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5 Raiders of the Lost Archives: Searching for the Hidden History of Religious Education in England

Abstract

This chapter provides a justification for historical inquiry in Religious Education research and a critique of the existing historiography of Religious Education in England. It then provides a report of two research projects funded by The British Academy and the Westhill Endowment Trust. These projects were both concerned to address the problems we had identified in the existing historiography by exploring the ‘hidden history’ of Religious Education in England between 1969 and 1979, when a radical shift in the nature and purpose of the subject is alleged to have occurred. The main methodological and substantive findings from these projects are discussed, as well as the extent to which we succeeded in achieving our aims. Finally, we briefly set out our agenda for future historical research based on a discussion of the need to place the history of Religious Education in England in four particular contexts: the wider curriculum; educational institutions and structures; religion(s) and the academic study of religion(s); and international and supranational comparators, movements and influences. This process of curriculum contextualization implies not just drilling down within the existing historiographical parameters of English Religious Education to unearth previously hidden data, but reframing the field of study more broadly and in a manner that might be relevant for all curriculum history.

Introduction

In a seminal chapter on the contribution of history to the study of education, Brian Simon argued that historical approaches should trace the origin and development of education as an important *social function*, across different periods and countries, and with regard to diverse social, political, economic and ideological influences (Simon, 1966). For him, historical accounts that assume that educational policies, theories, practices and settings have developed by their own momentum often provide flat records of ‘acts and ordinances, punctuated by accounts of the theories of great educators who entertained ideas “in advance of their time”’ (Simon, 1966, 95). Instead, he called for consideration of the social origin of ideas and legislation, and for inquiry to be undertaken ‘into why changes of a particular kind were needed, what assisted or prevented their realization, what compromises were made, breakthroughs achieved, and with what effect’ (Simon, 1966, 96). Furthermore, he maintained that it is ‘by entering into conflicts and controversies and seeing what they were all about – rather than leaving them aside to present educational change as a simple upward and onward movement – that those entering the field of education today are best equipped to take a positive part’ (Simon, 1966, 112). Last, for Simon, the purpose of such study is to ‘reach a deeper understanding of the function [education] fulfils today’ (Simon, 1966, 91); to contribute to *social history* by ensuring that education receives its proper place within the historical process, and to develop that ‘critical self-awareness’ that is the mark of educational professionals who are both knowledgeable and ready to extend their knowledge and develop their practice (Simon, 1966, 98).

Following in this broad tradition, in a previous publication, two of the present authors, exposed evidence of a lack of historical consciousness among Religious Education researchers and a corresponding neglect of historical inquiry as a method in Religious Education research in England (Freathy & Parker, 2010). In response, we endorsed the

utilization of historical inquiry, as a counterpart to other research methods, on the basis that it can foster important skills and dispositions in the Religious Education researcher, such as reflective practice, critical awareness and an ability to understand and interpret contemporary events; add depth and range to our understanding of Religious Education; illuminate important longer-term, broader and philosophical issues in Religious Education; temper a tendency to see contemporary challenges in Religious Education as entirely novel; and provide us with hope because, as Brian Simon (1966, 92) has argued, '[t]here is, perhaps, no more liberating influence than the knowledge that things have not always been as they are and need not remain so'. Furthermore, we criticized much of the existing historiography of Religious Education for being too descriptive, excessively generalized, biased toward the development of national policy and academic theory (particularly focusing on the life and work of specific theorists), rarely proficient in its utilization of historical research methods and original sources, generally neglectful of methodological questions, and too frequently concerned to produce synoptic overviews of existing and largely unchallenged historical accounts. In this sense, we maintained, there had been too much 'lumping' (i.e. synthesis of previous research and presentation in accessible forms to a wider audience) and not enough 'splitting' (i.e. essential engagement with the minutiae of research and production of detailed articles and monographs) (Aldrich, 2006, 5).

Terence Copley's *Teaching Religion* (2008) exemplifies many of these faults. As the standard text on the history of Religious Education in England and Wales since the 1944 Education Act, it demands particular scrutiny. First, although the chapters in Copley's book, each charting a different decade in the history of Religious Education, all begin with an introduction to wider political, social and religious changes in British society, there are few attempts to explicate the relationship between the curriculum history and the wider contexts in which it occurs. The seemingly ad hoc selection of 'social, aesthetic and moral trends and

changes' (p. 10) precludes systematic analysis across the decades and, by ignoring much that is relevant in the wider educational context (e.g. different systems of school governance, Collective Worship, and cognate curriculum subjects and areas), it is suggested that Religious Education has an unmediated relationship with much broader political, social and religious factors (Freathy, 2010, 568).

Second, the breadth of Copley's subject matter, stretching from politicians, policy-making and legislation to classroom practices, curriculum resources and teaching methods, and the consequently disparate range of sources upon which he draws, prevents him from undertaking a systematic and rigorous analysis of any one particular aspect of, or influence upon, the history of Religious Education; from exploring the relationship between his different sources and thereby creating a coherent narrative in which the relative significance of the different policies, theories and practices is explained; and from delving into the history behind published theoretical and policy documents, or exploring the curriculum taught and received in schools rather than that contained in rhetorical and official sources (Freathy, 2010, 568).

