Professionalism, Professionalization and Professionality in Religious Education

Rob Freathy, Stephen G. Parker, Friedrich Schweitzer and Henrik Simojoki

As guest editors, we are delighted to present the first ever joint Special Issue of the *British Journal of Religious Education* (BJRE) and *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik und Theologie* (ZPT). In fact, there are two Special Issues, published separately, but containing the same papers, albeit in English and German respectively. This initiative represents a historic step for both of these journals, and we hope will do much to further international collaboration and comparative research between UK and other European researchers.

The articles contained herein represent a selection from the proceedings of an international symposium on 'Teacher Professionalization and the Professional Quality of Religious Education', hosted at the University of Exeter, in March 2015. The symposium was generously funded by the Westhill Endowment Trust (Grant 1426/09/2014) to whom we express our gratitude.

In response to contemporary policy imperatives and research findings concerning the professional standing of Religious Education (RE) teachers and teaching, the symposium sought to explore three areas:

1. The relationship between the professional quality of RE teaching and the professionalization of RE teachers.
2. The extent to which international comparative research can yield insights capable of understanding better the traditions, trajectories and tribulations of RE theory, policy and practice both within and between countries.
3. The extent to which RE has become a topic of research almost exclusively for RE specialists, and consideration of what innovative interdisciplinary insights might be drawn from engagement with general educational researchers.

In accordance with this broad remit, the articles in this Special Issue focus variously upon the professionalism, professionalization and professionality of teachers, and predominantly, but not always, with reference to RE. The opening article by Rob Freathy, Stephen Parker, Friedrich Schweitzer and Henrik Simojoki, seeks to provide conceptual clarity, defining professionalization as the historical and institutional process by which teachers of RE, as an occupational group, assumed their specific professional shape and characteristics. It points to potentially fruitful avenues of further research on the relationship between professionalization and the professional quality of RE teaching in comparative international perspective. Klaus-Peter Horn's article, examines related issues from the point of view of general education, providing much needed definitional clarity to: professionalism, referring to the structural and collective characteristics of teachers as professionals; and professionality, referring to the characteristics and abilities that *individual* teachers must have acquired, usually through initial and continuing professional development, and be able to demonstrate subsequently.

Interestingly, from our point of view as editors, the dimensions of professionalization we have identified, and our substantive argument, map well onto the lines of enquiry pursued by our fellow contributors. Vivienne Baumfield's article focuses upon the nature of effective professional learning of RE teachers. Effective professional learning and the development of 'knowledge of practice', she argues, require the creation of 'communities of inquiry'. As we have identified, professional self-organisation, initial and continuing professional

development and professional knowledge are constituent dimensions of professionalization. It is evident from the history of RE that professionalization is facilitated when organized groups of professionals support the process of knowledge creation and dissemination, not least when teachers are given influence and autonomy in the process. Hans-Ulrich Grunder's article explores how the image of teachers created and promulgated through the arts can be used to stimulate reflection on what it means to be a teacher and help those within the profession conceptualise teacher professionality.

James Conroy's article concerns the parlous state and continued erosion of professional knowledge, professionality and professional identity amongst RE teachers. In the UK, he argues, RE teachers are caught up in multiple and conflicting demands from the state, religious communities and examination boards, which serve to create role-identity conflict. Moreover, the traducing of RE, even by teachers of other subjects, as well as its under-resourced status, make it impossible for RE teachers to find a secure professional standing. Conroy's sobering assessment, particularly in relation to RE teacher subject-specific content knowledge, is a reminder that professionalization is not an inevitable march of progress, and that it can equally well be impeded or reversed.

Judith Everington and Martin Ubani's articles each focus upon the identity and formation of teachers in training. In particular the research they have undertaken in their respective national contexts (the UK and Finland) examines how the personal beliefs of trainee teachers interact with their developing sense of professional identity and understanding of subject-specific aims and pedagogical methods. The research recounted in these two articles emphasizes the important function of initial professional development to individual professionalization. Additionally, the distinct and unique character of RE teacher professionalism and professionality is highlighted.

The differing national perspectives of Everington and Ubani are suggestive of the potential insights to be generated by further transnational and international comparative work. The concluding article in this Special Issue, by Bernd Schroeder, provides a framework for understanding the character of comparative research, including international comparisons. This resonates with our view that international comparative historical research on the professionalization on RE not only has the potential to be fruitful, but is also necessary.