideas

At the beginning of the project in 2016, the list of possible Big Ideas was much longer, and there was much discussion of the different types of Big Ideas, and whether they were 'of' or 'for' or 'about' or 'in' religion, religions, worldviews, religious studies, the study of religions, theology or religious education. The Science document that was part of the initial motivation for the project had ten Big Ideas OF science such as 'all material in the universe is made of very small particles' and four Big Ideas ABOUT science such as 'science assumes that every effect has one or more cause'. Some of the earlier longer lists of Big Ideas for RE included both the key concepts such as 'religion' and methods of study. In the end, it was decided to limit the number of Big Ideas to six, something of a traditional number in English RE (six religions, six dimensions, six areas of enquiry), that they were ideas FOR RE, they were ideas one had to 'get' in order to 'get' religions/worldviews, that they addressed the question of the content of RE, and they were 'for' RE in that they helped the selection of content rather than being about method or theories. In part this decision was made because the polymethodic nature of Religious Studies, Theology and RE make this area very complex as well as disputed, and also because our main concentration was on the big problem of the selection of substantive content.

Since the publication of the first book, there has been criticism of this limitation of Big Ideas, notably from Rob Freathy and colleagues. Rob was part of the original project team, and argues that it was a mistake to limit the Big Ideas to content and omit ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations (see for example Freathy and John 2019). Without these there is a danger that the Big Ideas themselves are reified and seen as 'objective' knowledge to be 'taught'. Freathy and John are certainly right to state that with any such 'list' we need to enquire how these were generated, in what context, by whom and for what purpose. Pupils themselves also need to be involved in this enquiry. The article raises some very important points, but a careful reading of both Big Ideas books reveals that some of these points are assumed, implicit, mentioned briefly or explicitly stated. For example, of the suggested list of four additional Big Ideas ABOUT 'the study of religion and worldviews', the first 'contested definitions and contexts' is addressed in part in the more detailed age-differentiated versions of Big Idea 1, where the contested nature of the concept of religion features. The fourth, 'relevance and transferability' is implicit in the ideas of 'RE Live' that features strongly in the second book, and is also part of the very definition of a 'Big Idea' as used in both publications. The second 'reflexivity, reflectivity and positionality' and the third 'methodology and methods, discernment and diversity' are less explicitly present, but are implicit in and compatible with the Wintersgill approach.

Although it is true that aims, methods and content are inextricably intertwined, for the purposes of thinking and planning it can be useful to concentrate on one thing at a time. As the methods of studying religions/worldviews at university and school level are so many and varied, and as the pedagogies for teaching religions/worldviews/RE are something else again, it would have made for a publication more inaccessible to practising teachers and thus of less immediate use. Reading both books, it is made clear that the Big Ideas are not meant to be understood as fixed categories but as revisable tools. In addition, the Big Ideas are not themselves a pedagogy or linked to any particular pedagogy, but compatible with a wide range of methods of studying religions/worldviews or teaching RE.

Each of the Big Ideas suggests a connection with some of the disciplines used to explore religions and worldviews. Religious studies and/or theology apply to all, but historical and geographical studies are required for Big Idea 1, language(s), literary and textual studies, and the creative arts for Big Idea 2, philosophy and ethics for Big Idea 3, psychology and philosophy for Big Idea 4, sociology, politics and history for Big Idea 5, and philosophy and natural sciences alongside theology and religious studies for Big Idea 6. Freathy and colleagues produced the innovative 'REsearchers', primary school versions of university researchers (see Freathy et al 2015), and it is clear that each of the REsearchers may find themselves more involved with some Big Ideas than others. 'See-the-story Suzie' could help explore Big Idea 2, 'Have-a-go Hugo' would be at home with Big Idea 4, Debate-it-all Derek would help with 3 and 6, and 'Ask-it-all Ava' with 1 and 5. In addition, well-known RE pedagogies suggest themselves, for example, the 'experiential' approach for Big Idea 4.

There is no reason why complementary Big Ideas about the study of religions/worldviews should not be developed, such as the list suggested by Freathy and John, which could work well alongside the Big Ideas FOR RE. The Wintersgill Big Ideas themselves stress diversity, change, plurality of interpretation and the contested nature of concepts such as 'religion', especially in the more detailed breakdown by age of students. When initially preparing for the Dartmoor symposium, the author came up with possible lists of eleven Big Ideas *about religion* (explanatory theories from Marx to Cupitt), three Big Ideas *about Religious Studies* as a discipline, seven Big Ideas *in religions* as employed by Religious Studies, and three Big Ideas *about RE* (mainly aims, approaches and methods). The possibilities are many, as Freathy points out, depending on by whom, how, when, where, why the list is generated. The Wintersgill Big Ideas have an explicit and particular purpose, and a clear focus.