Third, even though any one of the analytical frameworks or historical motifs deployed by Copley could be the focus for an entire monograph, none of them is defined, described or discussed in any detail. Instead, they appear and re-appear sporadically throughout the book's disjointed narrative reconstruction with the level of analysis remaining consistently banal. Copley includes: the peculiar national identity of the UK; the unique cultural and legal position of the Church of England; the experiences and views of senior politicians; the attitudes of the public to religion; the rapid social change of the last sixty years; the secularization of the nation and its education system; and the relationships between Theology and Religious Studies, confessional and phenomenological Religious Education, and Religious Education and Religious Studies. With regard to the latter, for example, one might

have expected to encounter an in-depth analysis of the development of the academic study of religion(s) in higher education and the on-going ontological, epistemological and pedagogical debates concerning Religious Education's disciplinary foundations, but neither receive extended attention (Freathy, 2010, 569). In these regards, it is the lack of a systematic and in-depth analysis, rather than the foci of his inquiry, that provokes criticism. Overall, therefore, although Copley's book provides many teachers, teacher trainees and teacher trainers with a wide-ranging, interesting and enjoyable chronological introduction to the history of Religious Education in England and Wales, it suffers from profound historiographical weaknesses that limit its value for specialist historians of education (Freathy, 2010, 570).

To address the limitations to be found in the existing historiography (Freathy & Parker, 2010, 235), as exemplified above, we argued for the promotion of rigorous historical studies in Religious Education that are more substantially grounded in the appropriate historiographical and methodological literature and that systematically utilize a judicious selection of original documentary sources (including non-published archival material) and/or non-documentary sources, such as oral testimonies (e.g. life histories of teachers), audio-visual material (e.g. radio and television programmes and films) and built and physical artefacts (e.g. classroom spaces, curriculum resources and equipment) (Freathy & Parker, 2010, 238). Furthermore, by way of illustration, we explored a specific example, demonstrating how an historical approach may be fruitfully applied to a particular contemporary debate concerning the nature and purpose of Religious Education in which the protagonists have different interpretations of the history of the subject, but little historical evidence to support their claims (Freathy & Parker, 2010, 236). The focus was the alleged transition that took place in the nature and purpose of Religious Education between 1969 and 1979. Traditionally, this has been characterized as a shift from child-centred, neo-confessional, Christian instruction to phenomenological, non-confessional, multi-faith

Religious Education (Parsons, 1994, 173-4). The academic theory underpinning this change is most frequently associated with the Schools Council's *Working Paper 36: Religious Education in Secondary Schools* (1971) that has been the focus of many recent publications (e.g. Barnes, 2002, 2007b, 2009, 2014; O'Grady, 2005, 2009; Teece, 2005). Most controversially, Philip Barnes and Andrew Wright (2006, 65-66) have argued that the period of transition associated with *Working Paper 36* did not see confessional, committed and indoctrinatory Religious Instruction give way to neutral, professional and educational Religious Education. Instead, they maintain that the form of 'post-confessional' phenomenological Religious Education that is supposed to have developed at around this time also exhibited a partisan and uncritical alternative confessionalism, albeit one that was moderate, liberal, ecumenical and in certain respects secular. According to Barnes (2007a), the beliefs, assumptions, values and commitments associated with this new form of Religious Education constituted a new 'liberal paradigm' that continued to exert an influence over the history of English Religious Education for the next thirty years.

With reference to this example, we hoped to demonstrate that there are many opportunities for Religious Education researchers to undertake further historical research. This is because, first, the proponents of the arguments on both sides have utilized insufficient primary source work in exploration of the reasons for, nature of, and responses to, the alleged 'paradigm shift'; and second, they have focused primarily on the beliefs, assumptions, values and commitments of Religious Education theorists in the context of specific philosophical and theological outlooks, rather than discussing how these theories became embedded locally in policy and practice, or how these Religious Education theories, policies and practices might be located within the wider historical context (Freathy & Parker, 2010, 236). Thereby, Barnes and Wright's historical accounts leave too many questions unanswered, including the following:

- What would primary archival and/or oral sources reveal regarding the relationships between the wider historical context (i.e. political, economic, social and cultural conditions) and the alleged ‘paradigm shift’, and between Religious Education theory, policy and practice?
- How, if at all, did the new theories become embedded in policy and actual practice, for example, through the aims, methods and content of syllabuses and pedagogies?
- What role did specialized Religious Education networks, pressure groups, centres and organizations play in the changing nature of policy, curriculum and professional practice?
- How in reality were the competing discourses surrounding Religious Education shaped and influenced by those seeking an alternative model for the subject?
- Were the major agents of change really the university academics in education, theology and cognate disciplines?
- How were the curriculum changes influenced and perceived by other stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, the faith communities, politicians and the media? (Freathy & Parker, 2010, 237-8)

The hidden history of Religious Education in England

To address the historiographical deficiencies in contemporary Religious Education discourse, and to answer the research questions above, we undertook two complementary research projects funded by The British Academy (Ref. SG-54151) and the Westhill Endowment Trust. These utilized original archival material and oral life history data, contextualized within their educational, socio-cultural and political milieu, to explore the ‘hidden history’ of Religious Education in English schools between 1969 and 1979, and with a particular focus on the controversial *Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Instruction*

(City of Birmingham Education Committee, 1975) (BAS). Our intention was to demonstrate a systematic approach to the identification of original source materials; rigour in evaluating, assessing and interpreting these sources; and analytical skills in synthesizing material and developing coherent arguments that make a significant contribution to the existing historiography. We developed a critical, multi-perspectival and mixed methods ‘bricolage’ approach to our inquiry (Kvale, 2007, 115-7) as a strategy to add ‘rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, 6). In terms of data collection and analysis, this allowed us to pursue, elucidate and contrast multiple perspectives in relation to the same historical events and/or the same historical data, thereby guarding against any tendency we might have had to select data and analyse them simply to confirm our initial presuppositions, and in doing so, trying to ensure our historical accounts are reflective of the complexity of the social world. Like ‘interpretive bricoleurs’, we believe that ‘there is no one correct telling [of an] ... event. Each telling, like light hitting a crystal, reflects a different perspective on [an] ... incident’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, 6).

Our specific objectives were:

- to undertake a preliminary analysis of previously unutilized archival material;
- to undertake a sample of life history interviews with Religious Education academics and practitioners in order to collect and analyse their previously ignored oral testimonies;
- to evaluate a broad range of relevant factors in the wider historical context in which Religious Education theory, policy and practice are generated including: the educational, socio-cultural and political milieu; the increasing racial and ethnic plurality of England; and the religious, theological and ecclesiastical circumstances of the time; and

- to scrutinize the generalizations contained in the existing historiography of Religious Education.

The 1975 BAS was chosen as a particular focus because: it included statutory requirements for a form of Religious Education that has been referred to as a ‘major breakthrough’ (Hull, 1984, 29) and as ‘the total revolution of subject matter’ bringing about ‘a totally new orthodoxy’ (Priestley, 2006, 1012); it generated the publicity that brought significant new trends in Religious Education ‘vividly before the general public for the first time’ (Hull, 1984, 29); it gained coverage in the local and national press; it provoked debates in both British Houses of Parliament; and it became the focus of dedicated publications, a conference, and a nation-wide Save Religious Education in State Schools petition backed by the broadcasting standards campaigner Mary Whitehouse. Despite its significance in these regards, no detailed historical case study of the syllabus had ever been undertaken that drew upon unpublished documentary and oral primary sources. Furthermore, the syllabus provides an ideal focal point around which to explore the theories, policies, practices and settings of Religious Education in the period. Too frequently the BAS had been described merely as a staging-post in the development of Religious Education theory and as a product of particular methodological or theological outlooks (e.g. Ninian Smart’s phenomenological approach to the study of religion combined with John Hick’s pluralist theology). To address this, and the other historiographical deficiencies noted above, we sought to provide a case-study of Birmingham and the local factors influencing the formation and implementation of the BAS, and to investigate how and why it provoked public, political and professional discourse that extended well beyond the community of Religious Education academics and practitioners. Overall, we hoped to consider the social and political processes by which particular individuals and groups ensured that certain theories of Religious Education gained acceptance over others and to place the BAS and the theories underpinning it at the heart of a

broader historical reconstruction of curriculum change in Religious Education in England between 1969 and 1979.

Historical sources

To answer the research questions and meet the objectives above, we utilized primary documentary sources, primary oral sources and secondary documentary sources, each of which will be discussed in turn below.

Primary documentary sources

Focusing on the hidden history of Religious Education in English schools between 1969 and 1979, the study drew upon relevant *published* primary documentary sources in the following genres: central and local government publications (including Agreed Syllabuses of Religious Instruction/Education); Hansard Parliamentary Papers; national and local press; educational and church press; Schools Council publications; publications by the churches, other faith groups, professional organizations and pressure groups; and academic literature in Education, Theology and Religious Studies.

In addition to this, we accessed *unpublished* primary documentary sources, held by national and local archives, as listed below:

- Department of Education and Science and Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations files (The National Archives, Kew);
- Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations files (Institute of Education, London);
- Church Assembly and General Synod: Reports of Proceedings, and the National Society archive (Church of England Record Centre and Lambeth Palace Library, London);

- Save Religious Education in State Schools Campaign files (National Viewers & Listeners' Association Collection, University of Essex);
- Ninian Smart's personal papers and publications (Ninian Smart Archive, University of Lancaster);
- Church newspapers (British Library Newspapers, Colindale);
- The Shap Archive, including handbooks, calendars and journals (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford);
- Minute books for the City of Birmingham Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, plus extensive uncatalogued files on the BAS (Birmingham Central Library); and
- Christian Education Movement files (University of Birmingham Special Collections).

Primary oral sources

We also identified two distinct categories of participants to be interviewed. First, we interviewed key informants who could provide insights into the events surrounding the formation and implementation of the BAS; evaluate its short- and long-term influence on the nature and purpose of Religious Education; provide knowledge of the local context of Birmingham between 1969 and 1979; and shed light on the network of personal, professional and social influences that shaped the syllabus. Although the educational theories of some of the interviewees had already been written about, their oral life histories had been largely ignored. Second, we interviewed a number of Religious Education classroom practitioners who taught in Birmingham and the West Midlands at the time and who would have been expected to have implemented the BAS. We believed their oral life histories would enable us to answer the following questions:

- Why did people choose to become Religious Education teachers and what did they hope to achieve by doing so?

- To what extent were their aspirations facilitated, challenged or reformed by the changing models of Religious Education?
- How far did so-called phenomenological, non-confessional and multi-faith Religious Education influence those teachers who entered the profession out of a sense of Christian vocation, and what was the relationship between their personal theologies and professional practice?
- Did a new kind of professional identity for Religious Education teachers emerge?
- How far did changes in the rhetorical and formal curriculum influence the aims, methods and content of their Religious Education classroom practice?

Overall, we wished to give voice to those Religious Education practitioners whose stories of the history of Religious Education in England between 1969 and 1979 had been silenced by the discourses of academic theorists and policy-makers that currently dominate the post-war historiography of Religious Education.