Relationship to the National Entitlement for English RE proposed by the Commission on Religious Education

The Big Ideas project happened to take place simultaneously with the Commission on Religious Education in England (2016-2018), and the author was one of two specialists involved in both projects. Barbara Wintersgill was also one of the expert witnesses invited to give a presentation to the Commission, so it was inevitable that

there was some synergy (or interference) between the two, especially as one of the briefs of the Commission was to investigate a possible National Entitlement for the subject, which was engaging in a similar (but not exactly the same) quest for a brief statement of what is core/central/essential/crucial/important for students to learn in order to benefit from a high quality education in 'Religion and Worldviews'.

The two year Commission was set up by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales in order to collect evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of RE as currently found in England, to identify changes required to address the problems emerging and ensure that all pupils have access to high quality RE, and to make realistic and specific proposals for accomplishing this aim. The final report of the Commission (CoRE 2018) made eleven recommendations designed to provide a new vision for the future of RE in England, as well as practical measures. As well as proposing a new name, 'Religion and Worldviews', both to include non-religious as well as religious worldviews and to suggest the need to examine the very concept of 'religion' and related terms such as 'spirituality', and 'secular', the Commission proposed a National Entitlement for all pupils. This National Entitlement lists nine items that pupils 'must be taught'.

Pupils must be taught:

- 1. about matters of central importance to the worldviews studied, how these can form coherent accounts for adherents, and how these matters are interpreted in different times, cultures and places*
- 2. about key concepts including 'religion' 'secularity' 'spirituality' and 'worldview,' and that worldviews are complex, diverse and plural*
- 3. the ways in which patterns of belief, expression and belonging may change across and within worldviews, locally, nationally and globally, both historically and in contemporary times*
- 4. the ways in which worldviews develop in interaction with each other, have some shared beliefs and practices as well as differences, and that people may draw upon more than one tradition*
- 5. the role of religious and non-religious ritual and practices, foundational texts, and of the arts, in both the formation and communication of experience, beliefs, values, identities and commitments*
- 6. how worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions of meaning and purpose raised by human experience, and the different roles that worldviews play in providing people with ways of making sense of their lives*
- 7. the different roles played by worldviews in the lives of individuals and societies, including their influence on moral behaviour and social norms*
- 8. how worldviews have power and influence in societies and cultures, appealing to various sources of authority, including foundational texts*
- 9. 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, pp.34-35).*

An appendix to *Big Ideas in Practice* compares the two lists. Five of the six Big Ideas correspond neatly to items in the National Entitlement. Interestingly in the light of the Freathy critique, the National Entitlement does include an item on methodology 'the different ways in which religions and worldviews can be understood, interpreted and studied, including through a wide range of academic disciplines and through direct encounter and discussion with those who hold these worldviews'. It is also worth noting that the Norwegian curriculum 'core elements' referred to above include methods and skills as well as content. The content most similar to Big Idea 1 is divided into three: statements about concepts and complexity, change and diversity, and interactions/similarities/differences (National Entitlement items 2, 3 and 4). In sequencing the Big Ideas, the decision was taken to put Big Idea 6 (the coherent accounts) last in order to deprioritise the institutional 'isms' that have often dominated debates about what to teach in RE, whereas in the National Entitlement, the equivalent comes first, to reassure the religious communities, the theologically minded, and government that the 'whole religions' are not being neglected for some ideologically driven thematic approach. The National Entitlement also presents the list of items rather dogmatically as 'pupils must be taught', not the sort of language that would be used in the Big Ideas documents, but which is required in something that might eventually have legal force. The National Entitlement list has a somewhat different audience and purpose from the Big Ideas list.

How do we make choices of content?

So, how does the curriculum planner or individual RE teacher make decisions about content? This is a very complex and multi-faceted process but a crucial one, given the very limited time that is often available. The Big Ideas offer criteria for selection, as does the National Entitlement. The planner can either apply them to existing programmes, and ask whether their programme of study or individual unit of work helps to make progress in understanding one or more of these crucial elements, or use the age-differentiated versions of the Big Ideas to suggest appropriate content.