Secondary documentary sources

In addition, we also drew upon an analysis of relevant published secondary sources in order to explore how the history of Religious Education can be located within, and contribute to our understanding of, the wider historical context. In this regard, Sullivan (2007, 127) has argued that the ‘revolution in Religious Education that took place from the 1970s was the result of multiple factors’ including pressure groups, secularization, the decline of the churches, the development of the study of religion in universities and religious pluralism. He also argues that ‘changes in the material conditions of people’ (e.g. communication and travel), as well as ‘[c]hoices, expectations, attitudes, habits, priorities and mind-sets’ all influenced the reception of Religious Education. Our study attempted to address at least some of this wider historical landscape.

First, it sought to contextualize the history of curriculum change in Religious Education by analysing literature on the historical development of Theological and Religious Studies (e.g. King, 1990; Nicholson, 2003). This required familiarization, on a national level, with the work of Ninian Smart (e.g. Smart, 1968), and, on a local level in Birmingham, with the work of John Hick (e.g. Hick, 1973). Second, we sought to locate the history of Religious Education in the 1970s within a broader historical and sociological literature on religion in the UK (e.g. Brown, 2001, 2006; Davie, 1994; Garnet, Grimley, Harris, Whyte, & Williams, 2007; Hastings, 2001; Morris, 2003; McLeod, 2007). These publications helped us to explore the processes of religious pluralization, secularization, de-Christianization and the influence of the Church of England. Third, we sought to analyse literature on the educational challenges posed by immigration, multi-racialism and multi-culturalism (e.g. Grosvenor, 1997; Tomlinson, 2008). Fourth, we reviewed the broader history of English education (e.g. Aldrich, 2002; Dean, 2007; Jones, 2003; Lowe, 1988; Lowe, 1997; Simon, 1991) as well as literature specifically on curriculum history (e.g. Goodson, 2005). Last, we engaged with the burgeoning generalist historical literature on the 1970s, which includes Beckett (2009), Haslam (2005), Sounes (2006), Turner (2008), and Wheen (2009). In this regard, it has been noted that contemporary historians have recognized the 1970s as a watershed in post-war British history and crucial to an understanding of subsequent debates about economic, social and cultural change. The decade has been characterized as bringing about a polarization of British politics, social and cultural discord, the end of British social democracy and the welfare society, and a 'sea-change' in social and political values. Through such engagement we hoped our project could, following Brian Simon's lead above, also make a significant contribution to social history by ensuring that education, and specifically Religious Education, receive their proper place within the historical process. In this regard, as we discuss below, our endeavours are continuing, partly because of the scale of the enterprise

and the voluminous quantity of data we have collected requiring analysis, and partly because in uncovering a hidden history, we are continually unearthing new material that necessitates further contextualization.

Findings

The detailed findings from our critical, multi-perspectival and mixed methods ‘bricolage’ approach to the history of Religious Education have been reported elsewhere (e.g. Doney, Parker & Freathy, in preparation; Freathy & Parker, 2012, 2013; Parker & Freathy, 2011a, 2011b; Parker, Freathy, & Doney, in preparation), but in summary we have established that:

- in the archives listed above, there are indeed abundant and neglected unpublished primary documentary sources relevant to the history of Religious Education in England;
- there is also a plethora of pertinent published primary documentary sources in the genres listed above; and
- oral life history interviews with selected key informants and classroom practitioners can yield significant insights into the history of Religious Education theory, policy and practice, shedding light on the network of personal, professional and social influences that shape the subject, as well as potentially offering insights into the wider religious history of the period through which individuals live.

More substantively, our study revealed that there *is* a hidden history of Religious Education between 1969 and 1979, including significant public, political and professional debates that the existing historiography had neglected. For example, concerted campaigns by secularists and humanists to abolish, reform or establish a secular alternative to Religious Instruction; fervent responses by certain ‘Christian’ groups, including Dorothy Howlett’s

National Association for Teachers of Religious Knowledge and Mary Whitehouse's well-publicized Save Religious Education in State Schools campaign; forgotten national policy developments led by the Department of Education and Science and Her Majesty's Inspectors; and theoretical and political tensions surrounding the perceived need for multi-faith curriculum content to be taught in Religious Education as a response to the mass immigration of adherents of non-Christian religions.

With regard to the first of these - contextualized in the 1960s by institutional attenuation within the churches, and the institutional marginalization and cultural displacement of Christianity (Morris, 2003) - analysis of archival sources suggested that the contribution of humanists to the secularization, or at least extensive liberalization, of the aims of Religious Education in England, and the inclusion of multi-faith and secular stances for living on the curriculum, had been both underplayed and overstated in the existing historiography (Freathy & Parker, 2012, 2013). In terms of pressure group activity, more attention had been given in previous accounts to historically more recent individuals and groups, such as Baroness Cox, Baroness Blatch and Colin Hart of the Christian Institute, whom David Rose (2003) has called 'Christianizers' or 'cultural restorationists'. His research, on Religious Education curriculum policy-making from 1988 to 1997, demonstrates the strong emphasis they placed on culture, heritage, tradition and 'the need for the retention of "pastness"' in arguing that the development of multi-faith Religious Education represented the overthrow of Christian education and a challenge to the Christian identity and morality of Britain (Rose, 2003, 309). However, the nature, purpose and influence of earlier lobbying groups that promoted a similar agenda, such as the National Association for Teachers of Religious Knowledge and the Save Religious Education in State Schools campaign (the second of which received much popular support in the mid-1970s), had not previously been subjected to in-depth, primary-source-based, historical investigation. These prior campaigns

evidence the existence of lobbying, and a coalescence of political support and public debate about the reassertion of the Christian identity of Britain through a return to ‘confessional’ Religious Education, at least a decade earlier than has previously been proposed (Parsons, 1994, 183). Thereby, they suggest that the relative beginnings of the ‘discourses of derision’ (Ball, 1990) through which ‘Christianizers’ and ‘cultural restorationists’ carved out their political power base should be pushed backwards from the 1980s to the 1970s.

With regard to the third of the areas mentioned above, our archival research has uncovered evidence that the Labour Government (1964-70) was intending to introduce a major Education Bill that would defend Religious Education and Collective Worship in schools from secularist and humanist attacks, but also reform them in accordance with the latest curricular and pedagogical theories and meet teachers’ demands for more professional autonomy. We have unearthed correspondence regarding these provisions between politicians and civil servants within the Department of Education and Science, Her Majesty’s Inspectors and educational, religious and secular organizations. Until now, this proposed Education Bill and the correspondence surrounding it have been omitted entirely from the historiography of Religious Education even though they form a significant moment in the subject’s history and provide important insights into the Religious Education policy-making process. The proposed legislation, which was never enacted, included controversial policies such as the abolition of statutory Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Education - which until the present day have to be adopted by each Local Education Authority - in favour of non-statutory national guidance. Such policies would have changed the history of Religious Education significantly and have relevance for contemporary debates regarding the local or national definition of Religious Education in England. The public, professional and academic discussions regarding the possible abolition or reform of Religious Education in the proposed legislation also helped to create a critical climate in which significant theoretical developments occurred. These

debates also challenge the assertions of those, such as Parsons (1994), who state that there was a political consensus about Religious Education in the 1960s and 1970s that was only overturned in the 1980s.

Finally, our archival research - particularly in relation to the BAS 1975 - has demonstrated the extent to which the inclusion of world religions in the Religious Education curriculum in the late 1960s and early 1970s grew from political exigency and moral panic about the integration of (non-Christian) immigrants into society and the promotion of racial harmony (Parker & Freathy, 2011a, 2011b). At the same time, it has shown that an alternative to multi-faith Religious Education could have emerged - with support from some of Her Majesty's Inspectors - in which pupils from different faith communities were taught Religious Education in parallel groups according to a range of faith-specific Agreed Syllabuses. Also, using published primary sources, we have highlighted the extent to which the landmark curriculum documents most associated with the development of multi-faith Religious Education, for example, the Schools Council's *Working Paper 36* (1971), continued to assert the pre-eminence of Christianity in British culture and in the Religious Education curriculum. In this sense, they simultaneously promoted two competing conceptions of 'community cohesion', that is, that which is based on the recognition and celebration of diversity and that which is based on the assertion of a shared history and culture. The vilification of multi-faith Religious Education as it developed since the 1970s by those who seek to retain or restore the status of Christianity in society and in the curriculum has been based upon an erroneous assessment of the extent to which the landmark curriculum reforms overthrew the hegemony of curriculum Christianity.

In addition to the substantive findings summarized above, our study also highlighted a number of methodological points that should be borne in mind by future historians of

Religious Education as well as historians of other curriculum subjects. On the basis of these, we suggest that all curriculum history should:

- recognize the complexity of the processes of curriculum formation and implementation by differentiating between the rhetorical curriculum – such as that proposed by policymakers and academics in speeches, reports and textbooks; the formal curriculum – such as that demonstrated by local statutory syllabuses and non-statutory national guidance; the curriculum-in-use – which is the content teachers actually deliver; and finally the received curriculum – which is the content that students actually learn (Labaree, 1999);
- recognize the multilevel complexity of, and contestation about, curriculum decision-making (e.g. macro- and micro-political factors at national, local, school, department and classroom levels) including the tensions that can emerge between individual teachers (agency) and the multiplicity of social forces acting upon them (structure) (Parker & Freathy, 2011b);
- expose the often highly politicized proceedings of curriculum councils, committees, working parties, conferences, and so forth, where status and power, force of argument, charisma and popularity, ensure that certain discourses are heard and become dominant, while others are silenced and excluded, including acknowledging the benign or malign influence of key individuals in supposedly collective decision-making procedures;
- consider carefully the mechanisms by which particular ideological factors, such as theological, philosophical or pedagogical theories, influence curriculum change and continuity, and seek to demonstrate the outcome of such influences, whilst at the same time recognizing other factors, such as demographic fluctuations or educational organization and expenditure, that catalyse or inhibit curriculum change; and

- interrogate the short and long-term effects of curriculum reforms, including the extent to which they have been generalized, institutionalized and sustained, acknowledging evolutionary and revolutionary processes of change, but also examples of continuity, regression, subversion, avoidance and compromise, in terms of how the formal curriculum is interpreted and translated into schemes of work, lesson plans, resources and activities by teachers and how these are then encountered by students.