The Big Ideas books do not specify which particular worldviews should be used to provide the substantive knowledge with which to illustrate the Big Ideas. This would need to take account of particular school context, the interests and concerns of students (which may include wanting to learn about the unfamiliar, according to many students the Commissioners heard from in our consultations), contemporary events and issues, and teachers' particular expertise. This latter is rarely mentioned in the literature, but students themselves told us that RE works best where teachers are both knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their topic (CoRE 2017:85). However, whoever and whatever the context it would seem essential to understanding the Big Ideas that content is drawn from a diverse range of traditions; non-religious as well as religious traditions; Dharmic as well as Abrahamic faiths; and local, indigenous, nature-based and newer religions and worldviews. Pupils also need to know that their own worldview is respected and relevant, whether it is a well-known institutional one, a smaller community, or their own

individual response. RE in state-funded schools has to be useful for everyone, not just adherents of the main so-called 'world religions', and should empower students to develop their own worldview, not just to learn about content that is relevant to understanding other people but of no importance for their own personal life.

An appendix to the Commission's report (see CoRE 2018: 72-76) explains in more detail that the content of 'Religion and Worldviews' includes both 'institutional systems of making meaning and structuring how one sees the world', both religious and non-religious, and 'the individual process of making sense of life and making meaning of experience'. It is important to note that personal worldviews are part of the subject matter of RE. In that everyone is involved in trying to make sense of their lives and find meaning in their experience, everyone has a worldview. As the report states 'These personal worldviews may be more or less consciously constructed or coherent. They may make reference to institutional worldviews but we are aware that increasingly young people make less explicit reference to institutional worldviews. They do, however, draw on ideas from these worldviews, both consciously and not' (CoRE 2018:72). Thus the subject is not just learning 'facts' about a series of institutional worldviews, but also about reflecting upon the pupil's own worldview and examining what and how useful such labels as 'religious', 'non-religious' or 'worldview' are. Thus RE is relevant for everyone.

This understanding would seem to require that the traditional (in England) 'big six' religions, taking full account of their diversity, continue to supply a substantial part of the content, but that non-religious worldviews and a wider range of religions are also drawn upon. With non-religious worldviews, the Commission was not suggesting adding a long list of non-religious philosophical 'isms' to the existing list of religious ones, but reflecting the fact that contemporary English society is increasingly composed of people who claim that they are not 'religious'. The 'isms' that might usefully feature are those which play a similar role in people's lives to religions, with ontological, epistemological and moral claims, rather than those that would fit better into the subjects of philosophy, economics or politics. This is obviously contentious, but the Commission tentatively suggested 'Humanism, existentialism and Confucianism'. The current author might on reflection include Maoism/Marxism with older pupils. When it comes to 'religious' traditions, this would depend on school context and pupil and teacher backgrounds and interests, but the Commission suggests a comprehensive list of traditions that might possibly feature, including those from China, Japan, Africa, Australasia and the Americas, Zoroastrianism and Jainism, contemporary Paganism and more recent developments such as Baha'i, Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses and Rastafari. Neither with these nor with non-religious traditions was the Commission suggesting lengthy discrete units of work, rather that they can be used to illuminate the understanding of the National Entitlement, where appropriate, depending on which of these traditions feature in the backgrounds of pupils and teacher, or have been encountered in the local community or on travels further afield, are part of the teacher's specialist expertise, or have caught the interest of either pupils or teacher, whether through being in the news or otherwise.

Wasting RE time

We are all aware of how easy it is to get distracted and waste time on our various electronic devices looking at images that other people find cute or reading the outbursts of ignorant or malevolent people. These can be likened to two forms of religious education that waste the precious time we have. The equivalent of the cute images are the fun, enjoyable activities that can take place in RE but do not really help children learn anything important about religions/worldviews or their own perspectives. Andrew Wright decades ago drew attention to an anodyne RE producing 'contented pigs' rather than 'discontented philosophers' (1993:12). There is value in activities such as dressing up in saris or making diva lamps out of clay, if they lead students to find the subject or tradition studied interesting enough to want to know more, and if they help to establish positive attitudes towards the people to whom these items belong, and they may be memorable. It depends on the skill of the teacher whether such activities are ways in to deeper learning, but it may not always be the case. The equivalent of the angry tweets and comments are the debates on contemporary issues that students also enjoy but where they are merely rehearsing their existing prejudices rather than learning anything new, and emerging with the impression that anyone's view is as good as anyone else's. No wonder some research (for example Conroy et al 2013 pp. 208-217, Cush 2020) tells us that many students enjoy RE or find it interesting but do not think it important. It is also tempting to think that this attitude is learned from parents and a society that can only see instrumental purposes for education. The Big Ideas project reminds us that RE needs to focus on what is most important.

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BARBARA WINTERSGILL'S BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE NATIONAL ENTITLEMENT TO THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS AND WORLDVIEWS IN ENGLAND.

Denise Cush

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