An agenda for future research

As articulated above, in our synchronic study of Religious Education between 1969 and 1979, we have sought to demonstrate how the curriculum subject can be located within, and contribute to our understanding of, the wider historical contexts of which it was a part. In this regard, we have collected an extensive range of primary and secondary sources that we are continuing to analyse. Furthermore, as a consequence of discovering previously hidden histories of Religious Education, we have increasingly come to recognize the complexity of the curriculum subject and quite how far-reaching we need to be in our attempts at contextualization. In seeking to do more to relate the history of Religious Education to the wider religious, social, cultural and political milieus that impact upon it and upon which it has an impact, we have developed an agenda for future systematic and in-depth research based on the identification of four particular contexts: the wider curriculum; educational institutions and structures; religion(s) and the academic study of religion(s); and international and supranational comparators, movements and influences. Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

The wider curriculum

The history of Religious Education should be related to wider curriculum history (see McCulloch, 2000; Cunningham, 1988; Musgrave, 1988; Tanner & Tanner, 1989). Studies in

curriculum history have examined the precedents of contemporary curricular issues, problems and solutions and the extent to which they embody physical and behavioural vestiges of the past (Marsden, 2000, 28). They have explored the ‘historically-formed rules and standards that order, classify, and divide what is “seen” and acted on in schooling’ (Popkewitz, 2009, 301). They have also demonstrated the complexity of the historical contexts in which curriculum pressure-group activity and decision-making occur (Marsden, 2000, 29), thereby examining the multiple factors that advance and inhibit curriculum change (Musgrave, 2000, 67–8), and discerning explanatory frameworks for complex change over time (Goodson, 2000). In addition, they have shown how the curriculum as a social artefact ‘conceived of and made for deliberate human purposes’ arises, persists and changes (Goodson, 1987, 259-60), and what political traditions, competing ideologies and other vested interests determine its social function (McCulloch, 2000, 45). Furthermore, they have highlighted how curriculum subjects represent social systems and professional communities sustained by networks of communication and apprenticeship, material interests and ideologies/missions that compete between and within themselves for resources, status and power (Goodson, 2000, 96; McCulloch, 2000, 47; and Hargreaves, 1989, 56). Last, they have transformed as well as extended accounts of the curriculum, posed new questions and pointed toward fresh assumptions by engaging in critical analysis of the curriculum and the society of which it is part (McCulloch, 2000, 54). The consequence of failing to learn about curriculum history, and the evolution and establishment of traditions of practice, is an amnesia that can lead to curriculum reinvention rather than development (Goodson & Marsh, 1998, 593), and the misguided assumption that past curriculum traditions can easily be transcended if only there is sufficient conviction, good management, planning and resources (Goodson, 2000, 94).

Despite the relevance of the theoretical insights of curriculum historians, both generically and in relation to other curriculum subjects, their work has been conspicuously

ignored in the existing historiography of Religious Education in England. Yet the most immediate context in which the history of Religious Education should be located is that of the wider school curriculum, particularly other arts, humanities and social science subjects, as well as Collective Worship, which was traditionally deemed to be intimately related to, and a practical expression of, Christian instruction/education in England. The history of Religious Education should be contextualized by, and make a contribution to, the broader historiography of school curricula. The histories of other curriculum subjects, for example, in terms of their methodological approach, empirical findings and theoretical orientations, could illuminate the particularity of Religious Education, highlighting the extent to which its curricular and pedagogical changes, and/or the historical factors that led to them, were distinctive.

Educational institutions and structures

The nature and purpose of Religious Education in England is also impacted by the educational institutions and structures in which it is situated. These include, for example, the legal framework governing schools, national and local policies, the processes and content of teacher education, and the identity and practices of schools, specifically whether they are with or without a religious affiliation. The parallel, and sometimes overlapping and/or conflicting, histories of non-denominational Religious Education in fully state-maintained schools on the one hand, and Religious Education with a religious/denominational character as it occurs in schools with a religious/denominational affiliation on the other, need to be written to ascertain the similarities and differences between each kind of provision. However, in England, this situation is made all the more complicated because religious/denominational Religious Education may occur in some schools without a religious/denominational affiliation, and non-religious/non-denominational Religious Education may occur in some schools with a religious/denominational affiliation. A further layer of complexity is added by

the legal right that the Church of England and other religious groups have traditionally exercised, through the workings of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education and Agreed Syllabus Conferences, to define the ‘non-denominational’ Religious Education that takes place in fully state-maintained schools. The changing nature of educational structures in England has recently made the situation even more complicated by exempting some fully state-maintained schools from this arrangement. It is clear that if we wish to understand Religious Education in England as it occurs in all settings, including all fully state-maintained schools and partially state-maintained schools with a religious/denominational character, there are good reasons to explore both non-denominational and religiously/denominationally-specific Religious Education. Moreover, one has to be aware that many primary sources concerning non-denominational Religious Education in fully state-maintained schools are written from religious/denominational perspectives that are sometimes, but not always, acknowledged. The history of Religious Education must therefore also pay due attention to the religious/denominational divisions that have sometimes been overlooked, forgotten or marginalized within mainstream academic discourse about Religious Education and contained by supposedly representative ecumenical/inter-faith organizations.

Additionally, the history of Religious Education needs to be considered in the light of the existing historiography of the national education system overall, particularly the politics and economics associated with the control, organization and funding of schools. Specific attention needs to be paid to the negotiations, and sometimes power play, between the churches and other faith groups on the one hand, and local and national government on the other (Cruickshank, 1963; Murphy, 1971; Chadwick, 1997). This contextual knowledge could facilitate an assessment of the extent to which the resulting legal and policy frameworks governing schools have shaped or constrained the development of Religious

Education policy and practice, as well as what was deemed thinkable in professional, political, public and parental discourses about Religious Education.

Religion(s) and the academic study of religion(s)

The history of Religious Education also needs to be considered in the light of changes within, between and across religious traditions, as well as developments and insights from within the academic fields of theological and religious studies. It is important to appreciate the multifarious ways in which the religions and Religious Education inter-relate. At the subjective level, the religious biographies and positions of teachers, pupils and parents, as well as those responsible for curriculum and policy development and implementation, are each relevant. Likewise, the religious positioning of those who fund, control and organize schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions is also important. Changing patterns of religious biography and affiliation cannot be ignored.

Furthermore, the nature, purpose and practice of Religious Education in schools is affected by, and may also affect, the nature, purpose and practice of its parent disciplines in higher education institutions. The development of Theological and Religious Studies has been the focus of only a limited amount of systematic research (e.g. King, 1990; Nicholson, 2003) and that which has sought to relate this academic history to the history of Religious Education in schools has been lacking systematization and depth (e.g. Copley, 2008). Yet the changes these disciplines have wrought in research and teaching, most notably through becoming heterogeneous multi-disciplinary fields of study utilizing the insights of innumerable philosophical and theoretical frameworks, have percolated through various channels to Religious Education in schools, not least through the plethora of Religious Education pedagogies propounded by educational theorists (Freathy & Freathy, 2013).

Moreover, with religious traditions representing the objects of study within Religious Education, we must be attentive to changes and continuities within, between and across those

traditions and the effects that this has upon the content of the Religious Education curriculum. Accordingly, in appreciation of the fact that religious positions are not static, it is important to be aware of religious change on a societal level, and at the level of specific faith communities and the denominational groupings within them. Here it is not only the nature of religious change that requires attention, but also variant understandings of how and why such change occurs, and how Religious Education functions and is affected by these changes. Understanding the wider religious milieu as an agenda to which religious educators and policy-makers seek to respond, necessitates that we interrogate contemporaneous perceptions of that milieu as a feature of Religious Education curriculum history both synchronically and diachronically. This should make possible an assessment of whether religious educators were responding to the actual or the imagined religious conditions of their time. It should also enable an evaluation of the extent to which Religious Education curricula were reflective of contemporary religious trends and conditions, and how far they sought to change them and/or public understandings of them. In other words, depending on the circumstances, Religious Education may have sought to transmit and/or transform the religious context in which it occurred.

Para-denominational and para-religious bodies are also a feature of the religious landscape; appreciating their make-up and role is important. The way in which such groups attempt, or portray the attempt, to be representative is illuminating; for example, the British Council of Churches Education Department (established 1942), although theoretically ecumenical in makeup, was heavily dominated by representatives from the Anglican Church. The influence of the supranational and national manifestations of the ecumenical movements has affected the nature and understanding of Christian denominationalism, particularly in terms of greater co-operation between disparate groups. The same could be said of inter-religious bodies and movements and their effect on the development of dialogue between

religious traditions. The legacies of these developments play out in the governance, structures and organization of Religious Education at any given moment and ought not to be ignored. It is therefore necessary to be mindful of the complex dynamics of the particular religious conditions operative at any given time, and over time; such conditions may position particular religious bodies, and the individuals within them, in certain ways in relation to Religious Education.

International and supranational comparators, movements and influences

Many existing historical studies of Religious Education are written from within national boundaries (e.g. Skottene, 1994; Skrunes, 1995; Lied, 2006; Jackson & O'Grady, 2007; Knauth, 2007; Skeie, 2007), often reflecting the particular relationship between church and state in different countries (e.g. Haakedal, 2001; Buchardt, Markkola, & Valtonen, 2012). However, the history of Religious Education in England must also be related to the history of Religious Education in other countries, not only to ascertain the extent to which theories, policies and practices of Religious Education have been imported, exported and adapted, but also to explore those international or supranational movements and factors that may have effected even the most nationally-orientated of educational systems (Freatly, Parker, Schweitzer & Simojoki, in press).

Friedrich Schweitzer (2014) has developed a preliminary typology of international and supranational comparative studies in Religious Education including: country reports and country-by-country comparisons (e.g. Bråten, 2009); problem-centred comparative studies (e.g. Jackson, Miedema, Weisse, & Willaime, 2007); integrated international empirical studies (Ziebertz & Riegel, 2009); and international comparative histories (e.g. Osmer & Schweitzer, 2003). With regard to the latter, Schweitzer highlights the neglect of supranational movements, for instance, Sunday Schooling, educational progressivism and Christian ecumenism. Just as national religious histories have to consider international trends

and tendencies, such as secularization or pluralization, so an international horizon might be required to understand national histories of Religious Education adequately. International comparative research has the potential to reveal something like a general European or western pattern of development, as well as a theoretical framework to explain such a pattern.

Schweitzer has also provided a summary of the main reasons for undertaking comparative research in Religious Education. First, the development of international cooperation and dialogical exchange between representatives of Religious Education from different countries, which has become much more established and widespread since the 1970s (see, for example, established groups like the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values, established 1978), raises the need for integrated and systematic international research in Religious Education. Second, being constrained by national boundaries restricts the way in which nationally-specific models of Religious Education can be properly evaluated. For example, it is increasingly the case that the phenomena under scrutiny (e.g. organizational structures, curriculum developments and different ways of teaching), and/or the factors that influence them (e.g. modernization, secularization, pluralization and globalization), are international or supranational in nature. Third, comparative research in Religious Education can challenge the assumptions and explanations developed in one particular context by applying them to similar or parallel developments in different contexts. Such comparisons can lead to new insights that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Fourth, the development of a more comprehensive understanding of Religious Education and the standards and professional criteria that should govern its operation (see Schweitzer, 2002) have become more desirable goals as a result of: first, the processes of internationalization and globalization in general; second, the effects of European unification, creating a new political and economic situation that also affects education; and third, the

increasing interest shown by political institutions in inter-cultural and inter-religious education, especially since 11 September 2001.

Overall, the process of curriculum contextualization outlined above implies not just drilling down within the existing historiographical parameters of English Religious Education to unearth previously hidden documentary sources and unheard oral testimonies, but also reframing the field of study entirely and in a manner that might be relevant for the historiography of all school curriculum subjects. Curriculum histories lacking in-depth historical and historiographical foundations cannot support the sort of thoroughly contextualized history that will make them of relevance to audiences beyond subject specialists and subject specialist historians. To meet Brian Simon's challenge, curriculum historians can only contribute to *social history* if they ensure that their accounts of curriculum change and continuity receive their proper place within the historical process. The contextual framework proposed above, at the very least, seeks to ensure that the history of Religious Education in England receives its proper place in curriculum history, the history of education, religious history and international comparative histories of Religious Education.

Conclusion

There are two main reasons why we believe our discovery and exposure of the hidden history of Religious Education in English schools in the 1970s is significant. First, it has long been acknowledged that Religious Education in England has lacked a clearly recognized and shared core purpose and that the effectiveness of the subject has been hampered by its poor reputation, marginal (albeit customary/statutory) position in the curriculum, lowly status in the hierarchy of qualifications, and derisory level of resourcing compared with those of core curriculum subjects (e.g. a shortage of specialist teachers and advisors, an insufficiency of initial and in-service teacher education, a lack of curriculum time, and frequent absorption

into other curriculum subjects and areas; see Copley, 2008, 57, 111-2, 175-6, 181). With the perennial nature of these problems in mind, leading to what many are calling a current crisis in English Religious Education (APPG, 2013; Conroy et al., 2013; and REC, 2013), we maintain that many debates about Religious Education would benefit from the insight and hindsight that historical inquiry can offer. Historical research can make a contribution to public, political, professional and parental understandings of the subject. Without a deeper awareness of how English Religious Education has evolved and why, including its traditions, trajectories and tribulations, any effort to enhance its reputation and effectiveness in the future will be impeded. Honing the historiographical record is one method of developing the knowledge and understanding that is a prerequisite of any accurate diagnosis of the present predicament and any worthwhile public discussion of the potential for resuscitation.

Our research is particularly pertinent in this regard because the levels of continuity between Religious Education in English schools in the 1970s and in the early twenty-first century are such that an historical study of the first period has much relevance to the second in terms of broadening and deepening our understanding of the relative beginnings of many contemporary theories, policies and practices in Religious Education, as well as contextualizing and contributing to current debates and discourses. The continuities between past and present theories of Religious Education have already been suggested by Barnes (2007a, 19, 24). Whilst the legislative framework governing the definition of Religious Education in fully state-maintained schools has changed since the 1970s, the changes are not so substantial as to invalidate comparisons. Furthermore, the findings from our study can be used to evaluate historical arguments promulgated in contemporary policy discourse, for example, with regard to current debates about the trend toward the nationalization of the Religious Education curriculum in England (see Qualification & Curriculum Authority [QCA], 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2004; Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010;

and REC, 2013). Contributors to this debate have used historical arguments relating to the 1975 BAS to justify the local definition of Religious Education on the basis that it can address local particularity, respond quickly enough to the messiness and diversity of religions as they change and develop, and provide a mechanism for innovation and reform, and for challenging traditional commitments and practices (Priestley, 2006, 1013-1015; Barnes, 2008, 81-82). By contrast, in this regard, by employing previously unutilized archival sources and undertaking oral life history interviews, we have identified the significance of supranational influences upon the 1975 BAS, prevarication and inertia in its formation and implementation, and continuities with previous policies and practices that it merely synthesized and formalized.

Second, our research has raised fundamental questions that relate to cultural clashes evident in our contemporary global situation. Internationally, politicians and policy-makers are considering critical questions such as:

- To what extent can people from different religious backgrounds identify common values and live together peacefully?
- In religiously plural societies, what role, if any, should schools fulfil in fostering tolerance, respect and community cohesion?
- How far is it possible for schools to be religiously-inclusive?
- What form of Religious Education, if any, is possible and appropriate in multi-faith schools?
- Who should be responsible for defining the aims, methods and content of Religious Education?

Despite these common challenges, often addressed differently in each national context in accordance with their own particular political, legal, educational and religious traditions, the international historiography of Religious Education is at an embryonic stage and its future

quality will depend largely on the rigour of the national level case-studies upon which it draws. In a previous article (Freathy & Parker, 2010), recapitulated at the start of this chapter, we have already cited reasons to question the value of the existing historiographical tradition on Religious Education in England and to regard it as inimical to international comparative approaches. On this basis, we argue that our detailed local case-study and on-going analysis, drawing upon primary and secondary documentary sources and oral life history interview data, contributes powerfully to a more rigorous national level understanding of the historical tradition of, and socio-political background to, Religious Education in England. This includes an exploration of relations between the state and the faith communities, the nature and degree of multiculturalism, the socio-political structure, the economic system, international/global influences, and educational values, aims and funding arrangements. Moreover, we argue that this locally- and nationally-orientated research is essential in laying the necessary ground for future international comparative histories of Religious Education.

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